

In memory of the late Prof. Nekitel this site is pleased to make available a draft of one of his numerous works. This draft was later published as "Critical and Developmental Literacy" by UPNG Press. The print version should of course be obtained for finalised text.

## **1. Introduction - Otto Nekitel**

Literacy is a process which entails an establishment of a social or an educational relationship between a person who has and a person who does not have skills of reading, writing and arithmetic (3Rs). This special relationship can pose many problems to the parties involved. Concerned parties may disagree with each other or with authorities on the way Literacy programmes are designed and run. They may not have all the resources needed to successfully run programmes they have started or to expand the scope of the same to areas where literacy is needed. These issues are central to any developmental process of the human resource. Literacy, can "liberate" people from social, educational, political and economical woes or it can become a major hurdle to development if the human resource remains illiterate (Freire, 1975: 246f).

The acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills is, therefore, necessary for survival in any modernized or monetized state. The skills of the 3Rs can be acquired if the illiterates and the innumerates are invited to the literacy and numeracy programmes and be coached to "discover that their task as human beings is to make history ... and simultaneously to learn how to command their language and discover the reasons which explain their concrete situation [reality] in their society" (Freire 1975: 246). The illiterates must be led to develop a mental readiness to recognize graphemes or letters which represent linguistic signs and correlate them with meaning. "Writing", as Saussure observed, "is the tangible form of images" ((1959:15) or if you wish, a graphic representation of mental images of reality. That being the case, it appears plausible therefore to extend the perception of literacy as propounded here to embrace a host of phenomena that is subsumed under art and/or cultural practices or events which encode meaning which can be "read" (see Faraclas, this volume). Those who subscribe to this view will agree that the intricate tattoos or motifs of the Motu, the Mekeo, the Orokaiva, the Abelam, the Tolai, the Trobriand, the Chambri and other cultural communities' art do encode meaning which the speakers themselves can "read" or decode. This I understand is the message that Sukwianomb, Faraclas, Kamene and others are attempting to advance in this volume. The expanded perception of literacy is not that strange, however, when considering the writing system with which we are familiar. Writing systems of the world have been refined from human art or symbolic representations of humankind's perception of reality. The dubious need only to compare a number of the ancient recording systems such as the Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Chinese pictographics the Phoenician writing with the traditional Papua New Guinean art to ascertain the similarities underlying these differing but not exclusive literacy systems.

Just as contentious as literacy and numeracy are educational philosophies that have been propounded over the years by different schools of thought. Social and educational strategists in Papua New Guinea, for example, continue to search for contextually relevant models for learning and for preparing the young to lead useful lives in society (see, for example Barrington Thomas 1976; E.B.Castle 1972, Adams

and Bjork 1969; Crossley, Sukwianomb and Weeks 1987 and Matane 1986). Suggestions for structural reforms and refinement of academic syllabi as well as the overhauling of curricula to meet perceived needs of the state and local communities continue to dominate the agenda and have thus attracted the services of many external consultants (Sullivan 1994). The quest for effective literacy and numeracy models has been hotly contested also as shown in this volume by Moody, Ahuja and Nembou. The recent Higher Education Review Summit that was organized in Port Moresby by the Minister for Higher Education, Science and Research, Mr. Moi Avei ( Post-Courier, April 26, 1994) bears witness to this trend. The summit exemplifies the ongoing debate between the structuralists on the one hand and the functionalists on the other on how members of the two camps perceive the mode and the means of achieving a sound educational system. Literacy and numeracy being the major catalysts for any national development often constitute the core topics of such debates. A nation which experiences an economic boom, for example, will demand or insist on its political machinery to devise appropriate literacy and numeracy programmes to produce the skilled work force required for the professional workplace.

These demands coupled with UNESCO's insistence to the world to reduce, and hopefully eradicate the world's illiterate population by the year 2,000 has compelled Papua New Guinea to speed up her efforts to reduce its illiterate population. A change in method and manner of promoting literacy was immediately required thus the recent (1990's) switch from the traditional top-driven approach to a bottom-up approach. The major tenet of the bottom-up literacy approach rests on the principles that were enunciated by the Multi-Strategy Method (MSM) that Stringer and Faraclas (1987) developed. The main aim of the MSM is to allow a community to assess its needs and decide on what it can do to effect social and educational change through the local language literacy programmes. At the outset the immediate training must be done by the resource person(s) but once the skills are passed on to the local trainers, external trainers must or should step aside and allow the locally trained workers to take over and run the programmes. The community based approach seems to go down well in a number of provinces and seems to receive a good following in the region. The republics of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, for example, have invited Papua New Guinea experts to share their expertise with them. Papua New Guinea has thus laid down what seems a useful model for combating illiteracy and innumeracy at the grass root's (populace) level.

It was for the foregoing reason(s) that participants at the 1992 Griffith University Literacy Seminar resolved to have Papua New Guinea host the following year's (1993) critical literacy seminar. The initial idea was to invite Australian and other interested participants to come, see and hear for themselves what Papua New Guinea literacy workers were achieving and what problems they were facing and to allow the visitors to share with them Australia's or other countries' literacy promotion experiences. The seminar was aptly timed especially when considering the UNESCO appeal to the world to eradicate illiteracy before the turn of the millennia, a concern which Papua New Guinea's constitution has supported in the words which follow:

"..., all persons and governmental bodies (to) endeavour to achieve universal literacy in Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu, and "*tokples*" or "*ita eda gado*". (National Constitution, p. 4).

Unfortunately, situational realities present an unfavourable climate for such an ambition to be optimally realized within the specified time frame. Albeit the MSM approach has achieved some fair to pretty good results (Faraclas and Jonduo, this

volume), there are practical shortcomings which must be addressed (Jonduo, Aries, Moroi, Benoma and Ponaiah, this volume).

Traditional approaches though effective in certain respects, they were generally regarded to have outlived their usefulness. Literacy and numeracy promotion by the government in English for example, was seen to be divisive and exclusive and was and is cumbersome for about 80% of the indigenous school age children who do not use English at home. These kinds of defects have been discussed many times before but began to gain prominence in the 1980's. Thus in 1987, a number of concerned people met at Ukarumpa, the Papua New Guinea's Summer Institute of Linguistics headquarters in the Eastern Highlands Province to discuss the shortcomings of the inherent system and explored ways to improve the methods of making people become literate. The consensus was that an effective method for advancing literacy in Papua New Guinea at this present day and age was needed. The idea of using the *tokples* (mother-tongue) although was attempted before especially by the different churches (Nekitel and Moli 1989), the idea was not well received by the authorities of the formal education system and many parents who have a negative attitude towards the use of local languages as media of instructions or even to teach about local languages. In the early 1980s the idea of using tokples schools in the early stages of community education was refocussed and was trialled in a number of provinces like the North Solomons, East New Britain, Enga, Oro and a few others. By around the mid-1980's assessment studies on the academic performance of students who began school in the *tokples* and then transferred to formal English schools showed remarkable results (Ahai and Faraclas 1992; Malone 1987). As soon as more and more people were told about the benefits and the parents themselves began to see the benefits of tokples schools, attitudes began to change. The formation of the Language and Literacy Consultancy Group by the Department of Language and Literature of the University of Papua New Guinea in 1988 was meant to advance the positive aspects of vernacular education. Several years later some members of this group split to form what is now known as the Papua New Guinea Trust, now a member of the National Alliance of Non-Governmental Organizations (NANGO). The initial aim of the Group was to run Literacy and Awareness workshops throughout the country to either rekindle the dying embers of literacy and numeracy drive or to initiate programmes in areas which have been deprived of such services by the national and the provincial governments or the different church agencies. Two major principles were adhered to; first the use of MSM which advocates the philosophy of community based approach to development thus departing from the top-driven approach that many countries are well familiar with and second, the strong belief in promoting local language literacy. Outside the University of Papua New Guinea, the Summer Institute of Linguistics and the Curriculum Division of the Education Department were spurred on by the 1987 resolutions and to some extent, by what the University of Papua New Guinea was attempting to do and so agreed to join hands and assist each other in promoting what they probably felt they should have done more of. The endorsement of the National Language Policy in 1989 by the national Government formalized the trends towards the importance of vernacular education and to some extent recognized associated literacy activities.

With due respect to what has been said, literacy being a major public venture, opinions and practices vary and at times those involved went their own ways each claiming credit for what they felt they have achieved. Often times, however, successes made by certain NGOs and the University of Papua New Guinea appeared to have been taken for granted or were not given the credit they deserved (Sullivan 1994). It

was this milieu of conflicting opinions which prompted the hosting of the seminar. Literary or literacy theoreticians, practitioners and concerned members of the public were invited to attend and present papers or share their experiences as panelists. An attempt was made to bring Paulo Freire to deliver the keynote address but due to personal reasons he was unable to attend. Unfortunately, the conference did not attract many Australian speakers or participants except Martin Nakata, a doctoral candidate from James Cook University who kindly accepted our invitation to him to deliver the keynote address. The failure to attract more speakers from Australia and other nations within the region did not deter the conference from going ahead as planned because there was a reasonable number of scholars from within the country to draw upon. Writers, linguists, educators, philosophers and some natural scientists as well as the literacy/numeracy workers from around the provinces of Papua New Guinea grasped the opportunity to attend the seminar and contributed substantively to the ensuing discussions. Topics addressed by speakers varied but were generally guided by three basic historical periods namely; past, present and future. Papers presented reflect experiences of literacy and numeracy endeavours undertaken within the periods. The role of literary criticism, creativity and the justifications for the recognition of the existence and relevance of other forms of literacies were contested first. The chapters by Sukwianomb, Kamene, Winduo, Soaba, Faraclas and to some extent Nekitel focused on these issues at both theoretical and practical levels. Trainum and Spaulding papers appeal to the designers of literacy curricula to recognize and value indigenous myths and cultural ecology which are stepping stones for advancing literacy and numeracy. These papers are linked to the current post-independence literacy efforts. The chapters by Faraclas, Jonduo, Stebbings, Moody and the reports from provincial representatives shed light on the current literacy practices and programmes and suggest ways to alleviate various problems which impede the literacy movement. The Sorariba and Singh papers plead the nation to recognize and accept the pivotal role "media technology literacy" and "chemical literacy for life" play in society. Ahuja and Nembou vehemently make a case for any literacy philosophy to include numeracy for obvious reasons and propose a series of recommendations on how numeracy can be promoted in the country. Silas Ponaiah shares with participants the practical problems he encountered in his attempt at promoting literacy through lexicography. This specific case study shows how an individual Papua New Guinean has taken the initiative to utilize the literacy skills he had attained to write a dictionary in the Akara language of Manus. The idea was to utilize the dictionary when completed in the Tokples schools thus helping to spread tokples literacy as well as preserving this dying language in a written form. The task was made difficult because he received no support from any of the appropriate government agencies.

Nakata's keynote address did provide the basis for the ensuing deliberations. He adopted a deconstructionist's position to appeal to indigenous writers to review the dominant discourse in vogue. His case study of his own Torres Strait Islands was used to devolve an emic perspective thus showing flaws apparent in the literature about his community. The tone of the paper was sufficiently dissuasive to prompt national academics like Soaba, Kamene, and Winduo to expound on issues of national ideology and consciousness. Papua New Guinea academics and other literary artists are becoming more concerned now than ever before about the literature that has been written about Papua New Guinea and its people. The outsiders' literature on Papua New Guinea has become entrenched and thus constitutes what Winduo, Faraclas and Kamene designate as the "dominant discourse". Papua New Guineans have and will

continue to become mere objects of literary delineation. Outsiders have come with preconceived stereotypes to use Papua New Guineans as mere subjects for study to test whether or not their imported descriptive models are sufficiently powerful to describe the "exotic", the "unrefined", the "primitive" or the aberrant behaviours. This is a cruel choice which does not go down well among a cadre of Papua New Guinean literary critics. No doubt literary imperfections have been portrayed about the way indigenous cultures have been researched and analyzed (Narokobi 1980; Nakata, and Winduo, this volume). Outsiders' delineations have been coloured by the social, the cultural and the literary traditions with which the same are familiar. Hence the dominant discourse must be deconstructed, reviewed and rewritten by the indigenous scholars to correct apparent flaws. While it really benefits no one to point fingers, some of the viewpoints presented herein reflect one main underlying theme and that is: the recognition of indigenous thought and an acknowledgment of misconstrued views that are or seemed to be in vogue. Given the present conflicting ideologies, it would be myopic on the part of the indigenous scholar not recognize the fact that humans do err. And if that has been the case, it is urgent that reviews are made of the constructed dominant discourse to ascertain the flaws. Once the flaws are unveiled they must be corrected before we can joyfully join hands in welcoming on board the refined non-Western perspectives and subsequently incorporate them into the overall scheme of present day universal knowledge in the different fields.

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## **2. Welcoming Address: Critical Literacy in Papua New Guinea**

**Joseph Sukwianomb**

International visitors, friends from Papua New Guinea, guest speakers, colleagues and students.

Allow me at this juncture to welcome you all to the Waigani Campus of the University of Papua New Guinea. Most importantly I would like to cordially welcome you to our first Critical and Developmental Literacy seminar in Papua New Guinea. The University is pleased to be sponsoring this conference, because in many ways, Papua New Guinea has been and continues to be a world leader in the area of critical literacy, in both its critical literacy traditional and post-modern forms. Many of the post modernist versions of critical literacy that have recently been presented as major

breakthroughs and innovations by academics in first world countries reflect principles that have always governed the lives of indigenous communities in Papua New Guinea. But Papua New Guinean leadership in the area of critical literacy does not stop there.

In recent years, in response to the changes that are occurring in their lives, Papua New Guineans are developing very sophisticated theories of critical literacy based on their traditional conceptions of the world, as well as very advanced critical literacy praxis. In many ways, critical literacy theorists and practitioners in industrialised countries have much to learn from their counterparts from nations that have suffered historical fates of other lands - Papua New Guinea is being one of the affected former colonies.

In Papua New Guinea, the definition of literacy seems to have come full circle. Our ancestors practiced a form of 'literacy for living' that equipped them, to critically analyse the realities of their lives, to take control and to transform those realities for the good of their communities. They made very important decisions that affected community lives, and these were binding indeed. If we are to define critical literacy as the process of '**reading and writing one's life**', then it appears that our people have been practicing critical literacy for thousands of years. With the advent of colonialism new forms of literacy from the Western tradition (and form) was transplanted and took root in Papua New Guinea as indeed in other similar contexts. Over the past century, Western influence has shifted the focus of literacy in Papua New Guinea from reading and writing one's life to reading and writing books and other written texts. But during the past few years, the Western tradition itself has moved in the opposite direction, from a narrow definition of literacy as the ability to decipher and encode written texts, to the ability to critically analyse the realities of one's life and to play an active role in shaping those realities. In short, Western versions of literacy are coming more and more to resemble traditional Papua New Guinean 'literacy for living'.

While many Papua New Guineans are still living, relatively, traditional forms of life and are practising their traditional forms of 'literacy and living', other Papua New Guineans are trying to integrate Western book-centered literacy with traditional Papua New Guinea life-centered literacy, with some very interesting and exciting results, which we should be hearing about during this conference. These efforts to create new forms of Papua New Guinea literacy are beginning to capture the attention of people in other countries as an example of the development of indigenous critical literacies.

We have seen the event of the UN. International Year of Indigenous Peoples. As one of the few nations in the world where indigenous peoples can be said to be fully enfranchised and represented, Papua New Guinea has a leading role to play in the movements of indigenous peoples worldwide. Being a relatively young state, Papua New Guinea has sometimes found it difficult to exercise this leadership role. In the area of literacy by, and for, indigenous peoples, Papua New Guinea is establishing itself as a world leader.

In the past, many had regarded the fact that over 800 languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea as a problem, especially in the areas of literacy and education. The movement for critical literacy in Papua New Guinea is attempting to change colonial views about language and culture. In the new forms of literacy that are developing in

Papua New Guinea, the fact that Papua New Guinea has over 800 languages and cultures is considered to be a great resource for education and literacy. In accordance with this new thinking, new methodologies, materials and techniques have been developed over the past few years in Papua New Guinea to harness this great resource.

The methodologies, materials and techniques that have come out of the movement for critical literacy in Papua New Guinea have proven so successful that they are now beginning to be adopted as models for literacy education in other countries. The University of Papua New Guinea is proud to have played a key role in providing support for the development, elaboration, testing and dissemination of these methodologies, materials and techniques. It is my intention to ensure that the university continues to be a major player in this area. One of the ways we can do this is to establish an Institute of Papua New Guinea Languages. I will be shortly setting up a working committee to look at this proposal. May I request that you also take up the proposal and consider it during this conference.

The movement for critical literacy in Papua New Guinea is also playing a crucial role in national development. The first goal of our Constitution is Integral Human Development, which aims to involve all Papua New Guineans as active agents in the process of social, economic, spiritual, and political education and action for their liberation from all forms of oppression. For too many Papua New Guineans however, development has come to mean passive and uncritical acceptance of changes which are introduced and controlled by outsiders.

The movements for critical literacy in Papua New Guinea is bringing about a reawakening of the traditional Papua New Guinea spirit of curiosity and critical questioning of life. Papua New Guinean traditions of community participation, responsibility and control are also being revived, after years of waiting for development to come from outside the community. It is becoming increasingly apparent that without critical literacy, Integral Human Development will be impossible to achieve.

Let us hope that this conference will contribute in a positive way to the further development of the movement for critical literacy in Papua New Guinea, not only so that Papua New Guinea can establish a leadership role internationally in this area, but more importantly so that Papua New Guinea can realise the major goals and objectives that it has set for itself as a nation.

Before I finish let me thank the committee which was tasked to have this conference held at the University of Papua New Guinea. In particular I pay special tribute to Dr. Otto Nekitel, Mr. Steven Winduo, and the Head and members of the Department of Language and Literature for their hard work. Last but not least, thank you to all the sponsors.

### **3. Keynote Address - Culture in Education: A Political Strategy for Us or For Them?**

**Martin N. Nakata**

I am a Torres Strait Islander, a neighbour of yours so to speak. I am very grateful to you all for inviting me here today. Not only do we share a border but also cultural affiliations and languages that go back, long before the white invasion into our lives. Today, we also share experiences of the legacies and traditions left over by white people, their languages, their economies, their spiritual beliefs, their laws, and so on. In Australia, there have been times and places where some of us have become the best representatives for on-going colonial presence and dominance in our lives. But why should we be surprised by this? Do we in fact know what the colonial presence looks like in our lives? Do we know when we are speaking outside of colonial discourses? Whose realities are reflected by the characters Raka and Ranu? Colonial discourses and their narratives, my friends, are now so dense that it is very hard to make out (a) whether one speaks from within them; (b) whether one can speak outside of them, or (c) whether one can speak at all without them. Unfortunately, it appears that we are all caught up. Prioritising any emancipatory agenda to deal with dominant forces necessarily involves certain risks. I think that this is where literacies in schools should be aimed at.

If anything is to come out of this address, I hope we can establish some direct dialogue with each other in the future. In Australia, Torres Strait Islander issues in education and literacy programs are historically tied to Aboriginal issues. This is understandable as much of our history is shared and our futures are dependent on a unified government. But political borders should not preclude dialogue with our Melanesian sisters and brothers. Torres Strait people orient themselves towards the south. Perhaps, it is high time we begin to look to the north as well - so that we can learn further about any political approaches to literacy programs in Papua New Guinea. I feel that talk amongst ourselves can only be of benefit to us all.

It was suggested to me that perhaps for this address I might like to talk about myself and how I came to be doing the sort of research I am doing, what experiences have led me in the direction I am going and what led me to reject other approaches to education in the Torres Strait. I have to be honest from the outset and tell you that I am not comfortable talking about myself. There is something about standing up and relating personal experiences that I don't really like at all. In the University system marginalised people are often called upon to do this kind of public confession. They say, "If you speak to us about your personal experiences we can better understand your position". I often wondered why people from dominant groups couldn't understand my position by reflecting on their own actions. However, lately, I have come to the view that there is some value in inserting the personal into a talk to make what are largely academic points about literacy education. Personal experience can bring home very powerfully the implications and effects that flow on to people's lives from institutional and governmental practices. I have come to a point in my public presentations where I now elect to use a language register people understand and will listen to, rather than abide by the western practice of using academic jargon expected

of public speeches. That is something I think we may all like to reflect on from time to time.

Despite my discomfort with this, I thought that I would approach this address by telling you some of my personal history and by interweaving that history with the development of my own standpoint towards academic work in order to highlight changes that I think are needed for education in the Torres Strait region. By doing this, I think this will show why my approach may seem different from others and indeed different from other Torres Strait Islanders who are working in the field. To put things into perspective, some points need to be shared about the socio-historical context that shaped my thinking.

My mother is a Torres Strait Islander who grew up on Naghir Island in the Central Torres Strait region. Her grandfather was a prosperous and enterprising Samoan. When he died early this century, his assets (which included 10,000 pounds) were left to his family. We never saw it. It was irrecoverable, lost in the maze of so called 'protection' that was the Department of Native Affairs. The family, of course, felt that they had been robbed, but were not quite sure how it was done. My mother's father became the chief on Naghir Island. He had an influence on me throughout my life, and education. An education that is based on white man's knowledge and languages. These became matters of great importance. Education was needed not just for economic development, it was also needed to understand and know the whiteman well so that he could not rob us again. We needed to come to terms with whitemen's knowledge and to understand how it was that they did things which seemed to advantage them but not us. My grandfather believed that to negotiate our position in the Islands we needed the whiteman's language. I guess he wanted a bit of an insider's view of the white world, and I think that if you read some Torres Strait history you will see that his view was reflective of a trend at that time.

Because my grandfather was so keen for his children to receive the best education, my mother and her twin sister were sent away to board at the Convent School on Thursday Island, at the age of seven. This was in the mid-thirties, well before we were granted citizenship and well before any Commonwealth funding. My mother learnt to read and write and do basic maths. She received an education to Year Four level. Of course, she also learnt to boil up the nun's habits and linen in the copper -- to mend, starch, iron and scrub. She learnt to prepare food, to wait on priests at tables and to garden and milk goats. As a teenager she became, without any training, the teacher at the small school on Naghir Island. She remained there until her marriage in the early fifties. This school, (one of the first primary schools in the Torres Straits), had been conceived, built and paid for by her grandfather in 1904 and had at various times been staffed by the Department of Public Instruction. So you see we weren't exactly sitting under coconut trees waiting for handouts.

In 1964, my grandfather made the momentous decision to abandon his Island. Anyone who understands the attachment we have for land, sea and island way of life could perhaps understand the incredible pain and pressure my grandfather had to confront. But the fact was that the War changed a lot for Torres Strait Islanders. The economic and educational opportunities were much better on Thursday Island. It was the younger generation - that is my generation, with whom he was concerned. When struggle with my academic work, I often think of my grandfather -- I think of his

generous nature, his bitterness, suppressed anger and confusion over the intrusions of white control into his community. I think of his efforts to build on his own father's perceptions of the situation and the aspirations he held for his children. I think of the hopes he had for all his grandchildren; that we could do "better". He realised that despite some successes, and that, things had changed and that we were able to go away to school in the south, to receive "more" education and some of us eventually made it to tertiary level, that relatively speaking, vis a vis whites, did not really place us in a much better position than we had been all those years ago. His biggest sadness though, was the self doubts he had about giving up his island for this other dream, and what for? I suppose my family history gave a sharp edge to my perceptions of the white world. On reflection this edge was part of the grounds for what is now a very political and critical stand that I take towards academic work.

My own education occurred mainly on Thursday Island from the early sixties to the early seventies. This was before any special programs became available. We had the straight Queensland curriculum, taught by white teachers who had no special preparation, who probably didn't know we existed until they found out that they had a transfer to Thursday Island. There was no recognition that English wasn't our language. I think in those days Torres Strait Creole, our local lingua franca, was not considered to be a language. It was deprecated as broken or bad English. I learnt to read on Dick and Dora and I guess the equivalent here would be Ranu and Raka. I started off at the same convent my mother went to which is still there today. My father took us out of there when I was in Year Two, after arguing with the priest about how much of school time was spent building the stone wall at the back of the church. The stone wall is still there too, built on the labour of primary school children. I then went to the State primary school and I have to tell you I did pretty well by the teacher's standards -- though, I never understood anything much -- but I did learn to read and compute in a basic sort of way. As well as my mother, my Japanese father was very keen for us to have the best education that was possible. To this end he always spoke English to us and encouraged us to speak and read it. All my Japanese was learnt from other Japanese people, not from my father. So now we are into the third generation where English and education are to be our salvation.

We were continually exhorted by our parents to do "better". My memories of school were always of trying, trying, trying, of never getting it quite right, of never knowing what it was that I didn't quite get right, of never being able to make myself understood, of always knowing that I wasn't understood in the way that I meant. These feelings have not changed at all, even today, even when I'm interacting with the people I know that are close to me and care. That frustration I felt in the primary school classroom I still feel on a daily basis in the University even though I have proved myself in the white world, even though I have a first class honours degree and am doing doctoral research.

I did badly in high school, hindered as I was by my "bad" attitude, and had to repeat Year 10. You see by this time schools, teachers and school work really de-motivated me. The next year, I went onto Year 11 on the Australian mainland as there was no schooling beyond Year 10 in the Torres Straits. I attended two schools in that year, having run away from the first. I hated the experience. I understood nothing in the classroom. I understood nothing of what the teacher was teaching. I understood nothing of what we were required to read, nor why. I understood nothing of myself,

just one big confusion. This was probably the time when I first took up sports as a survival strategy. Yet academically, it made little difference. I still understood little of what went on in the classroom and by the end of Year 11, I gave up school. I did various jobs, packing shelves, driving trucks and forklifts for a food storage company, fixing small engines for another joint, and later on some clerical work with the agency for Ansett. With each change of job I was trying to "better" myself.

In 1980 I joined the Commonwealth Government, as a travel officer, moving all the boarding school students from the Straits and the Cape to Southern mainland schools and back. In 1986 I moved back to Thursday Island as an Education Officer for the Commonwealth Government. It was in this position that I really began to think seriously about studying. The job I applied for required teaching qualifications but I had got it on account of my local knowledge. Part of the job involved liaising with teachers and with students in the high school, who were experiencing difficulties in their schooling. It became obvious to me about a year later, that my input was discounted at all turns. I was primarily there as an avenue for funding which was part of the job also. My local knowledge and understanding of Islander students in classrooms counted for nothing and were disregarded entirely. That is, the Torres Strait component of my job which was supposed to be important was merely a token. I began to wonder if I had qualifications equal to those of the teachers, would I be able to do my job much more effectively and be able to push the Torres Strait Islander perspective more insistently. So having unsuccessfully completed Year 11, having read nothing apart from prescribed Shakespeare and Dickens (which I never understood a word of), local newspapers and a few adventure novels, I applied to James Cook University in North Queensland for entry into the Bachelor of Education program as a mature-aged student.

So far I have given you some background to my situation but from here on I hope I can bring out a little more of how this all impacts on my current work.

When I started studying I had to read everything at least five times each before I could understand a word I had to keep a dictionary with me all the time. Writing was the same, I could never be sure whether I had written a sentence or not. I couldn't believe that there was so much to know. It was a real struggle but it gradually became easier. For the first time in my life, I felt that I was making sense of the stuff, that I was learning. I knew I was going to be able to do it. I was also learning to write what I wanted to say. Although it was a difficult and frustrating process, I began to feel excited about what I was doing and became very stimulated to learn more. I worked pretty hard. At this time my eldest child was learning to read and I was also truly amazed by this process. I was very keen for my daughters to do well of course. I was often disappointed with my wife because she never seemed to pursue this cause very keenly. She read to them and talked to them, but I wanted to see them "taught", - the alphabet and things. She would say "no, no, don't worry, these children will read" and to my amazement, they did. It was a time of great excitement for me to witness the ease with which my children were experiencing in the world of print and texts. This has resulted in their success at school.

In my second year I began to think more deeply about issues in cross cultural education. I was beginning to feel a sense of dissatisfaction about some of the stuff I was reading. I remember getting a little impatient with some of it. I was in danger of

entering a "radically dumb" stage, where the only good idea is the really wild, off the planet one. Perhaps what we really needed was a revolution and all that stuff. I reached a turning point here because I met a lecturer who has had a big impact on my life. This scholar gave me something that no-one else had ever given me in all of my schooling years. For the first time in my life, another person (an authority type person) responded to me as if I was a capable knowing person, as if I was a person who didn't have to be put on probation before I was allowed to proceed as mainstream people did. It is a hard thing to explain and perhaps it is a thing that only people of colour can truly understand. I don't think it was so much that he took down a barrier for me, I think that he just didn't put one up. On the basis of my work he enrolled me in an Honours program. By this time, I was sure that I wanted to go on and research rather than go into a classroom or return to my former job. This lecturer is still my supervisor. Despite some on and off tensions in our relationship, I feel sure nobody else would have shown the confidence in me that he did. About this time also I began to feel uneasy when I read about people at the margins. This strange sensation you get when you read about what is supposed to be a representation of oneself in a text. It can give you a sick feeling inside when you're thinking, "but this isn't me", "this isn't how I perceive my position" or "this wasn't my predicament". And then the related worry of course, "is this how others see me?". And how do others see me and other Torres Strait Islanders?

From my reading of the literature they see a lot of things. But I think overwhelmingly that they see a group of people who "lack". Along with Aboriginal people, I think Islanders have probably at some stage or other been represented as having lacked everything there is to have. It really has been literally a case of the "experts" name it, and we lack it. We have at various times lacked in terms of intellect, language, education, spirituality, economic and social value. We lacked in terms of health, hearing, nutrition; we lacked in control over alcohol, finances, land and sea; we lacked as fathers and mothers; we lacked as children, we lacked as students; we lacked in access to information and mainstream experiences. It has been written from the time of the first anthropological expedition by Haddon in the 1880s, and over 100 years later, western "experts" still name it and we still lack it.

But from whose point of view are these lacks inscribed on us. Let me give you a neat little example of how it was done blatantly by this Cambridge sponsored research group from England in the 1880's. It appears blatant to me though perhaps if others were to read the account they would not even notice the bias. One thing these anthropologists could not help but note last century was the incredible visual acuity of the Islanders. The Englishmen were amazed at how the Islanders could look to the horizon, which was empty to them. They could say that there was a canoe out there and how many people were on board. They spot and name a bird from a great distance and be correct about it. They measured this difference in acuity as six times greater than their own. But was this to be a strength or something positive for the Islander? No way, this acuity for the small detail in their line of vision was really a lack which prevented them from appreciating the aesthetics of a whole field of vision: "Minute distinctions of this sort are only possible if the attention is predominantly devoted to objects of sense, and I think there can be little doubt that such exclusive attention is a distinct hindrance to higher mental development" (Haddon, 1901:44). This visual acuity was the cause of the Islanders' lack of an appreciation of the beauty of landscape, which was assumed to be a higher mental skill. For example, and I quote again, "If too much energy is expended on the sensory foundations, it is natural that

the intellectual superstructure should suffer. It seems possible also that the over-development of the sensory side of mental life may help to account for another characteristic of the savage mind" (p. 45). This is actually how it was interpreted by these early anthropologists. The expedition, by the way, produced six volumes of information about Torres Strait Islanders and it continues to be a reference source for "experts" working on issues to do with Torres Straits.

I actually think that textual misrepresentations such as those alluded to in the reference source are still going on today -- but that without the distance and the advantage that we get from the passage of time, current misrepresentations are a lot harder to see. I see that misrepresentation in the Haddon reports as an early example of Islanders being made the object of scientific and textual discourses and this is still going on today.

The standpoint I have taken is historically rooted and arising as it does out of this particular history I have politicised these historical experiences and have good reasons to do so. As a result, I may not appear nice to everyone and feel grateful for all the work experts have done or are doing for us. I am not really disposed towards letting it wash over me to make everybody else feel comfortable and unthreatened. I am really disposed towards getting angry about my own experiences and those of my parents and grandparents and those that will fallout on the current generation and so on. I am accused of, and I do not wish to deny or defend it, of being too critical, of standing against everything and of not considering other points of view. I think that I have to be because I do not want research students in a hundred years time to look back on the 1980's and laugh at the textual misrepresentations that are going on now. I want them uncovered here and now. I do not want them to look back and say, yes, there have been changes but we are still in a relatively similar position. I feel fairly safe also in saying that many people would read that account in Haddon and think that it was a fair and justified interpretation of the "facts". So this is why I really do think that everyone needs a critical component in any literacy program, in any education, or for any re-reading of history, material practices and subjectivities. And indeed, we all need to understand that there is no correct version of criticism. How we see things critically, depends on our own historical location.

At this juncture, I want to move on to discuss the main thrust of my work based on my honours thesis. This was a critique of the way that "culture" has been deployed in the national policy on behalf of the Islander and the Aborigine. It is a critique that has got me into a lot of trouble with people. It was not something that I just suddenly thought of. It was something that rose out of my dissatisfaction with the stuff I was reading. A lot has been written about Aboriginal and Islander people with regard to how we have lost our culture. For instance, take the ways the Islander and the educational problems are represented in the National Education Policy (1989), and I quote from the first two statements of this document:

"Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are the indigenous peoples of Australia. Their distinctive cultures are a rich and important part of the nation's living heritage.

The historically-developed education processes of Aboriginal culture have been eroded in many communities for a variety of reasons. The education

arrangements and procedures established from non-Aboriginal traditions have not adequately recognised and accommodated the particular needs and circumstances of Aboriginal culture."

Again we encounter all these lacks and how did we get into this terrible position? Well, we were made to appear inadequate to hold onto our culture. White people came in and took control and look what happened, we lost it. I am not being facetious here because I don't believe that that was what happened. My critique of the use of culture has been, that it is a very limited and very problematic response to the range of difficulties and the material realities experienced by the Islander in schooling. That it is too simple to name failure in schools because there is a "lack" of relevant cultural content.

Perhaps my paper titled: "Culture in Education: For us or for them?" helps to elucidate some of the issues I am raising here. The chapter by Luke, Nakata, Singh and Smith in "Schooling Reform in Hard Times" (Lingard et al.) also addresses this issue. In a nutshell, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989), was meant to specify the Islander's indigenous identity. Her status throughout the policy appears to be defined predominantly from within the frame of "distinctive cultures" or "the nation's living heritage". Likewise, education is redefined as a cultural event and social relations are similarly implicated with "culture". What is conspicuous throughout the document is the inattention to the mainstream schooling practices. Subsequently, reform -- that is, changing education for the better -- is aimed primarily at making everything culturally sensitive to Indigenous peoples. The problem I have with this is that the culture of education may change somewhat to be more sensitive to Indigenous peoples, but its politics on how Indigenous peoples are positioned, vis-a-vis colonial knowledge and practices in the material world, remains unchallenged. This is not so much problematic in itself but what concerned me was that these textual formations and representations of educational problems do not just stand at the omission of others, but they also set up effects which we tend not to think about.

That is, to read the Islander's educational situation as culturally inappropriate, mismanaged, deprived of rights, underrepresented, disadvantaged, and suffering inequitable situations, results in the pursuit of a reform agenda which becomes concerned with educational empowerment through preservation and maintenance of cultural identity. This is also not so alarming in itself and it speaks to many people and I do respect that. However, I think that the cultural agenda sutures over the political nature of our situation and the political nature of these very texts which represent and give form to our problems, that is, they structure our problems within their own scientific discourse, in their own terms, in much the same way that Haddon did, in the example I gave earlier. As such, this has meant that culturally relevant programs become "add-ons" to largely unchanged mainstream practices in the education system.

Thus experts still name the game, still identify the problem and they still provide the solution on indigenous peoples' behalf. Sadly, this has been a preoccupation with a "tourist's view" of Torres Strait Islanders and indeed, also of the educational problems Islanders face in schooling. One of the effects of this is that this cultural humanist's agenda also becomes a regulatory device for disciplining the Islander. It drums up an

image of Islanders as different, exotic, traditional, etc., and so if Islander students fail to conduct themselves according to the preconceived standards then they are seen as un-Islander like, not true to their culture, and so forth. This is a double edged sword when to be an Islander also means to be represented as always having a lack.

There are a number of academics who are interested in the comments I made in that paper. However there has been much hostility towards it as well. This hostility just reinforces the point that I was trying to make in it - that the cultural paradigm serves as, among other things, a regulatory device. Through pursuing this line of thought I have had my identity questioned. I have actually been asked by white University lecturers and researchers and students whether I can really claim to be a Torres Strait Islander, after all how long has it been since I lived there.

Some interpret my position as just being anti-Islander. Hence, if I don't behave, embrace and hold myself true to the textual representations of what constitutes a cultural Islander, then I must in truth, not be one. Of course, I identify myself as an Islander. Indeed, I'm treated as one with all the discriminatory and racist connotations that that denotation holds for me on a daily basis -- but am tired of being told that I have to conform to somebody else's image of an Islander. I would like to be the sort of Islander that I want to be, even if it is an angry, political one who shoots himself in the foot from time to time.

To illustrate the effects of the cultural agenda in current educational practice I thought that I might talk briefly now about my two daughters who are the upcoming generation.

When my children lived in the Torres Straits they spoke Torres Strait Creole because that was the language of their everyday world. Now we live on the mainland they speak English as their primary language, much to the disgust of our liberal white colleagues who think we are actively engaged in destroying their "cultural heritage". The girls are doing extremely well at school, they speak standard English, and have as good a chance at succeeding as any other middle class child. It was suggested by a so-called "expert" a while back that it might be good for the children's "self esteem" if they were to undertake a bush skills course. I suggested to her that if children could enjoy success at school, they might not need their self esteem raised by a bush skills course. This is the playing out of the Islander's dilemma in a nut shell. To pursue mainstream education at a level that is enjoyed by "other" Australians is always posited as at the expense of Islanders' culture. And to pursue the Islanders culture is at the expense of making sense of a mainstream education. Yes, perhaps as parents, we are neglecting the cultural education of the girls. Although this raises yet another question as to what is culture, something we live and change in the process, or some static entity. I don't want to pursue that here, but whether our girls perceive themselves primarily as Torres Strait Islanders or are perceived by others as such, one thing I do know. They will always, be perceived as girls of colour and to contend with this I feel as my father, grandfather and great-grandfather did, that what they need most is an understanding of the political nature of their position, and that requires both the language and the knowledge of how that positioning is effected in the mainstream world. They also need a way of maintaining themselves in the face of it, as well as working against that knowledge system that continues to hold them to the position that it has produced for them.

I think that this is what my parents, grandparents and great grandparents were after, and I think that my generation is being pacified by the call back to tradition. So what I am saying is that it is not enough to just be literate. As people at the margins and as people of colour, we need to be critically literate, not in any liberal sense but in a political sense. We have in the last fifteen years been called upon to celebrate our "difference". I don't think my children should have to celebrate a difference whose very constitution is still framed in terms of lack. As Audre Lorde comments "it is not difference that immobilises us, but silence. And there are many silences to be broken".

So this is why, for my current research, I am looking at some of the constituting elements of discourses in Torres Strait education that silences the viewpoint from which Islanders see themselves and schooling. Instead of just proposing some new remedy for our predicament, I wanted rather to go back and really look at the ways experts have in the past constructed the Islander's problem, and how these constitutive elements have limited ways to read and provide solutions to Islander problems -- and break them, so that the silence can be heard.

By way of closing, let me share one more thing with you. For some time now, I have been looking at and reading about how change is perceived. We are all in the field working for change but we don't think too much about what underlies our ideas or theories on change. What is change? How can it take place? What causes it to happen? And indeed, what causes it not to happen? And how do these ideas of change and cause limit what we are to understand as subjectivities to political or repressive positions or the standpoints we take up to defend against them? You may well be aware that, on the one hand, everybody wants to change things for the "better" -- but no one seems to want to spend the time to look at what theoretical foundations currently exist in the education system that constrict ways changes are to take place; and on the other, no one wants to look at how foundation elements to intellectual standpoints can only locate problems experienced by the Islander and reify them into ones defined as "lack". Along with others, I feel experts took the risk, reproduced a lot of mistakes, and fiddled around with symptomatic domains rather than foundation ones -- and I look forward to discussing some of these issues with you in future.

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