

Foreword

As a Pacific Islands educator whose research, policy, teaching and engagement interests relate to comparative and international education (CIE) and international development, and one who has traveled widely and worked extensively within the Pacific Islands region for more than three decades, I have always been impressed with the credibility and caliber of some of my colleagues in Oceania. For me, the authors of this publication are a group of scholars whose credibility is supported by the consistency of their scholarship, the adequacy of their thought leadership and the relevance of their insights about Pacific Islands settings. I am therefore delighted to see this publication; a valuable book which is based on the authors' multi-year New Zealand aid-funded education intervention program in two Pacific Islands nation states—Solomon Islands and the Kingdom of Tonga.

In this book, the authors have started to offer a counter narrative to the often-used managerial perspective to educational interventions (via international development). They do so by saying that international development encounters must be approached relationally. As CIE scholars, the authors are engaging critically with issues of place, context and culture. By taking a positive stance, the authors are able to affirm context as a complex reality to embrace and understand rather than as a problem to ignore. Such a perspective is collaborative and hopeful and, by adopting it, the authors are able to offer a fresh contribution to the wider CIE scholarship on north-south and south-south scholarship.

In contextualizing education for development in Oceania, the authors have woven together a three-strand tapestry as follows: First, as stated, in international development, context matters. When our encounters with each other seriously take context into account, we're likely to have a better glimpse of the assumed multiple and potentially conflicting worlds of our underpinning realities. As a sociological example, using the case of Tonga, there is a fundamental dilemma for north-actors whose assumed sociological culture is autonomous in nature whereas their Tongan south-actors are likely to be operating from a heteronomous culture. Without exposing this sociological dilemma, the context behind the context for a north-south encounter in Tonga is unlikely to be deep and relationally significant.

Second, in education generally as well as in international development interventions, relationality is key. By centering relationality, this book shows the importance of agency at each and all levels of education and international development endeavors. Moreover, the interactions, mechanisms and connections between people—learners, teachers, parents, administrators, etc.—and

roles are important. Centering relationality highlights meaning and with this, its associated challenges. One of these being that in our encounters with each other, we have the prerogative of choice. However, the outcome of our choice is not a privilege that we determine. As south-south or north-south actors in a more relational approach to international development we therefore have to learn to live with each other relationally as well. Third, the authors have highlighted the importance of learning. In this book, the authors have expanded beyond the usual learning by students and have included learning by teachers, parents, policy makers, education administrators as well as international development actors. Calling for the centering of learning that embraces indigenous Pacific understandings and frameworks in international development is new and long-overdue. For the Pacific Islands region, this new call is potentially exciting as it promises fresh ways of more relational engagements in south-south and north-south encounters.

In closing, I restate that there is much value in this exciting book and I congratulate the authors for gifting this to us at this time when people relationality needs to be highlighted in our CIE encounters with each other.

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