

# ERASING THE MARGINS: A CASE STUDY OF ALTERNATIVE OPPORTUNITIES TO SCHOOLS IN VANUATU

By Jane Kanas  
The University of the South Pacific  
Suva, Fiji Islands.  
[kanas\\_j@usp.ac.fj](mailto:kanas_j@usp.ac.fj)

## ABSTRACT

The University of the South Pacific (USP) serves a unique region of the Commonwealth. It is a major provider of tertiary education to its twelve member countries of which each have their own individual educational curricula. These systems of education have always supported the development of academia amongst the islanders and have no doubt been the foundation of many of the region's qualified scholars. Despite the success of these national curricula, it cannot be denied that most of these do not cater for the majority of their individual population. Many systems require a filtering of its students through various examinations at different levels of the formal educational lifetime. This has resulted in a high level of young push-outs who are almost always those from the rural areas where any further access to any form of education is a rarity. Reasons for their lack of accomplishment are numerous. It is now obvious that national curricula is not providing for the majority of its population. It is thus important that attention is brought to this situation and that some form of interference is applied. The Emalus Campus of USP, Vanuatu, caters not only for its regional students, but also for its national push-outs who hunger for another attempt at formal education. This campus has initiated the use of materials from the USP's continuing education and foundation level in government schools and these have proven to be the better option especially for marginalized schools. It has also provided for its multi-lingual situation in trying to provide opportunities for all levels of peoples in the community. This paper will present the Emalus Campus situation as a case study.

## INTRODUCTION



Maps copyright Hammond World Atlas Corp. #12576

[Source: Wordpress.org]

Vanuatu in the South Pacific is a country of around 192,910 people. Of this, about 36.35% make up the 0-14 years population, where males number 35,822 and females slightly less at 34,299.

Vanuatu's population growth rate is about 1.7% per annum (World Press, 2001). As a member of the United Nations, Vanuatu is obliged under the UNESCO Education For All (EFA) initiative to provide adequate and satisfactory education for all children of not only primary school age but also for secondary level age.

Vanuatu is also part of the University of the South Pacific (USP) region and so it enjoys the services that are provided by the USP. Apart from providing a tertiary education, the university also tries to cater for a growing sector of the Pacific region who may require a more secure grounding in basic courses that may have been absent or not well attended to in the formal school curriculum but are much needed if this population intends to further their education. This is through the implementation of basic preparatory courses through the Continuing Education department as well as the College of Foundation Studies.

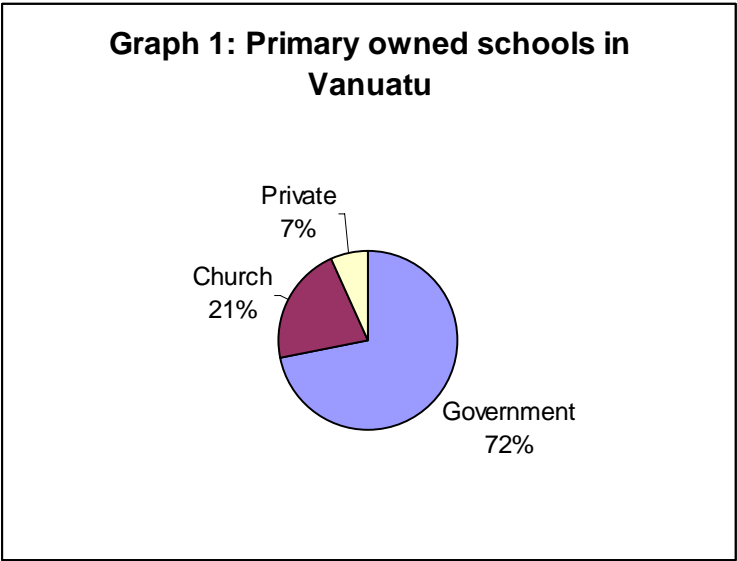
This paper will focus more on the initiatives of the Continuing Education department in Vanuatu by providing a brief history of education in Vanuatu, then showing how the EFA initiatives are being met by Vanuatu. It will also present the various courses offered by the Continuing Education department of USP and show how one school in Vanuatu had chosen to use this material as the basis of their curriculum. Although the project has been temporarily halted, it can be assessed as being a challenging alternative for a grave situation.

#### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN VANUATU**

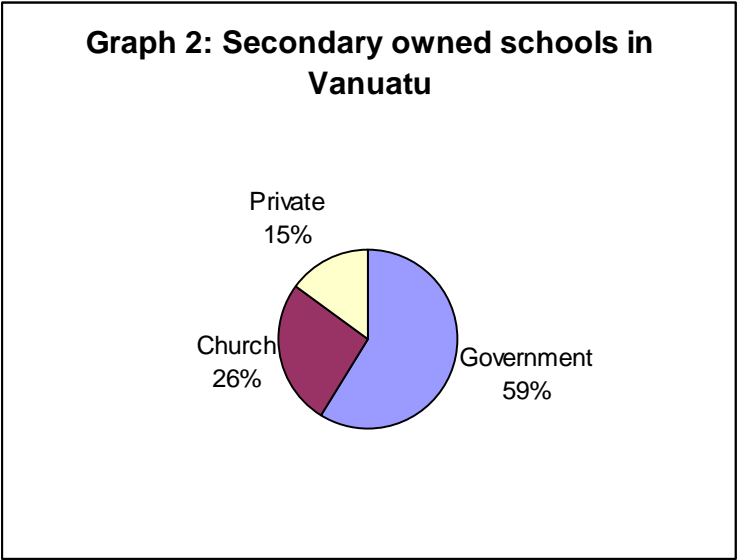
Formal education in Vanuatu was introduced by the church missions of the Presbyterian and Catholic Churches. Later missions to the islands also established their own training centres and schools. But the dominating mission in Vanuatu prior to independence was that of the Presbyterians accounting for 30% of the population (PCUSA, 2008). Introduced after 1839 when the first missionaries were victims to cannibalism, the mission became a fully independent church in 1948. It ran a seminary, a number of primary schools and one secondary school established in 1954: Onesua Presbyterian College as it is now known.

The Catholics through the French Marists arrived in the 1848 and they too faced a society of cannibals. But as was the stamina of the early missions, they too conquered all odds and established training institutions in the country.

The colonial government established their dual system of education and established both primary and secondary schools throughout the islands. From 1980, these schools were taken over by the new Vanuatu government and today, the government carries the burden of providing education. The two graphs below show the percentage of primary and secondary schools as owned by the government, the churches and by private owners (Vanuatu Country Report, 2000).



[Source: Vanuatu Country Report, 2000]



[Source: Vanuatu Country Report, 2000]

Pre-schools were left to the communities to manage and take full charge of. In 1997 there were 677 kindergartens with about 22,700 children enrolled. Higher education was mainly catered for by USP (Vanuatu Country Report, 2000).

**Current Curriculum**

Two systems of education were inherited from Britain and France as well as two languages of instruction. Efforts were made to ensure that children followed the same curriculum in either language enforced by an education policy (Gwero, 1991, p.3). It was a difficult exercise and although it was tried, it was expensive. The Anglophone and francophone systems of education were not always parallel and as with all curricula, needed to be revised over time (Matai, 2003).

### **Effectiveness**

With the limited resources, physical infrastructure and man power, the system has been successful in preparing fortunate students for life after secondary level. Many have graduated and are absorbed into the workforce as highly qualified personnel.

### **Shortfalls**

The system in Vanuatu sifts children along their education lifetime thus resulting with a fraction only of those who started out together. With the lack of physical infrastructure to house secondary education, the educational lifetime of a child requires 4 major exams. With a recent change in the curriculum, the primary level lifetime of a child spans over 8 years with a national examination determining who goes on to secondary level. Most primary schools have had to accommodate these two extra years with physical infrastructure, resources as well as teachers where previously they only went up to year 6.

Junior secondary level is from years 9 to 10 where another national examination is sat to further determine those eligible for years 11 and 12. There is a limited number of schools that provide adequately for this senior level. Although the Education officials will not openly admit to it, it is obvious that with inadequately resourced schools, the quality of students leaving these schools are very low compared to very well resourced schools mainly found in the urban areas.

At the end of year 12, a regional examination for the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate (PSSC) is sat. The handful of schools that reach this level will churn out the 'cream of the nation' who will be fortunate to enter into year 13. This level prepares the student for university and is equivalent to the Foundation level of USP's pre-tertiary level. The francophone system requires students to go through 2 years of preparation for university showing that the attempt to synchronise both the Anglophone and francophone systems is unbalanced.

Another shortfall of the current curriculum is that students are not prepared to return to their own communities with useful skills if they are pushed out of the system (Reganvanu, 2002, p.2). The current curriculum actually prepares the student for a white collar job and when pushed out, the student feels inadequate and may become alienated in their societies and so in turn drift to the urban areas looking for jobs.

### **Education for All (EFA) goals**

Pacific countries have had to ensure that their children are provided basic education access as spearheaded by the Education for All (EFA) programme launched in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand and the World Forum on Education (WFE) in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000. This meant reshaping and revising of primary level curricula which in many cases also led on to the need to revamp secondary curricula. Secondary curricula thus had to accommodate and provide the Pacific for work. It meant that the curricula had to provide for further learning opportunities but also for sustainable livelihoods.

Although Vanuatu did not draw up specific EFA strategies or plans, it embarked on Five Year Development plans. Various ministries became responsible for meeting the EFA goals (Vanuatu Country Report, 2000).

Indirectly, one of these initiatives is encouraged through the Continuing Education courses offered by USP.

### **Brief description of Continuing Education courses**

The following courses were trialed in the basic preparatory programme. These aim to target year 10 push-outs, standing in as year 11 equivalents.

CCE001: Preparatory Accounting

This course aims to provide the student with skills in basic accounting methods of recording and reporting financial events with the aim of orderly running a business.

**CCE002: Basic Biology**

With Basic Biology, the student is able to understand and appreciate the interconnectedness of man, plants and animals with their environment.

**CCE003: Basic Economics**

This course introduces students to a basic understanding of economics where topics such as economic systems, supply and demand, types of business organisations are a few covered.

**CCE004 : Basic English Skills**

This course was designed “to enable the individual to develop functional literacy understanding” (CCE004:Basic English Skills, 2006: iv) as many enter into tertiary studies without competency in the English language.

**CCE005: Basic Geography**

Basic geographical skills are introduced such as map reading, measuring distances and developing graph skills. There is also a section on soil erosion in two Pacific countries.

**CCE006: Basic History**

This basic course of history aims to help students to discover history and look at early migration into Pacific as well as contact with Europeans. It also discusses regional organizations and the United Nations.

**CCE007: Basic Mathematics**

This course introduces the students to mathematics in preparedness for further studies in the subject especially that of senior secondary level. It hopes to give them a wider mathematical knowledge.

(CCE Brochure, 2007)

**Use in secondary schools**

The various USP campuses in the region accord special attention and respect from the population of the countries they serve. Although each campus is unified by their link to the main campus in Suva, each can demonstrate its independence by the choice of activities it runs for the benefit of the needs of the population it serves. The campuses serve as a very important opportunity for students to gain access to higher education. With the continuing education programme, both regional and local, more students are served.

With the high number of push-outs from the national system the Emalus Campus in Port Vila aimed to sell its course offerings as widely as possible. One of these avenues was to target secondary schools. The campus has successfully integrated a number of schools into the pre-tertiary programme of the university.

As is seen with the constant sifting of students from the national education system, it meant that the attrition rates were high. This as is seen in other Pacific countries caused for an excessive number of teenagers and youths being too young, inexperienced and unskilled to be absorbed into the labour market, especially for the white collar jobs (but even for blue collar jobs) that they have been disillusioned about in their limited educational experience (Vanuatu Country Report, 2000).

With about 3500 youths leaving formal education (Vanuatu Country Report, 2000), many of these push-outs stunned at being unemployable are encouraged in taking up distance courses from USP. With their varying qualifications, these students enter the pre-tertiary level (preliminary, equivalent to year 12 and foundation being the equivalent to year 13) or are guided to start with Continuing Education courses (which are equivalent to year 11).

Many may have been from inadequately resourced schools and are found to be incompetent in the secondary level in that they lack some very basic subject knowledge. There is then a large gap to fill in order for them to satisfactorily complete the pre-tertiary courses. Also, because there is limited choices for further education in the country, USP is absorbing many of these push-outs.

The Emalus Campus embarked on drawing high schools through offering these bridging and pre-tertiary courses with continuing education courses standing in at year 11, preliminary courses for year 12 and foundation courses for year 13. This was envisaged as a better option that would see the students be adequately prepared for further tertiary studies with USP or other institutions regionally or internationally (Nirua, J.P 2007, pers comm. & Netaf, N, 2008, pers comm.)

The Kwataparan school on Tanna island offered to trial the continuing education courses to its students.

#### Their needs

Because the school was located rurally, it was deemed appropriate to use distance designed material in their teaching because the materials were self contained. Most of the students come from a subsistence farming background and affording an education is difficult. To avoid further costs on the students, Kwataparan school was sent two copies of the various courses where one copy was used by the class teacher while another copy was kept in the school library. Students could purchase a copy of these books from the local USP campus or centre for individual reference.

#### Teacher satisfaction of curriculum

Teachers do have a say in what they teach and with the piloting of the system with Kwataparan school as well as these courses being taught through the distance mode, there has been requests for the material to be revised.

Reasons for the need for revision included the inconsistency of topics within a unit, for example, in CCE005: Basic Geography, the course dealt with developing skills required for geography and then brings in soil erosion with no clear connection between these topics.

Teachers have also commented that the level of the courses was incomparable to other curriculum for the level intended. In many cases the level offered was lower and this has given a sense of inferiority. Teachers have then demanded that the materials be revised immediately.

#### How students coped

Rural Vanuatu students are passive and thus accept and trust whatever is taught to them. With the reputation that USP has in the region, students have welcomed this curriculum with the firm belief of accomplishing something through an option that may lead to future ambitions.

However, the course offering requires better management. As with other DFL courses, this continuing education programme is coordinated from the main campus in Suva. This means that all assignments are sent to and marked in Suva. A problem associated with this arrangement is the late turnaround of marked assignments. In some courses, students have not received their assignments at all. This of course is not encouraging to the students.

#### Previous records

Because this was a pilot, the results of this run of the programme was enough to put a hold on this effort and for necessary changes to be made urgently. It can be seen that the initiative to have schools utilise alternatives to the national curriculum is a good one as it should mould the students for the pre-tertiary programme.

### **Is this the answer?**

Although the intention of using continuing education is a good one, it is absolutely necessary that the programme be thoroughly planned and coordinated. The Continuing Education unit is constrained financially, but it must ensure that whatever it chooses to trial, it must follow stricter guidelines and objectives. Course writers must work collaboratively despite their subject of speciality in order to produce quality courses.

### **Challenges**

Financial constraints hold back the Continuing Education unit to develop its programme further. However this must not be seen as a hindrance to a good initiative. There are many young people in the Pacific who look forward to furthering their academic level and this is an opportune time to harness this market.

Experienced trainers and writers must be sought in order that quality materials be written that properly prepare the students. There is no shortage of this in the Pacific but they must be carefully sourced.

The whole coordination and management of this programme is important to ensure reliability and accountability as this will serve the whole USP region.

### **Conclusion**

The initiative to run a curriculum parallel to a national one is challenging but if it is to be provided by a regionally recognised university, then the product must live up to the name of the institution. Kwataparan School is an example of a school that is willing to pursue other alternatives to provide quality and affordable education to its students. It is certain that if this pilot had been successful, many more schools would have taken this option which does not sift out students but gives them opportunities to repeat if need be and a chance for further studies.

It is hopeful that a revised curriculum will be accepted and used not only by Kwataparan but more secondary schools in Vanuatu. This alternative ensures that education for all is not only available at primary and secondary levels, but paves the way to a tertiary education if so desired by the student. In so doing, we can say that the main goals of EFA have been achieved.

### **References**

Basic Preparatory Programme. Brochure. Centre for Continuing & Community Education, Centre for Educational Development & Technology, USP, Suva.

Gwero, A. 1991. Unified Primary Curriculum: An introduction and overview. Department of Education, Port Vila.

Karie, S. 2008. Personal communication, 26.03.08. Coordinator, Continuing Education, The University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, Port Vila.

Matai, K quoted in Licht, K. 2003. Working paper on curriculum review to address issues of concern in Daily Post 17 September 2003.

Netaf, N. 2008. Personal communication, 31. 03. 08. Director, Centre for Continuing & Community Education, Centre for Educational Development & Technology, The University of the South Pacific, Suva.

Nirua, J.P. 2007. Personal communication, 08.08 .07. Director, Distance and Flexible Learning Centre, The University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, Port Vila.

Reganvanu, R. 2002. : A vision of education, National Education Conference, Port Vila, 14-16<sup>th</sup> October 2002.

### **Online References**

Worldpress, n.d. Vanuatu.[online] Available  
<http://www.worldpress.org/profiles/vanuatu.cfm> (2008, March 18)

PC (USA), n.d. Presbyterians at work around the world: Vanuatu [online] Available  
<http://www.pcusa.org/worldwide/vanuatu/> (2008, March 18)

World History at KLMA, History of Vanuatu, n.d., [online], Available  
<http://www.zum.de/whkmla/region/pacific/vanuatu193980.html> (2008, March 18)

The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Reports, Vanuatu, n.d., [online], Available  
[http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/vanuatu/rapport\\_1\\_1.html](http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/vanuatu/rapport_1_1.html) (2008, March 18)

Whimp, N. n.d. A brief history of th work of the church in Vanuatu [online], Available  
[http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/fileadmin/global\\_mission/where\\_we\\_work/pacific/vanuatu/Vanuatu\\_mission](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/fileadmin/global_mission/where_we_work/pacific/vanuatu/Vanuatu_mission) (2008, March 18)

Educational Projects, n.d., [online], Available  
<http://www.british-friends-of-vanuatu.com/Education%20Projects.htm> (2008, March 18)

The EFA 2000 Assessment Country Reports: Vanuatu, 2000. [online] Available  
[http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/vanuatu/rapport\\_1.html](http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/vanuatu/rapport_1.html)

Dick, J. 2000. EFA 2000 Assessment Country Report, Republic of Vanuatu [online] Available  
<http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/countryreports/country.html>