

**CURRICULUM AND SOCIETAL NEEDS:
STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS' SECONDARY
SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

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ABSTRACT

Education is strongly linked to economic development, prosperity and social progress, yet recently, the Solomon Islands has experienced economic and social problems. This research used a questionnaire and interviews to gather perceptions from curriculum stakeholders (government and private sector education administrators, teachers, parents, students and business people) regarding the construction, content appropriateness and accessibility of the Solomon Islands' national secondary curriculum. The data gathered is intended to provide constructive input into future curriculum development.

Data supported the retention of one national secondary curriculum, but highlighted the need for one that is flexible and that takes into account the opinions of all stakeholder groups. Secondly, the content of the secondary curriculum provides much useful knowledge, but some gaps need to be filled, particularly in the area of the cultural, historical, geographical and global contexts of the Solomon Islands. Thirdly, the heavy emphasis on knowledge largely disregards students' moral, spiritual, physical, aesthetic and affective faculties. It has also resulted in the curriculum being implemented in a way that largely prevents students from learning many academic, practical and competency skills. This unbalanced approach to secondary education overlooks a need for values education and has produced a workforce with few skills and little ability to apply knowledge. Fourthly, while access to secondary education is being increased, data identified other accessibility issues that need attention. These include a lingering gender imbalance, poverty, and a lack of attention to the needs of slow learners. Additionally, a serious imbalance in the

rural-urban distribution of resources and of well-qualified teachers has helped create an educated urban elite in a previously egalitarian society.

Recommendations and suggestions for further research are made which, if acted upon, could result in the Solomon Islands' secondary curriculum attending to societal needs and supporting economic and social progress much more effectively.

DECLARATION

I, Pauline R. Potter hereby declare that:

- (i) This thesis is my own work.
- (ii) All persons consulted, and all assistance rendered are fully acknowledged.
- (iii) All references used are indicated in the text and accurately reported in the list of references.
- (iv) The substance of this thesis has not been presented, in whole, or part by me, to any University for a degree.

Date:

Signature:

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Last, but not least, I would like to thank the hundreds of Solomon Islands' young people who I have had the privilege to teach during the last 15 years. They added a new and most enjoyable dimension to my teaching experience, and it is to them and their children that I dedicate this thesis in the hopes that it might bring some educational benefits to the young people of the nation.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	I
DECLARATION.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
CONTENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
 CHAPTER ONE	 1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. Introduction	1
2. The Context	5
3. Definitions	16
4. Rationale	19
5. Aims of the Research.....	20
6. Research Questions	21
7. Significance	22
8. Methodology	22
a) The questionnaires	23
b) The interviews	24
c) Ethical considerations.....	24
d) Data Analysis	25
9. Limitations	25
10. Structure of the thesis	26
 CHAPTER TWO.....	 27
LITERATURE REVIEW	27
1. Curriculum Construction	27
a) At what level should the curriculum be constructed?	27
b) Who should be involved in constructing curricula?	29
2. The appropriateness of curriculum content	33
a) Culture and the curriculum	33
b) Holistic curricula	36
3. Accessibility	47
4. Summary	52
 CHAPTER THREE	 54
THE QUESTIONNAIRE – METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	54
1. Research Design	54
2. Methodology	55
a) The instrument	55
b) The sample	57
c) Data collection procedures	59
d) Ethical considerations	61
e) Data analysis.....	61
3. Questionnaire results	62
a) Demographic data	63
b) How many curricula?	71
c) Who should be involved in constructing the curriculum?	72
d) The content of the curriculum	75
e) Access to the curriculum	94

4. Conclusions and implications	96
a) Demographic Data	96
b) How many curricula?	99
c) Who should be involved in curriculum construction?	99
d) The content of the curriculum	100
e) Accessibility to the secondary curriculum	103
f) Summary	103
CHAPTER FOUR	104
THE INTERVIEWS – METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA	104
1. Methodology	104
a) The instrument	105
b) The sample	108
c) Interview procedures	109
d) Ethical considerations	110
e) Data analysis	111
2. Interview results	113
a) The number of curricula	114
b) Curriculum stakeholders	119
c) The content of the curriculum	128
d) Access to the secondary curriculum	172
3. Conclusions and implications	186
a) The number of curricula	186
b) Curriculum stakeholders	187
c) The content of the curriculum	187
d) Access to the secondary curriculum	190
e) Summary	191
CHAPTER 5	193
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	193
1. The research questions	193
2. Recommendations	215
3. Recommendations for further research	220
4. Conclusion	223
REFERENCES	226
APPENDICES	233
APPENDIX A Teacher questionnaire	234
APPENDIX B Student questionnaire	241
APPENDIX C The research questions related to questionnaire and interview questions	248
APPENDIX D A summary of questionnaire responses (%)	250
APPENDIX E Questionnaire requests for new subjects from a given list	253
APPENDIX F The helpfulness of the content of curriculum subjects	255
APPENDIX G Interview questions	258
APPENDIX H Sample interview transcript	263
APPENDIX I Chapter 4 codings	277
APPENDIX J Societal needs as perceived by interviewees	279

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	Location of the Solomon Islands	1
Figure 1.2	Enrolment in Schools by Gender	8
Figure 1.3	The provinces of the Solomon Islands	9
Figure 1.4	Secondary age children attending secondary school in 1999 as a % of the population in each province.....	9
Figure 1.5	Attendance in primary and secondary schools out of every 100 children in one year group	10
Figure 1.6	Students placed in secondary school 1997-2002	11
Figure 1.7	Ministry of Education recommended timetable	14
Figure 1.8	Enrolment in junior secondary school (Forms 1-3) 2001	16
Figure 3.1	The research questions and the questionnaire	56
Figure 3.2	Questionnaire uncertainties	62
Figure 3.3	Teacher Qualifications	64
Figure 3.4	Teacher qualifications by school and gender (actual numbers)	65
Figure 3.5	Teaching staff and gender	66
Figure 3.6	Teacher age groups	67
Figure 3.7	Age distribution in schools A and B (percent)	67
Figure 3.8	Years of teaching the secondary curriculum	68
Figure 3.9	Arts and Science students in schools	69
Figure 3.10	The gender balance in schools	69
Figure 3.11	The gender balance in Arts and Science classes (%).....	70
Figure 3.12	Questionnaire response categories	71
Figure 3.13	Demand for new curriculum subjects (%)	76
Figure 3.14	Average number of choices made per person	76
Figure 3.15	Suggested additions to the curriculum	77
Figure 3.16	Curriculum subjects questionnaire participants wished to drop	78
Figure 3.17	Curriculum subjects ranked by agreement percentages	81
Figure 3.18	Unhelpful subjects – the number of explanations offered	82
Figure 3.19	Perceptions of core subjects (%)	88
Figure 3.20	Suggestions for additional core subjects (actual numbers)	89
Figure 3.21	Opinions about selection examinations (%)	94
Figure 4.1	The research questions and the interview questions	106
Figure 4.2	Interviewees' code	114

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

“Every human society has some kind of education” (Brown, 2003, 2) and the Solomon Islands, a developing nation in the South West Pacific (see Figure 1.1), is no exception. Traditional societies have educated and trained their young people in informal ways for millennia. Formal education – with schools, teachers and curricula – also has a long history, which can be traced back to before the time of Christ with the Old Testament schools of the prophets (White, 1903, 45 – 50). Thus, formal education, a phenomenon created and maintained by human beings for human beings (McMahon, 2003, 1), has a long tradition and it can now be found in most countries in the world. The fact that this phenomenon is so widespread suggests that it is of great importance.

Figure 1.1 *Location of the Solomon Islands*



Arguably, the greatest importance of education lies in its link with well-being and prosperity, as it is claimed that it is virtually impossible to attain high levels of economic development and have a productive economy and a high standard of living without a highly educated workforce (Brown, 2003, 3; Inglehart, 1996, 654). Education is often talked about as being the key to well-being and prosperity (Wasuka, 1989, 99), and the “amazingly far-sighted” (Treadaway, 2003, 1) Solomon Islands’ Government report on education, *Education for what?* (Bugotu, Maeke, Paia, Ramoni & Arnold, 1973, clause 4.04) stressed the necessity of investing in education because of its key role in the development strategy of any country. More specifically, “western” education is becoming increasingly important to Solomon Islanders because it is seen as “the key to the most versatile form of wealth, cash” (Bennett, 1987, 341), and because of its contribution to development, growth and improved living standards (Rodi, Rore, Manurapu, Sadakabatu & Herriot, 2001, 13). Thus, education is strongly linked to the economy and therefore also to the prosperity of nations and their inhabitants.

However, *Education for what?* (Bugotu et al., 1973, 4.04) also points out that the value of education cannot be measured merely in terms of meeting manpower and economic requirements, and that it should be concerned with living (a social issue) rather than with the narrower concept of making a living (an economic issue). This recognises the need to gear an educational system to societal as well as economic needs and provide the knowledge and skills necessary for people to participate constructively in society. Education that is concerned with these wider issues is a good investment if the educational system is to meet the needs of the people it serves (Bugotu et al., 1973, 4.04).

These economic and social considerations both suggest that the quality, or appropriateness, of schooling is very important – that is, that the content of curricula should enrich people's lives with the knowledge, skills and attitudes (Rodi et al., 2001, 13) most helpful to them and their country in their particular context. Indeed, Schafer (1999, 1) points out that evidence is mounting of the critical nature of high quality education for sustained social and economic development and the realisation of human potential. On an individual level, education is a powerful force that shapes human beings in any society (Rodi et al., 2001, 13), and plays a vital role in giving children the training necessary to pursue their dreams and aspirations (Brown, 2003, 1). So if young people have little or no access to education, then individuals, the economy and society may be severely handicapped.

The argument thus far suggests that for a society to have contented and productive citizens who can become prosperous through a developed economy, the appropriateness and accessibility of education are both important. However, many developing countries around the world (including the Solomon Islands) are struggling with economic decline that is causing educational stagnation because there is little money to spend on education (Schafer, 1999, 1), so the appropriateness and accessibility of the education that they offer are under threat. Thus it becomes vital to the future of such countries that these aspects of education be examined in order for education to be as effective as it can be within local constraints, and contribute to economic and social progress rather than decline.

Brown, (2003, 3) describes a paradox of education that summarises the argument so far but also takes it one step further. He says that without education, one may live miserably in poverty, but that with the wrong kind of education one may also

live miserably in wealth (Brown, 2003, 3). However, Treadaway (2003, 2 & 9) points out that the Solomon Islands education system is presently producing more and more young people who are frustrated by an educational system which leads to expectations that the society cannot fulfil, and that they are in danger of becoming, at best, *Masta Lius* (unemployed youths who roam the streets), or at worst, militants and rascals. Thus, people may also be well educated, but if their acquired knowledge and skills are inappropriate for their context, they may be unemployable and live in frustrating poverty. This underlines the significance of access to an education that is appropriate for the society in which one lives.

Another aspect meriting consideration is the quantity of education people receive. It is reasonable to suggest that within certain limitations, the more education people receive, the more knowledgeable and skilful they are likely to become. Whether this is true throughout the lifespan is not an issue here, but, based on the work of Piaget (cited in Dudley, 1999, 16) and Kohlberg (1980, cited in Dudley, 1999, 17), it is now generally accepted that cognitive and moral development do not come to fruition until teenage years and beyond. Thus, while primary schooling does a valuable work, secondary schooling is needed to teach students more, particularly the abstract and critical thinking skills that Piaget and Kohlberg argue cannot be developed until teenage years. Rodi et al. (2001, 12) and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, or MEHRD (2004, 18) certainly believe that in the Solomon Islands education that extends into secondary schooling enables individuals to perform more efficiently, become self-sufficient, responsible and resourceful members of the community, and generally perform work of a higher quality. Therefore, secondary schooling is vital for a highly educated populace, and

it is this level of education, along with its appropriateness and accessibility, that provides the focus for this research.

The argument thus far shows that education is an individual and a societal need, but that the extent to which this need is fulfilled depends upon its accessibility to the young people of the nation, how much education the young people receive, and the appropriateness of its content.

2. The Context

It would be difficult to understand the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum without some understanding of its development and the setting in which it takes place (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, preface). Thus it is now pertinent to describe this unique context and establish why the construction, appropriateness and accessibility of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum merit special attention.

Most educators would agree with Brady and Kennedy (1999, 6) when they say that the curriculum is essentially about the future, so it is important to ensure that schools' curricula are able to contribute productively to the future. However, several social and economic facts suggest that the secondary curriculum of the Solomon Islands may not have been fulfilling the nation's societal or economic needs as productively as it might. Firstly, the Solomon Islands ranks very low among Pacific nations and in the world as a whole in terms of industrial development (Chandra, 2004, 379-381). Secondly, ethnic unrest in the late 1990s culminated in a coup in 2000 with a subsequent breakdown in law and order and destruction of the economy, which traumatised many inhabitants (MEHRD, 2004,

6). Thirdly, unemployment of school leavers has been very high. For many years, the number of jobs available increased at a slower rate than the number of school leavers (Treadaway, 2003, 6), while recent coup-related closures of some industries and businesses actually reduced the number of jobs available. Thus students completing Forms 3, 5 and even Form 6 currently find it very hard to get paid employment (Treadaway, cited in "More practical education needed", Solomon Star, 21 July, 2004, 5). Yet at the same time, it is hard to find the good builders or plumbers that society needs (Treadaway, 2003, 6 & 7). This suggests that insufficient school leavers learn such skills. The history of education in the Solomon Islands offers many clues as to how the appropriateness and accessibility of education in general, and of secondary schooling in particular, may be linked to these problems.

Formal education in the Solomon Islands began in the late 19th century with the advent of Christian Missions, at a time when the local people's increasing involvement in the developing cash economy made them increasingly aware of their educational limitations (Bennett, 1987, 258). Missions continued to be the sole local source of schooling until after World War II, but as the pre-war colonial government saw no independent political future for the Solomon Islands, it took little interest in education and gave mission schools no support (Wasuka, 1989, 102). Unfortunately, mission education varied greatly in its content and quality, and much of it was very rudimentary (Bennett, 1987, 258). As different denominations had varied commitments to formal education, and were dominant in different provinces, this led to very uneven accessibility to schools and/or a good quality education, while non-Christians were excluded from any kind of formal education (Bennett, 1987, 216-7). All this caused disillusionment and led to a strong desire

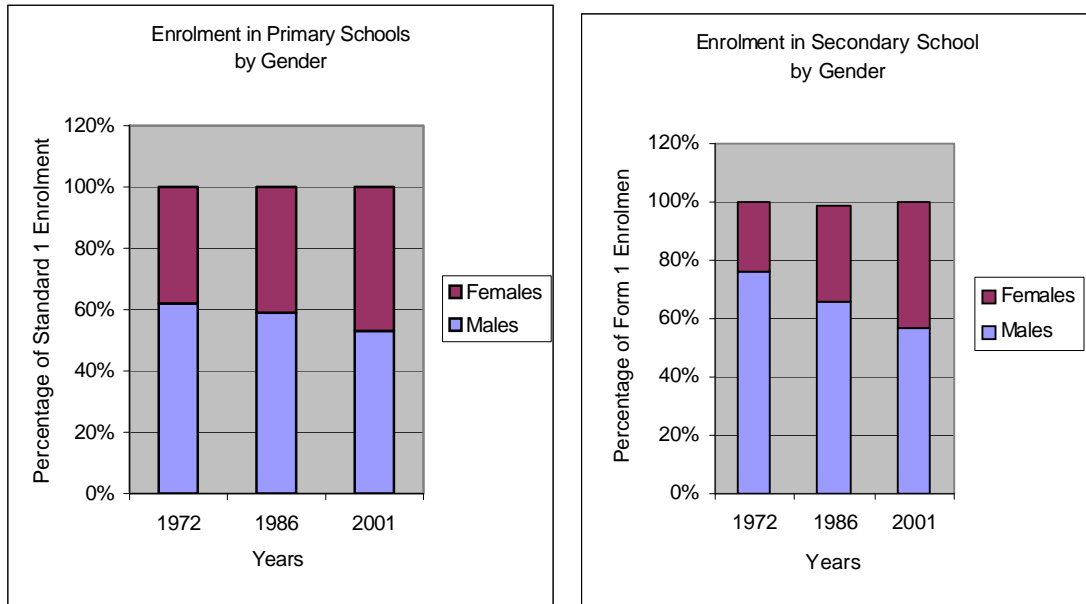
for improvement that was not to eventuate until after World War II (Bennett, 1987, 258).

After World War II there was a steady increase in government involvement and a diminution (though not cessation) of Mission involvement in education (Wasuka, 1989, 103). It was hoped that this would improve the quality of education, groom leaders for the future, and help provide people with skills – particularly to resource the emerging private sector – the lack of which, had hitherto retarded development (Wasuka, 1989, 106; MEHRD, 2004, 11; Bennett, 1987, 318). In the late 1960s, two schools – one a government school and the other Anglican – provided the first local opportunity for secondary education. (Before that, secondary education was only available overseas.) With the help of other Christian denominations, the number of secondary schools soon expanded to nine, which became the National Secondary Schools of today. Eight National Secondary Schools were, and still are, boarding schools taking students from any province (depending on student choices and academic criteria). However, five of them are either in, or are very close to, Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands on the island of Guadalcanal, and this clustered location continued a trend of unequal access to schooling begun by Mission primary schools. Today, the central government still runs only two secondary schools, with the expanding remainder supported by town or provincial authorities, Christian denominations and local communities.

Other factors have also contributed to the variable accessibility of secondary schooling. Firstly, education in the Solomon Islands is neither compulsory nor free. Secondly, as Figure 1.2 shows, males participate in education at a higher rate than

females, with the difference becoming wider as the children age (MEHRD, 2004,13). However, this is now changing, with parents more willing to enrol daughters in day Community High Schools rather than in boarding National or

Figure 1.2 *Enrolment in Schools by Gender*

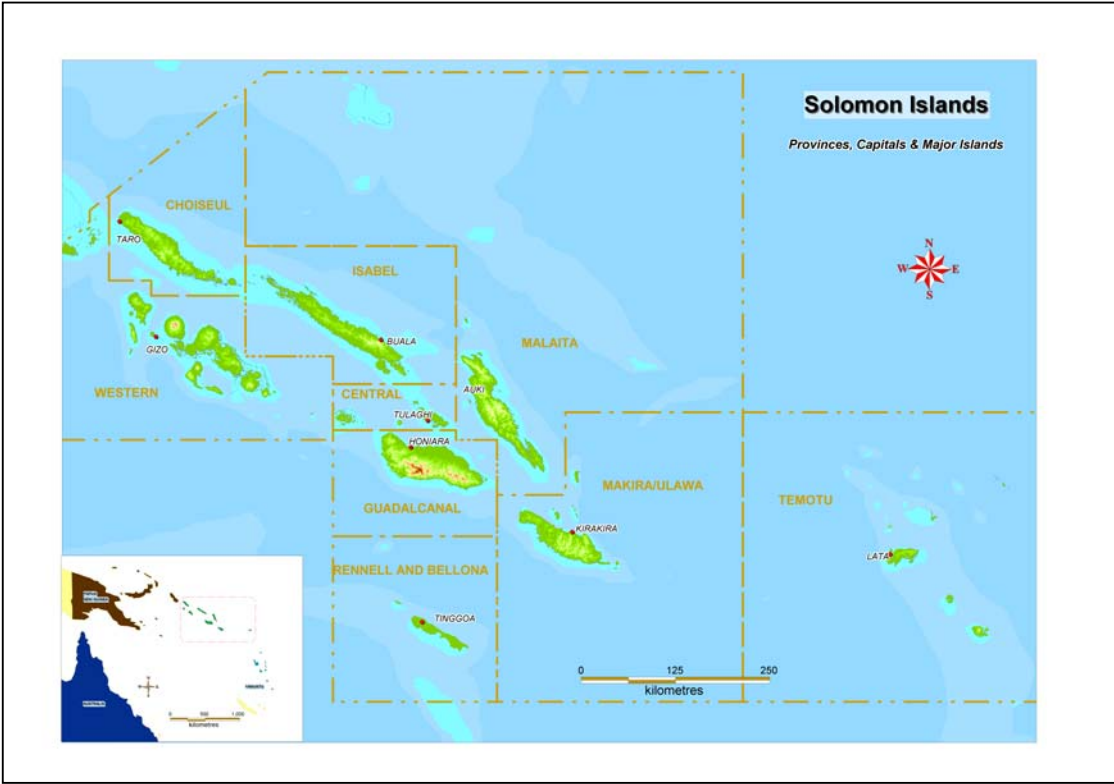


Sources: - Bugotu et al., 1973, 3.20,
 - 1986 Population Census,
 - School return information, MEHRD.

Provincial Secondary Schools (MEHRD, 2004, 12). Thirdly, the distribution of the newer Provincial Secondary Schools (established in the late 1970s and 80s) around the provinces does not reflect population density, even though *Education for what?* (Bugotu et al., 1973, 5.44) requested otherwise. The Curriculum Handbook (1987, 27), using data from the 1986 population census, noted that province populations varied between less than 15,000 (Isabel and Temotu) and more than 80,000 (Malaita), yet each province had one or two Provincial Secondary Schools with places for 315 or 420 students. (See Figure 1.3 for a map showing the provinces of the Solomon Islands.) Not surprisingly, Figure 1.4 shows that this led to big differences in the proportion of students of secondary school age attending secondary schools in each province. These differences persist, though

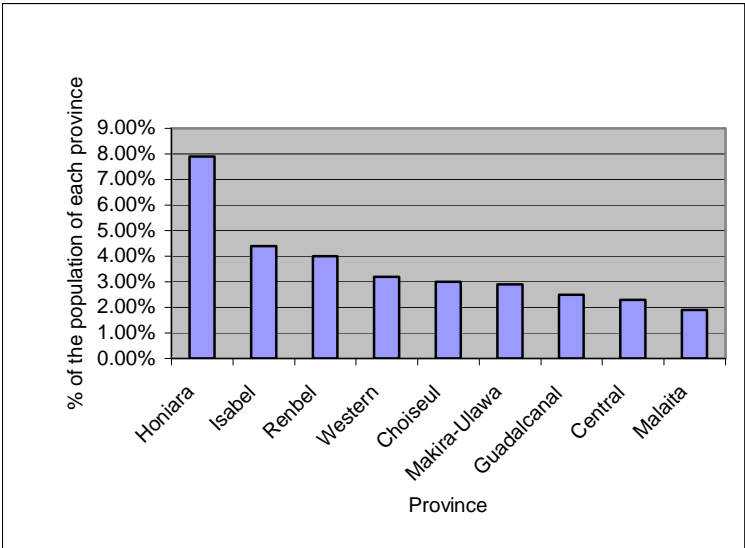
the development of Community High Schools in the last few years has reduced this inequity.

Figure 1.3 *The provinces of the Solomon Islands*



Source: R. Little, Lands Dept.

Figure 1.4 *Secondary age children attending secondary school in 1999 as a % of the population in each province*



Source: - Solomon Islands 1999 Census statistics

Perhaps the most important factor affecting accessibility to secondary education is that students have to pass selection examinations at the end of primary school to receive any secondary schooling at all. Students also have to undergo a second selection examination after three years to be able to progress to Forms 4 and 5 and be able to sit their state examinations, which in turn, select students for Form 6. The curricula for Forms 6 and 7 come from overseas and are outside the scope of this research. Figure 1.5 not only shows this very competitive system, it also illustrates the substantial number of children who, whether by choice or lack of places in schools, do not attend secondary schools. These are average figures and conceal differences between provinces. Interestingly, while Figure 1.5 shows a substantial number of non-starters and high push-out rates, it also shows an

Figure 1.5 Attendance in primary and secondary schools out of every 100 children in one year group

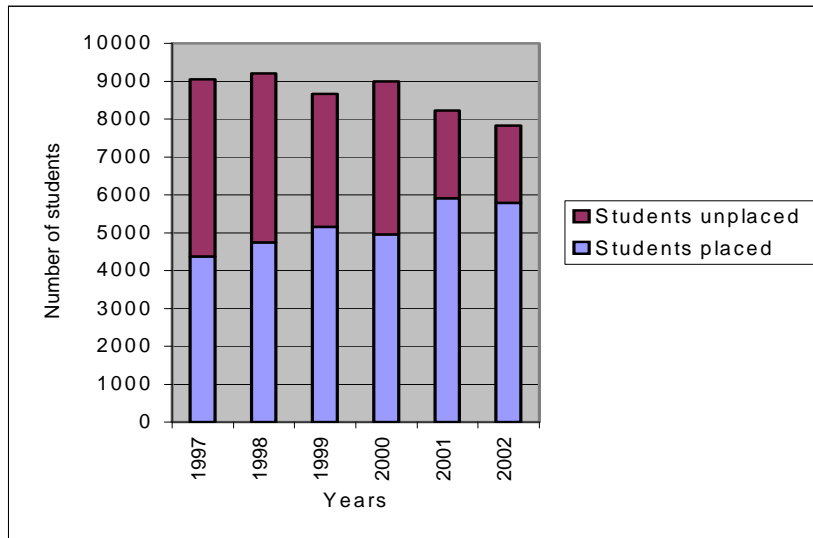
YEAR	Base Population	Starting Standard 1	Reaching Standard 6	Reaching Form 1	Reaching Form 4	Reaching Form 6	Reaching Form 7
1987	100	55	40	13	5	1	-
2001/2	100	60	36	25	13	2	<1
2004	100	70	41	24	14	4	?

Sources: - 1987-8 Curriculum Handbook,
- 2001/2 school return information, MEHRD.
- Education Strategic Plan, 2004-2006.

increase in students reaching secondary school and continuing with secondary education (some sources say 30%+ in 2004 rather than 24%). This probably reflects the expansion of Provincial Secondary Schools from Forms 1 – 3 only, to include Forms 4 – 5, and also the opening of new Community High Schools. Figure 1.6 sheds further light on the reduction in students taking the secondary school selection examination shown in Figure 1.5. Significantly, it shows that student numbers were at their peak in 1998, but have decreased since, reflecting the disruption of education caused by the ethnic tension and coup. With the situation now stabilising, more Community High Schools opening, and the Solomon Islands

Figure 1.6

Students placed in secondary school 1997-2002



Source: - Examination data, National Examinations and Standard Unit, MEHRD.

population growth rate decreasing from 3.5% in 1986 to 2.8% in 1999 (Solomon Islands Population Censuses, 1986 & 1999), accessibility to secondary education may begin to radically improve.

Several important events have also had a big impact on the construction, content, and development of the secondary school curriculum.

A steady increase in the involvement of central government in education culminated in their taking control in 1975. Whilst schools are still autonomous in some respects, significantly, there is now just one national curriculum, which is under the control of the Ministry of Education. When the Regional Examining Board failed to materialise, the Solomon Islands became the first Pacific Islands' country to break away from Cambridge (Treadaway, 2003, 4), whose curriculum had been perceived as rather alien and largely irrelevant to the needs of the majority of students in the Solomon Islands (Bugotu, 1973, 6.27). This allowed the construction of a curriculum with syllabi ostensibly written for local conditions. The

secondary curriculum now culminates in the Solomon Islands School Certificate (SISC), taken in Form 5, which replaced the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate in 1978 (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, 14 & 15). Those directly involved in constructing this curriculum were, and still are, all educators, while several expatriates – particularly from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, 26) – with different cultural perspectives, have been involved in constructing and developing subject syllabi.

Of paramount importance to the content of the curriculum, is the movement towards a very academic curriculum based on knowledge, even though this was not the original intention. The education system in the 1970s created primary school push-outs, who were ill-fitted for ordinary village life and somewhat alienated from their culture by their academic education, yet they had insufficient education to work elsewhere (Wasuka, 1989, 106; Bugotu et al., 1973, 5.04). This led to a grass-roots demand to give them practical skills relevant to village life through the development of rural training centres. An important reason why this ultimately faltered was the shift in the overall goal of schooling from education for village life, to education for paid employment (Bennett, 1987, 340), which Bugotu et al. (1973, 4.04) found disturbing, realising that the system would create insufficient jobs for school leavers. To help cope with the effects of this trend, Bugotu et al. (1973) stressed the need for practical and vocational subjects in schools (clauses 5.07 & 5.15) and encouraged the government (clause 5.29) to develop a two-tier secondary school system. This system set up what later became known as Provincial Secondary Schools (first called New Secondary Schools) with a much more practical curriculum terminating after two years, as an alternative to the much more academic 5-year curriculum taught in National Secondary Schools. It was

hoped that these initiatives would affirm traditional values and avoid a crop of push-outs discontented with village life (Bennett, 1987, 341). Musuota (1994, 4) claimed that this “mixed mode” was, in the Solomon Islands context, the most appropriate mode to help reconcile the educational dilemmas of a country needing to simultaneously sustain and develop both subsistence and market economies, and village and urban life.

However, the Solomon Islands is an egalitarian society where obtaining material rewards, higher status and power are perceived as dependent on educational achievement (Wasuka, 1989, 99), thus right from the outset the two-tier system was perceived as unfair. The new schools with their almost entirely practical curriculum, which only taught English and Maths in the context of other subjects, were perceived as a “dead end” because they neither awarded certificates, nor allowed the possibility of further education (Treadaway, 2004). Thus in 1978, by Act of Parliament, their curriculum was extended to three years, English and Maths became formal subjects, and the three years culminated in common English and Mathematics examinations with National Secondary Schools’ students that allowed the possibility of selection for a National Secondary School for further education. Figure 1.7 illustrates the contrasting curricula of the two types of schools during the 1980s.

Thus by the early 1990s, with pressure from parents, teachers and politicians, but on a rather gradual and ad hoc basis (Treadaway, 1996, 8; 2003, 5), all schools followed the one academic National Curriculum, which may be described as a localised version of the Cambridge curriculum (Treadaway, 2004). This curriculum prescribes what subjects are taught, their content, their textbooks and their

Figure 1.7

Ministry of Education recommended timetable

	SUBJECTS	PROVINCIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL	NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL (FORMS 1-3)
		Number of 40 minute periods per week	Number of 40 minute periods per week
ACADEMIC SUBJECTS	Business Studies	3	2
	Christian Education	2	2
	English	6	7
	Mathematics	5	6
	Science	0	6
	Social Studies	4	5
	TOTAL	20	28
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS	Agriculture	5	4
	Industrial Arts (Boys)	5	4
	Industrial Arts (Girls)	1	0
	Home Economics (Boys)	1	0
	Home Economics (Girls)	5	4
	Creative Arts	2	2
	Physical Education	2	2
	TOTAL	15	12
TOTAL PERIODS PER WEEK		35	40
			(FORMS 4 – 5)
CORE SUBJECTS	English	-	7
	Mathematics	-	6
	Science	-	7
	Social Studies	-	5
	*New Testament Studies	-	5
ELECTIVE SUBJECTS (2 of)	Agricultural Science	-	(5)
	Industrial Arts	-	(5)
	Home Economics	-	(5)
	Business Studies	-	(5)
TOTAL PERIODS PER WEEK		-	40

Source: Curriculum Handbook, 1987.

* New Testament Studies is now an elective subject, though in all Christian schools and in some secular schools, it is compulsory.

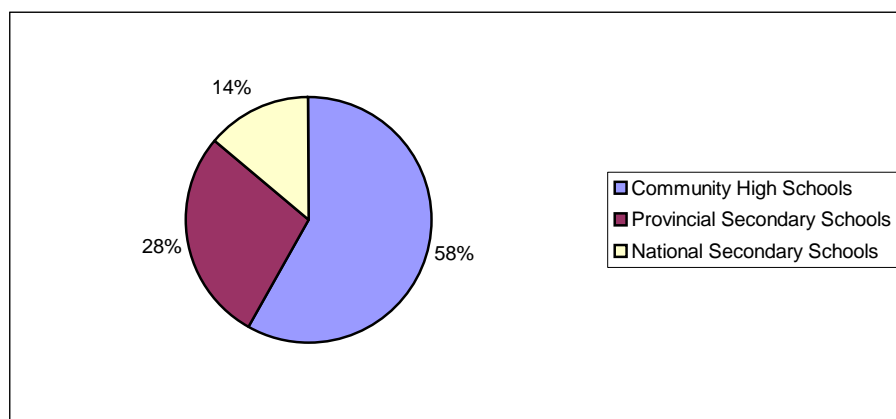
assessment, and as Figure 1.7 illustrates, it also recommends allocated teaching times for subjects (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, 18, 20 & 29-67). A proposal aired in 1996 (Treadaway, 1996) to introduce a two-strand (academic and technical) system into Forms 4 and 5 in all schools, was never acted upon.

Lastly, and most significantly, even though curriculum development should be ongoing with regular monitoring for relevance and quality, in the 1990s, teacher

panels and workshops designed to develop the curriculum did not function effectively (Davy, 2000, 4 & 13), and had largely ceased by the coup of June 2000. This, coupled with a severely understaffed government agency responsible for curriculum development, led to virtual curriculum stagnation until very recently (MEHRD, 2004, 14). With most subjects' syllabi little altered since their creation (except for Science), they no longer meet the expectations of parents and employers (MEHRD, 2004, 8). With the arrival in July 2003 of RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands) to help the Solomon Islands solve its many problems, overseas aid money is once again flowing. One recipient is education. A review of secondary elective practical subjects began in October 2003, and a full review of all secondary subjects began in 2004. This is the first major curriculum review since the national secondary curriculum began in 1976.

To summarise, the secondary curriculum of the Solomon Islands is characterised by several constraining factors. The unplanned growth and expansion of schools has created a disjointed and complex system characterised by an unnecessarily large number of school types (MEHRD, 2004, 11). These schools are of varying quality. Provincial Secondary Schools have expanded upwards to include Forms 4 and 5, often without expanding library, laboratory and dormitory facilities, while the rapid development of Community High Schools has strained the government's capacity to provide trained teachers and curriculum support materials (MEHRD, 2004, 12). Figure 1.8 illustrates the large number of students this affects. Not only is access to good quality secondary education limited, the academically orientated curriculum is seen to focus on students who progress to higher education and to the formal sector of employment, and is considered by many as unconnected and

Figure 1.8 *Enrolment in junior secondary school (Forms 1 – 3) 2001*



Source: MEHRD, 2004, 12.

antagonistic to the social and cultural values of the Solomon Islands society (MEHRD, 2004, 23 & 5).

This historical overview of the development of education in the Solomon Islands and of secondary schooling in particular, reveals the roots of concerns with secondary curriculum construction, content appropriateness and accessibility, and these are the focus issues of this thesis.

3. Definitions

The world **curriculum** means different things to different people and its scope has expanded over time. At its most basic, it is the planned course of study or subjects taught in a school (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 7&10). However, many scholars now prefer a wider definition such as that given by Treadaway (1996, 30), who sees curriculum as everything young people learn in school, not just through the subjects they study, but also through how they are taught and through the examination system. Treadaway (1996, 30) also includes in his definition the influence of teachers and fellow students and the whole ethos of the school. These aspects

form part of the informal curriculum, and whilst the researcher acknowledges its existence and importance, the informal curriculum is considered to be outside the scope of this study.

As indicated in Treadaway's (1996, 30) definition, the formal curriculum may be divided into four aspects – construction, content, implementation and assessment. Both implementation and assessment are undoubtedly important, and have recently been the focus of much reform, notably, the use of outcomes (Brady, 1996) and moves to integrate learning and assessment (Glaser, 1998, 9 & 16-17) through such means as student portfolios (Armstrong, 2000, 98-101). But regardless of how well they are taught or assessed, if the knowledge and skills prescribed by the content are not appropriate for the local context, the curriculum is not fulfilling societal needs. Thus, the skills and the range of subjects taught, the emphases placed on them and the content of subject syllabi, are all exceedingly important.

The people who are in a position to decide the content of the curriculum are also very important, and they form part of a group called curriculum **stakeholders**. Curriculum stakeholders are the large group of people with a direct interest in, or involvement with, the curriculum, and it is a selection of members of this group who are normally responsible for constructing a curriculum. This group extends beyond such obvious people as professional educators and teachers to include students, parents and other interested groups such as the business community, though not all of these groups may be invited to help construct or develop the curriculum.

Culture has a very important relationship with education and the curriculum, yet it is not always considered. It may be defined as the shared values, beliefs and

practices of people, and these elements can vary greatly between cultures. (In the Solomon Islands, there are three indigenous Pacific Island collective cultures - Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian - which are all very different from western individualistic cultures.) **Societal needs** are considered to be what the people who constitute the population of a country need for their lives to be productive and happy in the local context. Finally, **perceptions** are mental impressions gained from people's thoughts and understandings. In this research, the perceptions come from stakeholders, and they are about participants in curriculum construction, the **appropriateness** (suitability) of the content of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum and its **accessibility** (ease of access) to young people of secondary school age in relation to societal needs.

Other terms used in this study include **National** and **Provincial Secondary Schools, Community High Schools** and **push-outs**. The nine National Secondary Schools (also commonly called National High Schools) of the Solomon Islands formed the first small group of secondary schools and could be said to be the elite schools of the nation. The sixteen Provincial Secondary Schools were formed later under the auspices of the seven (now nine) provincial governments. The first Community High Schools opened in the 1990s, by 2001 they totalled 93, and their numbers are still increasing today. As their name implies, they have been set up by communities with some backing from foreign aid. **Push-outs** (formerly termed drop-outs) is a term applied in the Solomon Islands to students who are pushed out of schools by the selection process, while **Masta Lius** is a term for unemployed young people (most of whom are push-outs) who roam the streets.

4. Rationale

The preferred level at which curricula are constructed – national, state, local authority or school – have varied over the years, with the current international trend being national curriculum frameworks that specify learning areas rather than prescribe detailed content (Brady, 1995, 3-10). As a curriculum may be described as a social construct (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 3) that is grounded in the culture of the people who write it (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 12), it is considered advisable that representatives from all curriculum stakeholder groups should co-operate in constructing a curriculum (Skilbeck, 1994, 99; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6). It is also considered extremely important that the content of a curriculum should support holistic student development (White, 1903; UNESCO, 2000, 8; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 8) and should transmit the local culture (UNESCO, 2000, 8; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 8). It should also fulfil societal needs (Bugotu et al., 1973, 4.04). To do this, a curriculum must be broadened beyond traditional knowledge-based education to facilitate the development of students' ability to think and act creatively and morally (UNESCO, 2000, 4 & 14; Downs Perry, 1994, 97) and to successfully practice competencies (such as problem-solving, decision-making and negotiating) considered necessary for life in the 21st century (Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 4; Tien, Ven & Chou, 2003, 1-7).

The Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum, however, although set at national level, is very prescriptive, and includes among its constructors people from other cultures, but not members of all stakeholder groups. Also, with its heavy emphasis on the transmission of academic knowledge, it may not be holistic, nor promote the development of key competencies successfully, and with its western bias, may not successfully transmit indigenous culture either. Furthermore, for a

curriculum to do its work successfully, it must be accessible to all students (Brown, 2003, 2), yet in the Solomon Islands there are inequalities of access to the curriculum. When these facts are set alongside the Solomon Islands' lack of economic development, insufficient jobs, dearth of trades-people and recent ethnic problems, it seems that the secondary curriculum has not been fulfilling societal needs.

Thus the context reveals a number of concerns with the Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum. These concerns merit research because they reduce the capacity of the curriculum to support future economic and social development.

5. Aims of the Research

This research gathered and analysed the perceptions of curriculum stakeholders regarding the construction, appropriateness and accessibility of the national secondary curriculum of the Solomon Islands in relation to the needs of the local society in its cultural context. Other commentators on the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum all highlight the problem of the extremely academic curriculum (Wasuka, 1989; Treadaway 1996, and 2003; Rodi et al., 2001; MEHRD, 2004). This thesis also covers this issue, but extends to other concerns that have received little or no attention.

An important aim of this research is to discover and highlight stakeholders' perceptions and opinions of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum so that they may provide constructive input into the implementation of the government's Education Strategic Plan 2004-2006, which represents a major overhaul of the

whole Solomon Islands' education system. The specific aims of this research may be summarised as follows.

1. To discuss who should be involved in the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum development process.
2. To describe the content of the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum and discuss its appropriateness for the local context.
3. To discuss the accessibility of the secondary school curriculum to young people of secondary school age.

6. *Research Questions*

The following research questions have been developed from the review of literature.

1. Should there be one national Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum (as at present), or should provinces and/or schools be given the opportunity to construct their own curricula?
2. Should the range of people involved in curriculum construction be educators only, or should the group be expanded to include other stakeholders?
3. Is the current Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of:
 - a) The range of subjects taught in the curriculum?
 - b) The content of the various subjects (in general terms)?
 - c) The emphasis placed on different subjects?
 - d) The emphases placed on knowledge and values?
 - e) The emphasis placed on communication, problem solving, negotiating and decision-making skills.

4. Do all young people of secondary school age have equal access to secondary schooling?

7. Significance

The findings of this research will be of value to the people of Solomon Islands for several reasons.

Firstly, stakeholders that should be involved in secondary curriculum construction in the Solomon Islands will be identified. Secondly, curriculum content and emphases that may not be providing students with the knowledge, values and skills appropriate for their context will be highlighted. Thirdly, any inequalities of access to secondary schooling will be identified. Lastly, data that may inform discussion and generate further research that may assist with reforming the Solomon Islands' secondary curriculum will be provided.

8. Methodology

This study is concerned with opinions and perceptions. The target population is teachers, students, parents, business people and education administrators who are connected to the development and delivery of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum. The data has been collected through questionnaires and interviews. This combined quantitative and qualitative strategy should reduce researcher bias and improve the validity of the data collected (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 224).

a) The questionnaires

The questionnaires used a Likert scale and some free response questions to gather basic demographic information and opinions. The question content was guided by the literature review and the researcher's observations gained from 15 years involvement with the Solomon Islands' secondary curriculum. The survey was cross sectional (Gay and Airasian, 2000, 279), involving the collection of data from selected individuals.

With the target population spread throughout widely scattered islands, subjects had to be selected for the questionnaire using clustered sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 129), and were limited to secondary schools located in, or close to, Honiara, the capital city of the Solomon Islands on the island of Guadalcanal. The four schools were also chosen with the following criteria in mind: private and government, boarding and day schools (giving a mix of provincial and urban students), and secular and Christian. As almost none have Form 6 classes, Community High Schools were not included.

Each cluster consisted of mixed gender groups of secondary school teachers (with varying ages and qualifications) and Form 6 Arts and Science students. After gaining consent, the researcher aimed to conduct the surveys herself and to collect from each school, 25-35 questionnaires from students, and 15-20 questionnaires from teachers.

b) The interviews

A partially structured interview was developed from the questionnaire responses – a technique recommended by Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander (1996, 188), and the open-ended questions were modified and expanded as deemed appropriate (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 221). Interview subjects were selected from stakeholders in the secondary curriculum and consisted of two individuals from each of the following groups: government education administrators, private sector education administrators, teachers, students, parents and business people, making a total of twelve. Each interviewee was presented with a copy of the research information statement and asked to sign a consent form, and the interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription.

For reasons of accessibility, all interviewees were Honiara residents, though they did represent several of the nine provinces of the Solomon Islands and members of the expatriate business community.

c) Ethical considerations

The Solomon Islands has undergone great social trauma in recent years (MEHRD, 2004, 5) that disrupted the delivery and assessment of the secondary curriculum. Consequently, questions linked to the delivery and assessment of the curriculum that may have led to criticism of individual schools and teachers were avoided.

Confidentiality of data was assured by the questionnaires not asking for names, by interviews being conducted in private, and by interviewees being referred to in all documents by a simple code, rather than by name.

d) Data Analysis

Data has been analysed by grounded theory and simple descriptive statistics, with the interviews helping to explain data collected from the questionnaires (Gay & Ariasian, 2000, 220).

9. *Limitations*

This research is very specific to the context of the secondary curriculum of the Solomon Islands. It therefore cannot necessarily be generalised to other areas of curriculum research. Because of accessibility problems, questionnaires and interviews were confined to the Honiara area. However, this limitation is largely offset by questionnaire respondents and interviewees between them representing all nine of the Solomon Islands' provinces. Also, although interviewees were chosen to represent particular stakeholder groups, in such a small community it was inevitable that some interviewees would also belong to a second group, (usually the parents group). Whilst it may be argued that interviewees' membership of more than one group might skew the findings, it may also be argued that interviewees who are members of more than one stakeholder group view the curriculum from more than one perspective, and are therefore more likely to be balanced in their opinions. This would enhance rather than detract from the validity of data.

10. *Structure of the thesis*

The current chapter introduces the thesis and establishes an important link between the content, appropriateness and accessibility of curricula and economic and social development. It goes on to briefly describe the context of the study, revealing the roots of curriculum construction, content appropriateness and accessibility issues. The chapter also gives necessary definitions, provides a rationale for the research, identifies the aims of the research, poses the research questions, establishes the significance of the study and briefly describes its methodology and limitations.

Chapter two reviews literature on various aspects of curricula related to this study. These aspects include, firstly, at what level the curriculum should be constructed and who should be involved in the construction. Secondly it considers the appropriateness of curriculum content in relation to culture, and also the appropriateness of a holistic education that balances the academic with the creative, practical, physical, values and morality, knowledge and skills. It concludes with reviewing the importance of the accessibility of curricula.

Chapter three discusses the methodology used for collecting the data through the questionnaires and presents the analysis and discussion of the findings. Chapter four discusses the interview methodology, then discusses the findings of the interviews and their relationship to the questionnaire findings. The final chapter summarises the main findings of the thesis, makes recommendations based on the findings, and concludes with suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

With education so vital to the life of nations, literature has a great deal to say about the aspects of education highlighted in the introduction. It also has a great deal to say about the curriculum. However, the focus of this literature search is, at what level curricula should be constructed, who should be involved in the construction, and the content and accessibility of curricula in the context of fulfilling societal needs. There is much literature that deals with these issues in the developed world, but the paucity of literature dealing with these issues in developing countries in general, and in the Pacific Islands and the Solomon Islands in particular, has necessitated the use of some older literature (such as Bugotu et al., 1973).

1. Curriculum Construction

a) At what level should the curriculum be constructed?

Curricula may be constructed at a variety of levels such as national level, at some kind of local authority level (such as state or province) or at school level, and each level has been in vogue at one time or another (Brady, 1995, 3-17). This is illustrated by Australia, the Solomon Islands' nearest developed neighbour, who in the last 40 years has used both state prescribed curricula and school-based curricula, and now uses a centrally determined curriculum framework consisting of eight National Curriculum learning areas (Brady, 1995, 3, 7&10).

There are both advantages and disadvantages for school-based and national curricula. School-based curriculum development was born of a recognition that schools should meet the unique educational requirements of their own students whose needs differ (for example in urban and rural locations) and that they can build on local community-based knowledge (Brady, 1995, 3; Glaser, 1998, 9). In the Solomon Islands, Bugotu et al. (1973, 5.05) certainly express the need for practical and vocational courses which reflect the needs of the areas in which the schools are located, and Treadaway (1996, 35) suggests using skilled people from the local community to teach some skills. It has also been implied that the teaching profession is enhanced by a less centralised approach (Brady, 1995, 11-12).

However, Brady (1995, 7) and Skilbeck (1994, 97) also point out that not all teachers or all schools have the capacity, time or resources to develop their own curriculum. A national curriculum, on the one hand, can be embodied in clear, concise legislation, be well supported by materials, and optimise curriculum resources (Skilbeck, 1994, 97; Brady, 1995, 6). On the other hand, Brown (2003, 2) warns that education can create conformity, and that there are dangers in a mandatory system under state control unless schools retain some measure of independence. Brady (1995, 11) also points out that school effectiveness literature seems to support a decentralised approach.

With such a small education system (the population of the Solomon Islands was 409,000 in the 1999 population census) it is not surprising that the Solomon Islands has opted for just one national curriculum. However, as already indicated, the national curriculum is highly prescriptive and it would be very informative to

ascertain stakeholders' perceptions of the merit of this, particularly in relation to the present mood of decentralising power, talk of statehood for the provinces and strong contrasts between rural and urban life.

b) Who should be involved in constructing curricula?

Lovat and Smith (1995, 11) argue that there is always an underlying social and politico-economic philosophy which impacts upon education and the curriculum. Brady and Kennedy, (1999, 3) extend this argument by maintaining that curriculum is not an entity apart from society, it is firmly embedded in it and thus is a *social construct*. But it is also a *personal construct*, as curriculum represents a selection of societal ideas, skills, values and practices, and what is selected or rejected depends on the life experiences of those doing the selecting (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 3; Lovatt & Smith, 1995, 2). Thus, the curriculum is constructed by people, for people, and the identity and backgrounds of curriculum constructors is of vital importance to the construction of a relevant and appropriate curriculum. However, one thing all curriculum constructors should have in common is an understanding of curriculum practice (Musuota, 1994, 3).

Literature recommends that several groups with a vested interest in the curriculum – the stakeholders – should be involved in curriculum construction.

The first group that literature recommends should be involved in curriculum construction is the government. As the curriculum is a major factor determining the knowledge and skills that future citizens will possess, and hence their capacity to contribute productively to their society, governments in many countries have begun

to take unprecedented interest in school curricula (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 5 &7). This interest should encourage governments to ensure what Posner (1998, 96) recommends, that is, that at least some curriculum planners have the ability to use various curriculum models and have an awareness of the implications of their use – people such as education administrators.

The second, and most obvious group, is teachers. As pointed out by Brady (1995, 7) and Skilbeck (1994, 97), individual schools and teachers may not be able to construct their own curriculum, yet at the same time, there can be no effective structure for curriculum decisions at national level that does not involve teachers (Skilbeck, 1994, 99). One problem with involving teachers is that their training may dispose them towards the academic, theoretical and esoteric, rather than the vocational, practical and relevant (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6). Yet their input is vital to reducing the gap that literature suggests exists between what curriculum planners intend should happen, and what actually does happen in schools (Lovatt & Smith, 1995, 14), because they are, of necessity, the interpreters and mediators of the curriculum (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6).

A third group, students, stands to personally gain or lose more from curricula than anyone else, yet they have rarely been involved in curriculum development. Brady and Kennedy (1999, 6 & 7) describe how a curriculum can be meaningless and irrelevant to students because their changing and evolving culture is often at odds with that of adults. Additionally, they point out that there are sub-groups among students such as girls, slow learners and isolated rural dwellers, whose needs should also be considered. They conclude by saying that for a curriculum to be relevant to students, it must be able to meet their personal, social and vocational

aspirations and take into account changing cultural standards from the perspectives of students themselves (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6).

Fourthly, Dodd (1998, 461) points out that many scholars argue that parents are important stakeholders whose support for schools is essential. Also, Brady & Kennedy (1999, 5) suggest that parents are far more likely to give their support if they have faith that the curriculum will help their children realise their aspirations. An obvious route to making these things more possible is to involve parents in curriculum development.

A fifth group is the business community, which generally shares governments' economic interests (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 7). In some countries, the business community has become very interested in school curricula because they expect it to provide students with the essential attitudes, knowledge and skills (such as literacy and numeracy) that will enable them to be productive workers (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 5 & 7). Furthermore, the American business community is now making it clear that new qualities are being sought in employees (such as flexible thinking, quick problem-solving and being a team-player) to enable them to "work smarter" as a complement to working harder (Elias et al., 1997, 7). If such essential knowledge, attitudes and skills are to be included in curricula, then business people should be participants in curriculum construction to encourage their inclusion.

Lastly, there are still other groups in the community whose input could enhance the relevance and appropriateness of school curricula. These groups include those dealing with medical and social issues, and tertiary educators (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 7; Skilbeck, 1994, 100).

Thus, the government, teachers, students, parents, business interests and other specialists all have valuable parts to play in constructing curricula. It is also considered most advisable that they co-operate together in partnership to achieve a consensus about a common core of interests that may guide curriculum development and content (Skilbeck, 1994, 99; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6) and that governments ensure that participatory systems are in place at both community and national levels (United Nations, 2001, 2).

In the Solomon Islands, education administrators under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education (currently the MEHRD) have always been involved in curriculum construction, as have teachers, though financial constraints and recent social problems greatly reduced their involvement. Previously, other stakeholders have not been involved, but Rodi (2004, 10) and the MEHRD (2004, 1) now accede that the responsibility for education resides not just with teachers and the national government, but also with parents, the community, educational authorities and local governments, and that all these stakeholders should engage in a participative, interactive and collaborative approach to curriculum construction in the context of an evolving and dynamic partnership. Furthermore, the MEHRD (2004, 18 & 9) recognises the need for further consultation with stakeholders, and plans to strengthen old partnerships and establish new ones with stakeholders and clients in redesigning the curriculum. As a curriculum review gets underway, it will be constructive to find out what various stakeholders think about their inclusion in, or exclusion from, the curriculum process.

2. The appropriateness of curriculum content

Benjamin (1939), in his classic story of the sabre tooth curriculum, effectively illustrated how contexts that evolve may make what is taught in schools an academic exercise that is largely irrelevant to modern life. It must also be remembered that education is much more than a mechanical process, as it deals with human lives, destinations, hopes and dreams (Disla, 2002, 2). Thus careful thought needs to go into the selection of curriculum content.

a) Culture and the curriculum

It is inevitable that curriculum represents a selection of the ideas, skills, values, norms and practices that are found within a society (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 12; Disla, 2000, 2), and as these are part of the substance of culture, curriculum may be argued to be a cultural construction. There are at least three important cultural considerations for curriculum developers.

Firstly, the curriculum can, and arguably should, be an agent of cultural transmission and thus ensure that the foundations of a society are transmitted to the next generation (Nanzhao, 1996, 239; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 8). It certainly helps a society to look more intelligently towards the future if they know where they have come from. Additionally, UNESCO (2000, 8) considers a high regard of oral culture and knowledge a desirable outcome of schooling. The Solomon Islands' MEHRD (2004, 7) would certainly agree, as it recommends the inclusions of indigenous language, literature (including oral tradition), culture and history. It also considers (2004, 31) the preservation of indigenous knowledge and skills vital for the sustainable development of the Solomon Islands. Culture may thus be

considered an essential part of curricula (Nanzhao, 1996, 239) and may be an important component in such subjects as Social Studies, a core subject in the Solomon Islands. However, as schooling may lead to a loss of respect for traditional communities (Treadaway, 1996, 35), the curriculum should transmit culture in such a way as to encourage students to explore and respect traditional beliefs and ways of thinking, reasoning and understanding (MEHRD, 2004, 14).

Secondly, other researchers warn that through the culturally chosen curriculum, conditions of older times may be retained, become maladaptive and deter progress even as a culture attempts to change (Benjamin, 1939; Glaser, 1998, 7). This is perhaps a particular danger in our fast-changing world, especially when a curriculum changes very little in 30 years as in the Solomon Islands. However, there is also a danger in being so relevant to modern life that contact with cultural roots is lost. There is much wisdom in Bugotu et al.'s (1973, 6.01) insistence that while what is taught and learned in schools must be meaningful in the local context, it must at the same time be able to meet the demands of the modern world.

Thirdly, another precautionary note comes from Disla (2000, 2) and Lovat and Smith (1995, 12), who argue that by being selective, curriculum can create reality for learners, and that if this reality is different from their life experiences and misrepresents social realities, students may feel alienated from their cultural worlds. This is particularly likely to happen today with the changes brought about by globalisation, the rapid extension of electronic media and changing conceptions of self and others, because these changes are transforming social and cultural life inside and outside schools all around the world (McCarthy, Giardina, Howard & Park, 2003, 4). These changes largely emanate from western countries whose

individualistic cultures are often quite alien to developing world cultures (such as the collective cultures of the Pacific Islands), so curriculum ideas imported from them may foster the development of values, behaviours and beliefs that are alien and highly problematic (Marglin, 2003, 6). Bugotu et al. (1973, 5.15) certainly saw the pre-independence Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum as "too narrow and foreign". Indeed, it is questionable whether a curriculum can be culturally appropriate unless it has been designed by people with knowledge of the context (Musuota, 1994, 3; Rodi et al., 2001, 14). Dimmock and Walker (1998, 8), through their experience of curriculum reform in Hong Kong, certainly question the wisdom of transferring curriculum reforms between unlike cultures. They also argue that as educational reform becomes internationalised, it is even more important to take cognisance of the indigenous culture. Thus there is a strong case for ensuring that curricula, their syllabi and support materials are all relevant to the cultural context (Musuota, 1994, 9; Rodi, 2004, 10). McCarthy et al. (2003, 8) summarise the argument well in their claim that an important task confronting 21st century educators is to address the cultural rearticulation now taking place in educational and social life.

An illuminating addition to this debate comes from Sir Peter Keniloria, a Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands in the 1970s and 1980s, and currently Speaker of the House of Parliament. In the 1970s, an expatriate (Keesing, 1973, 24) wrote an article lamenting the foreign education received by Solomon Islands' nationals, for it "imbued them with western values, western conceptions of progress and change, (and) western aspirations for themselves and their country" (Keesing, 1973, 24). Whilst this may cause problems according to the discussion above, Keniloria (1976, 8) pointed out that Islanders "may have to choose between the living values and

culture of the universally changing world, and the historical value of an irretrievable past”.

An obvious instrument to help educators address the rearticulation called for by McCarthy et al. (2003, 8) is the curriculum. It would thus be very informative to discover Solomon Islands curriculum stakeholders’ perceptions about how effectively the secondary curriculum is transmitting indigenous culture, whether they feel it should transmit culture, whether it is appropriate to adopt curriculum ideas developed overseas through the involvement of expatriates in curriculum development, and what needs to change in order to make the curriculum more relevant to 21st century Solomon Islands’ culture.

b) Holistic curricula

In general terms, literature suggests some important criteria that can and should guide curriculum developers in their choice of subjects and the emphases placed on them.

(i) The content of curricula in general

It has become something of a cliché to say that education must be concerned with the whole student (Best, 1996, 15), but it is nevertheless true. This means that curricula must include subjects which can offer learning experiences that will help attain the full flowering of human potential (Nanzhao, 1996, 245) through developing students’ cognitive, moral, spiritual, physical, aesthetic and affective faculties (White, 1903, 13; Best, 1996, 15 & 16; UNESCO, 2000, 8). Brady and Kennedy (1999, 8) prefer to talk about cultural, personal, vocational, social and

economic curriculum orientations, but the message is essentially the same. Thus by being holistic in their content, curricula may enrich individuality by ensuring personal fulfilment, effective social participation, enhancement of human powers and the maintenance of a high quality of life (Skilbeck, 1994, 95). Solomon Islands' literature is in agreement with these precepts (Bugotu et al., 1975, 4.04; Rodi et al., 2001, 12; MEHRD, 2004, 18) and plans that its revised curriculum will contribute to the holistic development of young Solomon Islanders (Rodi, 2004, 16).

While the development of the individual is of great importance, Brady and Kennedy (1999, 7) and UNESCO (2000, 14) argue strongly that the development of communities is also of paramount importance, and that the curriculum can and should contribute much to the creation of communities that are socially cohesive, politically and culturally sophisticated, tolerant and just. The Swedes are certainly highly committed to providing superior schooling in order to produce educated citizens who can form the cornerstone of their democratic society (Erickson 2000, 1). Rodi (2004, 6 & 10) believes that the curriculum should equip Solomon Islands' students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to become responsible citizens and so live in harmony with others and the environment. In that the crime statistics of many developed nations support the assertion that economic development, and consequent economic security tend to weaken the tendency of people to defer to authority (Inglehart, 1996, 654), then citizenship education becomes extremely important.

While these general guidelines are useful, the way that curriculum developers interpret them, and the subjects and learning experiences they judge to be basic and essential for all students within their society (Skilbeck, 1994, 98) depend on

their personal and cultural background (Brady and Kennedy, 1999, 3; Lovat & Smith, 1995, 2).

(ii) The academic versus the practical

Williams (2000, 1) asserts that an obvious tenet of education in America is the mastery of basic academic skills and ultimately the acquisition of wealth. As “many people in Solomon Islands ... have come to believe that academic education is the most valuable ... because paid employment in towns has usually offered material rewards” (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, 11), and as the four core subjects of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum (English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies) are all academic, then presumably, Solomon Islanders would agree with this tenet. However, Grubb (1996, 1) and Brown (2003, 3) point out that, in America at least, claims that schooling ought to better prepare workers for the 21st century by teaching skills necessary for industry and commerce have become increasingly strident. So much so, that Lewis (1998, 1) and Lee (1997, 1 & 2) report that a paradigm shift has taken place in vocational education, which consists of integrating academic and vocational subjects in order to give students the multi-faceted education they need to prepare them for modern careers. In a similar move, the United Kingdom government began an ambitious new drive in 2001 to bring vocational education into the educational mainstream with the intention of enabling young people to develop craft and technical skills which will allow them to work in engineering, computer technology and traditional craft skills such as plumbing, and so enable them to succeed in what they are good at (United Kingdom Government, 2001, 1). In this same press release, David Blunkett (the

Home Secretary at that time) is quoted as saying that “the neglect of vocational and technical education has been a British disease”.

It could be that the Solomon Islands, with its abandonment of the more practical curriculum for Provincial Secondary Schools, suffers from this same disease. This is evidenced by the fact that “the basic aim of these (National Secondary Schools) is to give an academic education to students who will (then) go on to further education or training, or take up skilled paid employment” (Curriculum Hand Book. 1987, 17), and that both Provincial Secondary and Community High Schools now share this aim. Higher levels of education are generally linked with higher levels of employment (Cornford, 1999, 2). However, in the Solomon Islands at present, there is very high unemployment of academically educated secondary school leavers, yet a dearth of trades people. It will be instructive to discover whether curriculum stakeholders perceive that the academic curriculum has had a role in creating this problem and therefore is not supplying some societal needs.

(iii) Creativity

On a similar note, UNESCO (2000,14) regards “learning to do” – that is, learning to act creatively – as the second of its four pillars of education needed to support society in the 21st century. Also, Brown (2003, 2) talks about edifying young people through fostering imagination and creativity, and a prime tool for doing this may be an arts education that includes art and music.

Jensen (1998, 87) believes that a strong arts curriculum is at the creative core of academic excellence and lays the foundations for positive, measurable and lasting

academic and social benefits through building creativity, concentration, problem solving abilities and self-discipline. Interestingly, in China, it is now creative students who are labelled as “good students” rather than students who gain high scores through the traditional rote learning (Broad-based education elevates the mind, 2002, 4). More specifically, the need to shape meaning and construct knowledge is central to development, particularly in adolescence, and visual artistry is a unique way to represent understanding (Graham, 2003, 2). Additionally, by learning and practising art, the human brain actually rewires itself to make more and stronger connections (Jensen, 1998, 38). Music, on the other hand, is a tool for arousal. It primes the brain’s neural pathways, enhances a wide range of academic and social skills – particularly for children who do not excel in the expression of verbal thinking – and may be critical for later cognitive activities (Jensen, 1998, 37 & 38).

However, adolescent artistic developmental potential is often underestimated, ignored, or dismissed as irrelevant, resulting in an impoverished educational experience (Graham, 2003, 1 & 2). Such may be the case in the Solomon Islands with no Music in the curriculum, Creative Arts in the curriculum (see Figure 1.7) but not being taught (Davy, 2000, 10), and a low emphasis on other creative practical subjects such as Home Economics and Industrial Arts. Again, it will be instructive to discover whether Solomon Islands’ curriculum stakeholders perceive the apparent neglect of this pillar of education as a problem that needs amending.

(iv) Physical education and personal development

Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, which Armstrong (2002, 2) defines as expertise in using the whole body, is an intelligence that may be developed through physical education. The goals of physical education have traditionally focussed on motor skills development and physical fitness – that is, co-ordination, balance, dexterity, strength, flexibility, speed and so on (Armstrong, 2000, 2; Hollander, Wood & Hebert, 2003, 1). However, it is now generally agreed that physical education enhances health and reduces health risks (Lowry, Wechsler, Kann & Collins, 2001, 1), so much so, that the British government has made a concerted effort to utilise schools' physical education programs to promote active, healthy lifestyles among young people (Green & Thurston, 2002, 2).

Yet adolescence represents a critical developmental period between childhood and adulthood when participation in physical activity naturally declines dramatically and may further decrease (Lowry et al., 2001, 6; Mulvihill, Rivers & Aggleton, 2000, 2). It may be no coincidence that the percentage of US students who do not take daily physical education classes is very similar to the percentage who are overweight (O'Connor, 2004, 2). This is despite the fact that the quantity of time students should spend doing physical activity is recommended to be 30-60 minutes per day in the US and the UK (Jensen, 1998, 87; Mulvihill et al., 2000, 2).

Physical education programs can also gain other benefits for students. Jensen (1998, 85) states that exercise also strengthens key areas of the brain (including the memory), while physical education can be taught in ways that enhance such personal and social skills as communication, decision-making, critical thinking and stress management (Hollander et al., 2003, 2 & 3). Thus physical education

shapes individuals mentally and emotionally as well as physically (Issues: Should physical education be required at the High school level, 1994, 8). In recent years physical education has expanded in scope even further. It is now considered that physical education can and should play a vital role in the prevention and intervention of alcohol and drug abuse (Hollander et al., 2002, 4), and it may also be used as a conduit of information on primary health care and nutrition, which the United Nations (2001, 2) recommends be taught in schools.

Therefore, physical education, and its expanded modern equivalent PDHPE (Personal Development Health and Physical Education) can achieve much. However, it is likely to achieve more if there is quality instruction (Lowry et al, 2001, 6) if activities are interesting (Chen, 1996, 2) and it has status, such as in the UK where Sports Studies is central to the curriculum rather than being an extra curricular activity (Issues: Should physical education be required at the High school level, 1994, 3).

Not requiring physical education of high school students sends a negative message that it is not essential for a good lifestyle (Issues: Should physical education be required at the High school level, 1994, 1). Yet in many Solomon Islands' secondary schools physical education is on the curriculum in name only. So stakeholders' perceptions of this subject may help to explain its neglect and suggest what could be done to improve its status if it is to play a part in improving the health of the young people of the nation.

(v) *Values and Morality*

Much literature is adamant that moral development is essential. Zern (1997, 1) states that the importance of proper moral development to the individual and their society is a straightforward idea that is hard to challenge, and Downs Perry (1994, 97) argues forcefully that if people are to function in a society, they must develop into moral beings capable of moral reasoning and behaviour. Furthermore, Sommers (1998, 4) claims that all healthy societies pass on their moral traditions and questions what a society will end up with if it does not have a population educated to be civil, considerate and respectful of each other. As morality is to a large extent a matter of values (Downs Perry, 1994, 96), and as UNESCO (2000, 14) makes “learning to live together” the third of its four pillars of education for the 21st century, then values education and moral development are both essential.

Although there are other sources of values education and moral development, much literature (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 13; Nanzhao, 1996, 244; Sommers, 1998, 2; Williams, 2000, 1; Brown, 2003, 3) argues that the curriculum is a particularly important source. To begin with, curriculum cannot be separated from values. Hill (1995, 32) and Gillard (1998, 86) both argue that values inevitably saturate the curriculum process, and by what they include and exclude, all curricula express value judgements. Sizer and Sizer (1999, 187) claim that curriculum content, if carefully considered, can provide the perspective that is ultimately at the heart of true moral decisions. Edwards, (2000, 1) goes even further by arguing that the moral development of children and their successful entry into a democratic society depend to a large extent on how successful schools are in promoting the development of responsible community membership. Holkeri, (United Nations, 2001, 2), General Assembly President of the United Nations, certainly believes that

a major responsibility of governments is to design school curricula that support the development of children in respecting the integrity of others.

Solomon Islands' literature agrees with all these concepts. Treadaway (2003, 8) considers it very important for education to emphasise the many good values – such as sharing and respect – that form the basis of traditional Solomon Islands' society. Additionally, Rodi et al. (2001, 13) and the MEHRD (2004, 18) see the ability of children to recognise, and hopefully adhere to, religious and cultural values, beliefs and norms of conduct in Solomon Islands' society, as a principle of basic education. Furthermore, Bugotu et al., (1973, 4.02) believe that there can be no holistic development of students in schools without values education.

Very closely associated with moral and values education is spirituality, which is now increasingly figuring in discussions of curricula reform and is included in definitions of holistic education used in Solomon Islands (Treadaway, 2003, 8; MEHRD. 2004, 7). Spirituality may be considered to be at the heart of one's being, and is to do with the search for meaning in life and values by which to live (Brussat & Brussat, 1996, 28; Gillard, 1998, 87), and though usually associated with religion, it can and does exist outside of organised religion (Engebretson, 2003, 1). In a thought-provoking book entitled "The Soul of Education", Kessler (2000, xiii & x) describes a growing awareness in America among parents and educators that a spiritual void is endangering their youth and communities and argues that, just as children's bodies and minds need nourishment, so does their soul, and that a "soulful education" can satisfy the hunger of today's youth. UNESCO (2000, 14) certainly agrees by making "learning to be" the fourth of its four pillars of education for the 21st century, which is something it suggests has hitherto been left to chance.

In view of all these assertions of the necessity of developing values, morality and spirituality, and of the role of curriculum in developing them, it is very relevant in view of recent social problems, to research whether the present secondary curriculum of the Solomon Islands attempts to develop these things, and whether it is doing so effectively. One source (though not the only one) of moral, values and spiritual education, is the Bible. Whilst it is a compulsory subject throughout the 5-year curriculum in Christian schools, in other schools it only occurs as the elective New Testament Studies in Forms 4 and 5, and it would be informative to find out whether it is taught in ways that encourage the development of values, morality and spirituality, or whether it is just taught as stories or theories.

Solomon Islands' researchers see "religious education as part of the Solomon Islands culture", and maintain that "Solomon Islanders want the Solomons to remain a Christian country" (Bugotu et al., 1973, 6.06). Thus "in a country where Christianity is so important, one of the aims of Solomon Islands' education must be to emphasise Christian values" (Treadaway, 2003, 8). This should avoid leaving students "swimming in the sea of moral instability that is the modern world" (Walsh, 1997,12). Indeed, one aim of the curriculum revision currently taking place in the Solomon Islands is to help students develop positive values (Rodi, 2004, 9).

To summarise, morality, spirituality and values are aspects of holistic education and thus should be an important part of any curriculum (Treadaway, 2003, 8).

(vi) Knowledge versus skills

In the Solomon Islands knowledge is often equated with power, and knowledge is seen as including language, literature (and oral tradition), culture, history, modern technology, science and the arts (Rodi et al., 2001, 13 & 12). However, UNESCO (2000, 14) now argues that traditional knowledge-based education is no longer appropriate and that students must be equipped with skills that will allow them to adapt to an ever-changing and complex world. This shifts the emphasis from amassing a large body of knowledge to “learning to know”, the first of UNESCO's (2000, 14) pillars of education for the 21st century. Curriculum reformers in the Solomon Islands agree with this change of emphasis and recommend developing a curriculum with syllabi that move away from mere amassing of knowledge towards developing people who can understand subjects, apply their knowledge to everyday life, make sense of life and cope with the rapidly changing conditions in the Solomon Islands (Bugotu et al., 1973, 6.32; Rodi et al, 2001, 13; MEHRD, 2004, 14).

Solomon Islands' curriculum reformers also state that basic education should provide students with the basic skills and competencies required for economic activity and development (MEHRD, 2004, 18) and that education must emphasise moulding students to develop such skills as thinking creatively and making informed decisions (Rodi et al., 2001, 13). Glaser (1998, 12), in asserting that increasingly, society will require the ability to think and reason, agrees with this. Other research concurs with these sentiments, but also broadens the issue. Quoting Australia and the United Kingdom in particular, Tien, Ven and Chou (2003, 1-7) describe how the promotion of key competencies has become an integral part of some secondary curricula. This dovetails with the call from American businesses to “work smarter”

(Elias et al., 1997, 7), with skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and good writing and reading comprehension being seen as vital to success in the workplace (Minehan, 1996, 1). Thus key competencies cited by literature include problem solving, decision-making, communicating and negotiating (Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 4; Gray 1998, 3; Tien et al., 2003, 2), the last two being particularly important skills for developing teenagers according to Gray (1998, 2), because they help teenagers move towards independence in both judgement and action. Thus these skills are not only considered important in the developed countries named above, but also in some less well developed nations. In China, training programs are drawing crowds of office workers who wish to upgrade their competency skills (Broad-based education elevates the mind, 2002, 2). Also, in Sri Lanka, education's narrow focus on learning facts and lack of orientation toward problem-solving and transferability skills is being criticised (Samath, 2002, 2), while in Hong Kong and Taiwan, key competencies have been specifically included in recent curriculum reforms (Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 4; Tien et al., 2003, 1-7).

Thus another very relevant question to research is whether the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum concentrates on just knowledge, or whether it endeavours to teach such skills as those listed above, and if not, whether stakeholders think it should.

3. Accessibility

Much of the literature commented on thus far would support the notion that access to education is pivotal to life's chances and self-fulfilment (Musuota, 1994, 4) and therefore is a societal need. Brown (2003, 2) argues that to enable a society to

progress, education must be widely available. The United Nations is so convinced of this that its 55th General Assembly resolved to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, and its President Harri Holkeri strongly believes that “when the right to education becomes the norm, the whole world gains” (United Nations, 2001, 2). However, the United Nations (2001, 2) also recognises that we are still far from equal treatment of children all over the world, with more than 110 million children, most of them in the developing world (which includes the Solomon Islands), still denied their “basic right” – the right to education. Yet even within the developing world, there are countries where education is a priority, such as Malaysia who aims to provide a world-class quality education system by making education the largest item on its federal budget (EIU ViewsWire, 2003, 1).

However, the importation of western-centred academic curricula has led in some less developed countries to struggles for educational advantage and some striking class inequalities (Connell, 1991, 9) – such as an educated urban elite and uneducated village people. Samath (2002, 3) stresses how education in Sri Lanka does not serve rural students well enough. A similar situation exists in the Solomon Islands where secondary schools especially, are not located evenly among centres of population (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, 27) though this imbalance is slowly being amended. Wasuka (1989, 99) certainly believes that when access to the fullness of the education system is not available equally to everyone, then despite the innumerable benefits, schooling also works to increase social divisions. However, Brown (2003, 2) also argues that expanding access to education automatically tends to lower barriers between classes, a very important

consideration for a society such as the Solomon Islands that traditionally had no classes.

When it ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child more than a decade ago, the world recognised not just the right of every child to education, but also that education must be free and compulsory (UNICEF, 2000, 1). Great progress has been made in this direction. The United Nations (through its Dakar Framework of Action, Education for All, of April 2000, cited in United Nations, 2001, 2) and the European Union, (with its charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union), both strongly support this ideal (United Nations, 2001, 2; Rothstein, 2003, 1). Some less developed countries are also committed to free compulsory education, such as Sri Lanka, where 50 years of free education has yielded a 91% literacy rate (Samath, 2002, 2). UNICEF (2000, 1) has an additional reason for wishing to abolish school fees in that it wishes to place education at the top of the world's HIV/AIDS fighting agenda. To this end, the Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy, (UNICEF, 2000, 1) called upon African governments in particular to reallocate budgets to strengthen the education sector, and on the international community in general, to relieve the debts that siphon resources from schools. Agreement with this high ideal may be irrelevant if a bankrupt economy necessitates substantial contributions from parents to help pay for the cost of secondary education. This is the case in the Solomon Islands, where education is likely to remain both fee-paying and non-compulsory for the foreseeable future.

Poverty is an important issue where education is not free, as in developing world countries such as the Solomon Islands. "Children whose families cannot pay for tuition are kept out of classrooms" (Bellamy, cited in UNICEF, 2000, 1). Friel (2003,

2) also notes that poor families often choose to educate sons first and that it is usually girls who drop out for economic and social reasons. There is also general acceptance of the fact that education is the best way to empower the poor (Business Line, 2000, 1), and Friel (2003, 1) describes how the United States aims to close the achievement gap between wealthy white children and poor minority children through the “No Child Left Behind” Act.

Another accessibility issue is gender. Friel (2003, 2) describes how, globally, girls are more likely than boys to miss school. The United Nations (2001, 2) also recognises this inequality, stating that two thirds of the 110 million children in the world not receiving education are girls (some of whom are in the Solomon Islands) and seeks to amend this inequality by 2015. Both Friel (2003, 2) and the United Nations (2001, 2) consider educating girls extremely important because the girls will then be more likely to ensure their own children are educated, and when women and girls – future mothers – are educated, whole nations are educated. The United Nations (2001, 2) also sees the education of girls as an essential part of their overall effort to eliminate discrimination from this world.

Another cause of some children getting educationally left behind recognised by Haycock (1998) is unequal access to well-qualified teachers. The United Nations (2001, 2 & 3) describes how the quality of education is too often threatened by untrained and overworked teachers having to cope with overcrowded, unhealthy and poorly equipped classrooms. The Solomon Islands MEHRD (2004, 21 & 13) recognises several problems in this area. Woman teachers are more likely to be untrained and are significantly under-represented as primary and secondary teachers (reflecting historical inequalities in education), untrained teachers account

for 16% of Community High School staff, and trained teachers are not equitably spread between provinces. It will be informative to ascertain secondary curriculum stakeholders' perceptions of children's variable access to trained teachers curriculum resources.

A final accessibility issue is that Glaser (1998, 9) argues that low-achieving students may get an education that curtails their opportunities. Petrus (1997, 1) and Dunaven (1997, 1) agree that 20% of all school children fall into a grey area between average intelligence and mental retardation, and that neither traditional teaching methods nor special education may be effective with these slow learners. Traditional teaching methods are all that is available in the Solomon Islands.

All the preceding highlighted aspects of accessibility are issues in the Solomon Islands. The need to respond to the lack of curriculum materials, insufficient trained teachers, and the needs of students with learning difficulties, disabilities and students who are gifted, has been recognised (Rodi et al., 2001, 11; MEHRD, 2004, 12) and it is now the stated intention to make education available to all young Solomon Islanders, regardless of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background (Rodi et al., 2001, 12; MEHRD, 2004, 7).

Thus accessibility is not just a matter of sufficient school places, and it is well worth researching from several points of view if the Solomon Islands, a traditionally very egalitarian society, wishes to be just in its provision of secondary education.

4. Summary

Curricula may be constructed at various levels, such as national level, at some kind of local authority level (such as state or province) or at school level. With such a small education system, the Solomon Islands has just one national secondary curriculum, and in the light of the various advantages and disadvantages of each level described by literature, it will be informative to discover from stakeholders if they think one national curriculum is the most appropriate option.

A curriculum is inevitably affected by the identity and backgrounds of the people who write it. Thus literature recommends that groups of people with a vested interest in the curriculum (the stakeholders) should co-operate together to construct a curriculum. Stakeholder groups include the government, teachers, students, parents, business people and others such as medical and social workers and tertiary educators. In the Solomon Islands, the government and teachers have tended to be the only stakeholder groups involved, but the government is now recognising that it would be wise to involve others, and research among stakeholders groups can help determine who these should be.

As contexts change over time, it is important to assess whether curricula retain their relevance. Literature contends that transmitting culture is an important job of the curriculum, though developers must be careful to ensure that what is transmitted is appropriate to the local culture in its modern context. It is also essential for individual students and for their society that the curriculum attend to the whole student by being holistic; that is, it should try to develop students' cognitive, moral, spiritual, physical, aesthetic and affective faculties. To attain a holistic curriculum, it

is particularly important to balance the academic with the practical, to develop students' creativity, and to improve students' physical fitness, health and cognitive and social skills through physical education. As the curriculum cannot be separated from values, it is also essential for the curriculum to incorporate values education and its close associate spiritual development, both of which have been neglected in the past. Additionally, it is important to realise that traditional knowledge-based education must now be blended with the development of competency skills if students are to meet the demands of modern society. Thus it will be informative to discover whether the Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum attempts all these things, and if it does, whether it is doing so effectively.

Access to education is pivotal to life's chances and self fulfilment, and as limited access to it may create social inequalities, it is important to both identify and attend to accessibility issues. As well as the number of student places, accessibility issues include the lack of free education, poverty, gender, recognition of the needs of slow learners, and access to well-trained teachers and resources. If the Solomon Islands is to be just in its provision of secondary education, it is important to identify accessibility issues and ascertain whether they are being attended to.

Thus the literature review raises many valuable points regarding the level at which curricula may be constructed, who should be involved in curriculum construction, what principles should guide curriculum content, and what issues may limit accessibility. Research into these aspects of the Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum may assist in making it more relevant to societal needs.

CHAPTER THREE

THE QUESTIONNAIRE – METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This research set out to collect and analyse opinions and perceptions about the secondary curriculum of the Solomon Islands, the target population being the stakeholders (education administrators, teachers, parents and members of the business community) who are connected with the development and implementation of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum.

1. Research Design

This type of research requires qualitative methods. However, qualitative researchers must be aware that their own bias and subjectivity can reduce data validity, and must make every effort to meet this challenge and maintain the integrity of their research (Minichiello et al., 1996, 180; Gay & Airasian, 2000, 224 & 225). One way of doing this is to combine different research methods. Thus the researcher used a questionnaire (a quantitative method) to initiate data collection, then as suggested by Minichiello et al. (1996, 188), used material drawn from it to suggest the substance of interview questions (qualitative research). Also, the questionnaire data will improve the validity of the interview findings, while at the same time the interview findings will help interpret the questionnaire findings (Gay & Airasian, 220).

2. Methodology

a) The instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 80 questions (see Appendices A and B). The first four questions were designed to gather basic demographic information, which could then be used to compare the opinions of sub-groups. The demographic questions asked to teachers and students were, of necessity, a little different. However the rest of the questions were exactly the same and were designed to collect opinions using a Likert scale. Five free response questions were also included. Additionally, the questions were set out in groups to correspond to the research questions as shown in Figure 3.1 and Appendix C. The substance of the questions was guided by the literature review and by the researcher's knowledge of the local context gained from 15 years of involvement with the Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum, principally as a teacher, but also as a participant in minor Social Studies syllabus reviews and in the setting and marking of the Form 5 Social Studies Solomon Islands School Certificate examination. Each questionnaire included a statement informing participants that return of their questionnaire indicated consent to participate.

The questionnaire is cross-sectional (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 279), involving the collection of data from selected individuals. It is recognised that one limitation of this method is that the data gathered represent the participants' opinions held at that specific moment in time and that perceptions may change over time.

Figure 3.1

The research questions and the questionnaire

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Questionnaire Questions</i>	<i>Literature</i>
1. Should there be one National Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum (as at present), or should provinces and/or schools be given the opportunity to construct their own curricula?	5 – 8	Bugotu et al. (1973), Skilbeck (1994), Brady (1995), Glaser (1998), Brown (2003).
2. Should the range of people involved in curriculum construction be educators only, or should the group be expanded to include other stakeholders?	9 – 18	Skilbeck (1994), Brady (1995), Lovat & Smith (1995), Dodd (1998), Posner (1998), Brady & Kennedy (1999), United Nations (2001), MEHRD (2004), Rodi (2004).
3. Is the current Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of: a) The range of subjects taught in the curriculum? b) The content of various subjects? c) The emphasis placed on different subjects? d) The emphasis placed on knowledge and values? e) The emphasis placed on communication, problem solving, negotiating and decision-making skills?	19 – 24 25 – 48 49 – 58 59 – 62 63 – 69	Bugotu (1973), Curriculum Handbook (1987), Downs Perry (1994), Skilbeck (1994), Lovat & Smith (1995), Nanzhao (1996), Dimmock & Walker (1998), Gillard (1998), Jensen (1998), Sommers (1998), Armstrong (2000), Kessler (2000), UNESCO (2000), Rodi et al. (2001), UK Gov. (2001), Lowry et al. (2002), Mulvihill et al. (2002), Graham (2003), Tien et al. (2003), Treadaway (2003), Rodi (2004).
4. Do all children of secondary school age have equal access to secondary schooling?	70 – 80	Wasuka (1989), Glaser (1998), Haycock (1998), UNICEF (2000), Rodi et al., (2001), United Nations (2001), Brown (2003), MEHRD, (2004).

b) The sample

(i) The selection of participants

Subjects were selected for the questionnaire using clustered sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 129) and came from four secondary schools. In each school there were two mixed gender groups. These consisted of teachers, with varying ages, qualifications and years of teaching experience within the Solomon Islands' secondary school system; and Form 6 students, who represented Arts and Science interests, and who had recently completed the Solomon Islands' 5-year secondary curriculum and have now embarked on a Fiji-based regional certificate.

Cluster sampling was chosen because, nation-wide, the numbers of secondary school teachers and Form 6 students are quite large, and the seventeen schools currently offering Form 6 tuition (this figure has more than doubled in the last 5 years) are spread over a wide geographical area, and are difficult to access. As Gay and Airasian (2000, 130) state that a single cluster may not provide a representative sample of the population from which it has been selected, four clusters were selected to give results that may be more generalisable. One limiting factor is that the four clusters, for reasons of accessibility, had to be selected from the secondary schools in or immediately around Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands on the island of Guadalcanal. However, this does not mean that the opinions collected were confined to one urban geographical location and that rural and provincial perceptions were un-represented. All four schools selected employed teachers from a range of provinces and backgrounds. Similarly, all four schools – day and boarding alike – also had Form 6 students from most or all of the nine provinces (one school had students from seven provinces, one from eight

provinces, and two from nine provinces) and represented both rural and urban backgrounds.

Reliability and generalisability of data is further enhanced by the selected schools representing private, government, secular and Christian interests. One limitation, however, is the fact that no Community High Schools or Provincial Secondary Schools were involved in the questionnaire. This was because few rural Provincial Secondary Schools offer Form 6, and the ones that do are difficult to access, while the only Community High School in Honiara offering Form 6 (one of only three out of 90+ Community High Schools nationwide to do so) is atypical, and would have over-represented the Christian interest.

In summary, questionnaire participants were selected to cover as wide a range of interests as possible within the geographical constraints.

(ii) The number of participants

The researcher aimed to collect from each school 15 – 20 questionnaires from teachers and 25 – 35 questionnaires from students.

The number of teacher questionnaires collected from each school fell between the 15 – 20 range, with the total of returned questionnaires being 69. However, the number of student questionnaires collected considerably exceeded the target in three out of four schools because of their large classes. In the only school with small classes, 34 questionnaires were collected, and this represented the entire Form 6 Arts and Science student population. However, in the three other schools,

single class sizes varied between 30 and 55. Thus, in order to achieve some sort of balance, the researcher opted to give the questionnaires to entire classes up to a maximum number of 30 students. In this way, 196 student questionnaires were collected instead of the anticipated maximum number of 140. Even though the numbers increased, the researcher still kept a balance between genders and between Arts and Science interests.

c) Data collection procedures

The first procedure was to pre-test the questionnaire (in accordance with suggestions by Gay & Airasian, 2000, 287) with four individuals – two teachers and two students from populations similar to the ones that would be completing the questionnaire – to provide information about deficiencies and to give suggestions for improvement. Comments were positive and none of the pre-testers suggested any alterations be made to enhance clarity.

The school principals were then approached for permission to run the questionnaires in their schools. They were also given research information statements, a copy of the questionnaire with further verbal clarification, and consent forms to sign giving permission to run the questionnaire in their school. With many parents (some of whom are uneducated) scattered around the nation, and with difficulties with the postal service, the researcher did not attempt to gain parental consent for each student to do the questionnaire. Instead, each principal was asked to give consent on behalf of the parents for his school's students to participate. Following consultation with their staff, each principal gave permission, and mutually convenient dates during May 2004 were set to run the questionnaire.

It was the intention that groups of teachers and students be invited to fill in the questionnaires in situ, with the researcher present for any clarification. (This is an important consideration in a country where English, the official language of education, is only people's third or fourth language.) However, circumstances dictated that the procedures for the teacher questionnaires were a little different.

In one school, the questionnaires were completed by teachers in situ with the researcher present, but in the three other schools teachers completed their questionnaires in private rather than at a set time and place. This was because in two schools, members of the administration preferred to co-ordinate the teachers' questionnaire and liaised with the researcher for a mutually convenient collection time, while the researcher both distributed and collected the questionnaire in her own school. Return/involvement rates varied between 47% and 81%. Each teacher was provided with a form to sign that consented to completing the questionnaire.

In all schools the completion of the students' questionnaire was supervised by the researcher in rooms set aside for the process. After a short explanation of why they were being asked to complete questionnaires and an exhortation to avoid discussing questions with other participants during the procedure (this was done to enhance the authenticity of data and increase reliability), the students were given time to complete the questionnaires. The researcher was only once asked for any clarification. This could mean that students had no problems with understanding the questions. However, given the existence of some omitted questions and one

demographic question that was often inaccurately answered, it is more likely that some students chose, for whatever reason, not to ask for clarification. This may reduce the reliability of data, but the large numbers of questionnaires should reduce the significance of unreliable answers.

d) Ethical considerations

In general terms, the Solomon Islands has undergone great social trauma in recent years (MEHRD, 2004, 5). This greatly affected the delivery and assessment of the secondary curriculum, and some schools were worse affected than others.

Consequently, any questions linked to the delivery and assessment of the curriculum that may have led to criticism of individual schools and teachers were avoided. Confidentiality is another ethical consideration. This was assured by the questionnaire not asking for names, and by it being completed in either large groups (four groups of students and the teachers of one school), or by individuals (the rest of the teachers) who took the questionnaire away, completed it in privacy, and returned it in an anonymous manner.

e) Data analysis

The questionnaire data has been analysed by the use of simple descriptive statistics.

3. Questionnaire results

The questionnaire yielded a great deal of data, which was tallied and then converted to percentages to allow for comparisons, and the discussion of the results follows the format of the questionnaire (see Appendices A and B) that divides the questions into groups.

However, while tallying, the research noticed that a few individual teachers had circled “Uncertain” a surprisingly large number of times for curriculum practitioners. To ascertain what this might be attributable to, a small sample, shown in Figure 3.2, was extracted from the questionnaires to compare uncertainty between schools, genders, ages, years of experience, and the type of qualification.

Figure 3.2 Questionnaire uncertainties

School	Number	Demographic data				Number of uncertainties				
		Gender	*Qual.	Yrs of teaching	Age Group	Section B	Section C	Section D	Section E	TOTAL
A	1	M	Cert.	25	41-50	0	0	1	0	1
	2	M	Bach.	1	41-50	0	0	8	0	8
	3	M	PG.	11	31-40	0	2	7	0	9
	4	F	Dip.	25	41-50	0	5	5	0	10
	5	F	Bach.	1	41-50	2	4	2	4	12
B	6	M	Dip.	1	31-40	0	0	16	6	23
	7	M	Dip.	20	41-50	0	2	0	0	2
	8	M	Bach.	1	21-30	0	1	4	1	6
	9	F	Dip.	22	50+	0	3	1	0	4
	10	F	Bach.	1	21-30	0	0	5	2	7
C	11	M	Dip.	18	41-50	0	0	0	0	0
	12	M	Bach.	2	21-30	0	0	0	0	0
	13	F	Bach.	3	21-30	2	4	3	1	10
	14	F	PG.	1	31-40	1	4	4	0	9
D	15	M	Dip.	3	21-30	0	3	0	0	3
	16	M	PG.	16	41-50	2	0	0	0	2
	17	F	Dip.	3	21-30	0	2	0	0	2
	18	F	Dip.	18	41-50	1	2	10	0	13

*Qualifications: Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor, Post-graduate.

The two most “Uncertain” teachers (numbers 6 and 18) both had Diplomas, while their ages, genders and teaching experience were different. This might suggest that a lower qualification is a cause of uncertainty. However, other teachers with only Diplomas in common (such as numbers 7 and 17) showed a high degree of

certainty, far more certainty than did some teachers with post-graduate degrees (such as numbers 3 and 14) and a teacher with only a Certificate (number 1). Also, some young and inexperienced teachers (such as number 12) were more sure of themselves than some older and more experienced teachers (such as teacher number 4). However, only two out of eight females in Figure 3.2 have low totals, compared to six out of ten for males, thus gender may have some bearing. Also, the uncertainties of three older teachers who have only one year of teaching experience (numbers 2, 5 and 6) may be the result of a gap of many years between their leaving school and becoming qualified to teach. More detailed analysis also showed that the teachers of school B were far more uncertain about curriculum issues than the teachers of other schools, and this was the youngest, least experienced and least qualified group. Thus while uncertainty may be linked to personality, it also appears to be linked to demographic characteristics.

A very small number of questions were omitted. However, these may be considered insignificant for the analysis because the sample is large, and because the omissions did not conform to any pattern, either in terms of the question numbers, or in terms of demographic groups or subgroups.

a) Demographic data

Demographic data was gathered in the first four questions (Q. 1 – 4) of the questionnaire, and because of their different characteristics, teachers and students were asked for different demographic data.

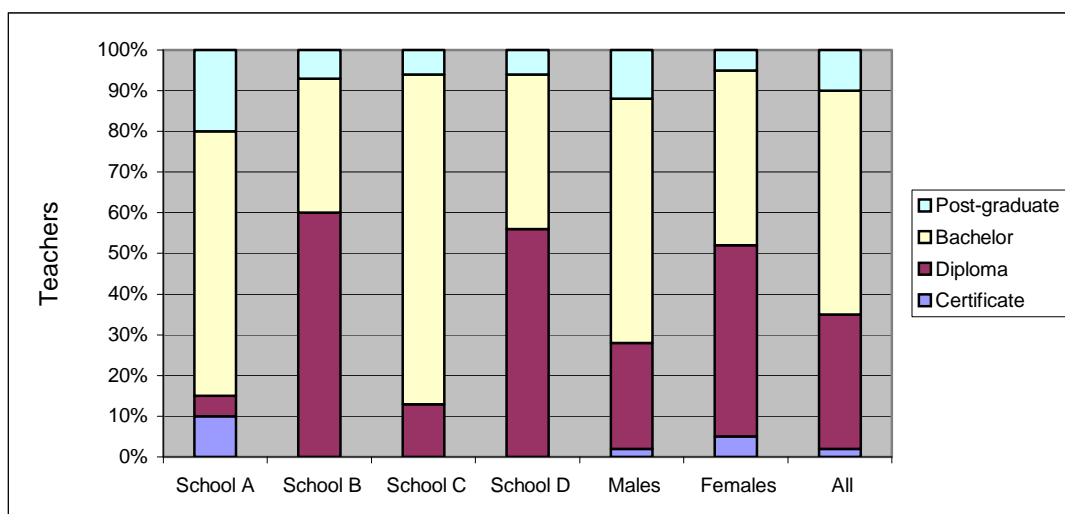
(i) Teacher demographic data

The schools in the following discussion are identified as schools, A, B, C and D, and because the number of teachers returning questionnaires was different in each school (20 in school A, 15 in school B, 16 in school C and 18 in school D) most of the data has been converted to percentages to allow for more effective comparisons. It is acknowledged that in no school is the entire teaching staff represented. However, the questionnaires do represent the majority of the teaching staff in three schools (81%, 74% and 68%, in schools D, A and B respectively). In school C, although only 47% of teachers returned the questionnaire, a much higher return rate would have skewed the results in their favour. Overall, many similarities, but also some interesting demographic differences emerge between the schools.

Question 1 – Teacher qualification

The teacher qualification data shown in Figure 3.3 shows that teachers have a range of qualifications. While a small majority (55%) have Bachelors degrees, the

Figure 3.3 Teacher Qualifications



high number of Diplomas is indicative of the fact that the local teacher training college (which has struggled to function in recent years because of the country's ethnic and economic problems), only awards Certificates and Diplomas in education, with Bachelors and post-graduate degrees having to be obtained from institutions overseas. The 2% of teachers with certificates (shown in Figures 3.3 and 3.4) are in the two oldest age groups (a male in the 41-50 age group, and a female of over 50), and this tiny percentage possibly indicates that poorly qualified teachers are being replaced (perhaps when they retire) as younger and more highly qualified teachers become available, or that some older teachers may have received further training.

It is also clear from Figure 3.3 that there are contrasts between schools and genders. Schools A and C clearly have more highly qualified teaching staff than D, and B especially. Whilst it is difficult to explain these contrasts without describing the history and status of each school (which would reveal their identities), it does highlight the existence of inequalities in teaching staff qualifications among the schools of Honiara.

Viewed from the perspective of gender, Figures 3.3 and 3.4 clearly show that males are more likely to have higher qualifications than females, that is, they have more bachelor and postgraduate degrees and fewer diplomas compared to

Figure 3.4 Teacher qualifications by school and gender (actual numbers)

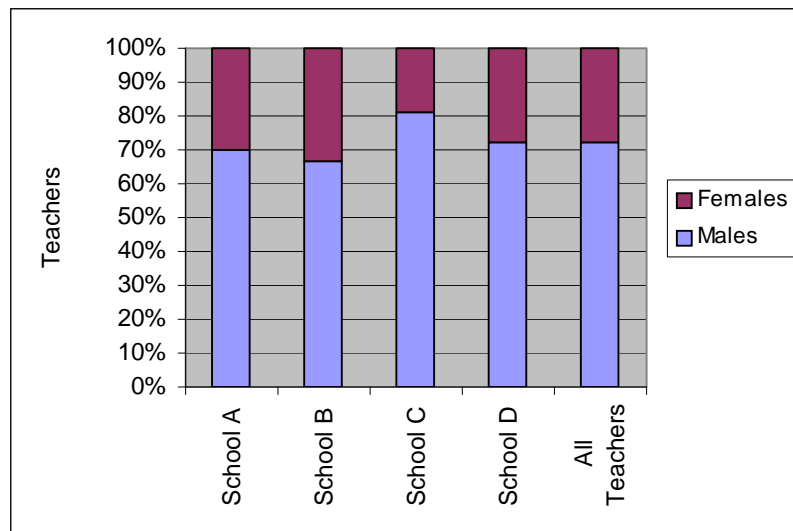
Qualifications	Schools								Totals	
	A		B		C		D		Males	Females
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Certificate	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Diploma	0	1	6	3	2	0	5	5	13	9
Bachelor	9	4	3	2	11	2	7	0	30	8
Post-graduate	4	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	6	1
<i>Sub-totals</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Totals</i>	<i>20</i>		<i>15</i>		<i>16</i>		<i>18</i>		<i>69</i>	

females. MEHRD (2004, 14) states that females are over-represented in the group of untrained teachers in primary schools and Community High Schools, and this research shows that they are also over-represented in the group of less well qualified secondary teachers.

Question 2 – Gender

Figure 3.5 shows that the teaching staff of all schools is dominated by males, with the percentage of male teachers varying between 66% (school B) and 81% (school C). While the gender balance shown for school C is less reliable because of its

Figure 3.5 *Teaching staff and gender*

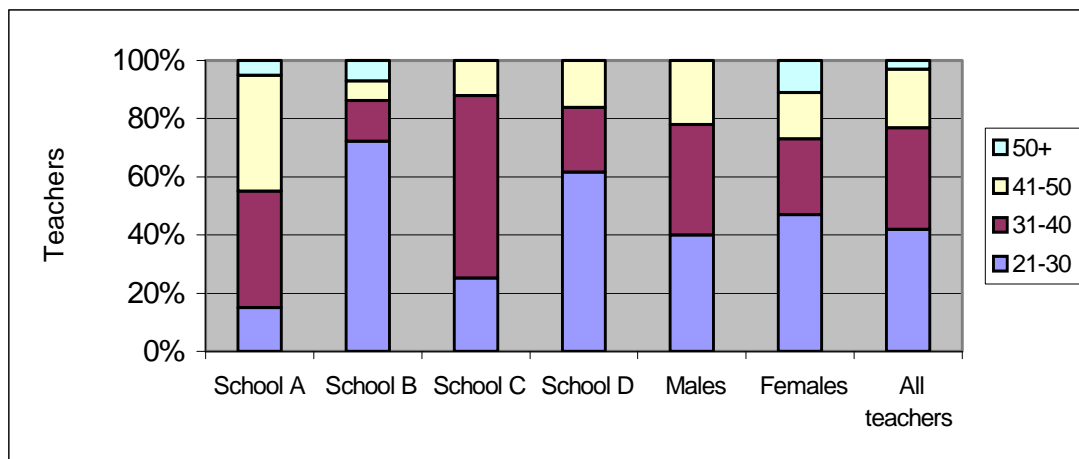


lower return rate, the average of 72% males reinforces the perception of a male-dominated secondary school teaching profession. This supports the claim by the MEHRD (2004, 13) that females are under-represented in the teaching profession, though it appears that the genders may be even more unbalanced in these four urban schools surveyed than in the mostly rural Community High Schools where the percentage of males in 2000 was 63% (MEHRD, 2004, 13). This is probably a result of the (now lessening) cultural reluctance to allow girls to be educated.

Question 3 – Age groups

An analysis of teacher age groups also reveals some interesting contrasts between schools. The “All teachers” column in Figure 3.6, suggests that the largest number

Figure 3.6 *Teacher age groups*



of teachers are in their 20's, almost as many in their 30's, with far fewer in their 40's and 50's. However, this is deceptive as the age distributions of teachers in school A and C are quite different. Figure 3.7 shows a particularly strong contrast between schools A and B, with school A having a relatively mature teaching staff, while school B's is very much younger.

Figure 3.7 *Age distribution in schools A and B (percent)*

Age groups	School A	School B
21 – 30	15	73
31 – 40	40	14
41 – 50	40	7
50+	5	6

Another feature of the age distribution is the paucity of teachers in their 50's. This may be attributable to the retirement age of 58 and fewer opportunities to be educated when they were young. Another aspect of age distribution is that most

teachers with postgraduate degrees are in their 40's, as one would expect from their greater possibilities of further study. However, whether teachers 21-30 or 31-40 have Diplomas or Bachelors seems more dependent on which schools they are teaching in rather than on their age or gender.

Question 4 – Years on teaching the secondary curriculum

Figure 3.8 shows that schools A and C, with their older teaching staff, have more years of teaching experience and with the exception of school A, on average, the females are more experienced than the males.

Figure 3.8 Years of teaching the secondary curriculum

	<i>School A</i>	<i>School B</i>	<i>School C</i>	<i>School D</i>	<i>All teachers</i>
Male average	10.6	4.5	7.4	5.5	7.3
Female average	9.0	8.0	10.0	7.8	8.7
<i>Average</i>	<i>10.2</i>	<i>6.0</i>	<i>8.0</i>	<i>6.1</i>	<i>7.8</i>

(ii) Student demographic data

A total of 196 students completed the questionnaire – 48 students in school A, 60 in B, 54 in C and 34 in D. For comparison purposes, all student data has been converted to percentages.

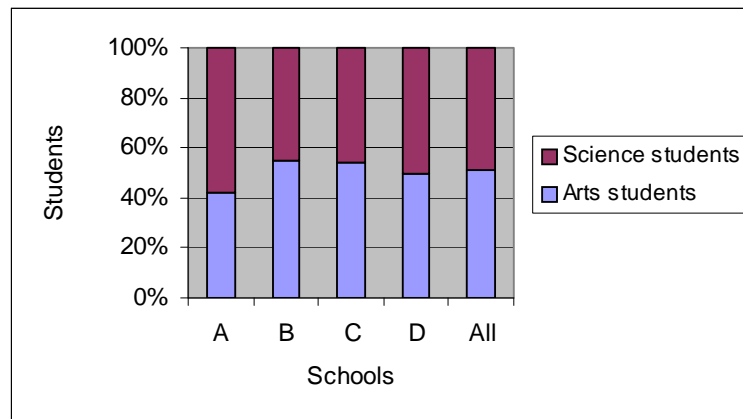
Question 1 - Class

In all schools, Form 6 students are divided into two streams according to the subjects they specialise in and are then referred to as the Arts and Science classes. At present, some schools have many more Arts students, but as Figure 3.9 shows, the researcher kept a balance between Arts and Science students to

increase the validity of results. Whilst Arts and Science interests are less balanced in school A, this is the result of student absences rather than different class sizes.

Figure 3.9

Arts and Science students in schools

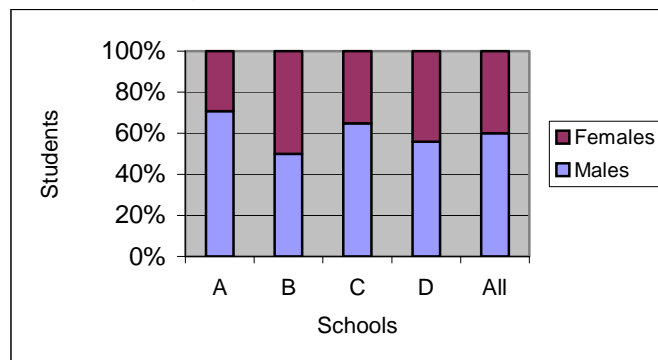


Question 2 – Student gender

In the past, there were many fewer female students than males in Form 6. Figure 3.10 shows that while this disparity is still true to some extent, the situation today is

Figure 3.10

The gender balance in schools



a lot more equal, due to changing culture and the opening of more day schools.

(Coincidentally, in school A, many girls were absent on the day of the questionnaire). It is also informative to consider the gender balance between Arts and Science students. Figure 3.11 shows that while males are less likely to dominate the Arts classes, this is not always the case. However, it also shows that males strongly dominate the Science classes.

Figure 3.11 The gender balance in Arts and Science classes (%)

Gender	Schools									
	A		B		C		D		All	
	Arts	Sci.	Arts	Sci.	Arts	Sci.	Arts	Sci.	Arts	Sci.
Males	60	79	39	63	52	80	47	65	48	72
Females	40	21	61	37	48	20	53	55	52	28
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Question 3 – Student age group

This question asked students to circle their age group. Two choices were given because in the past there were a number of more mature students in Form 6. However, with only 10% in the older age group, the questionnaires revealed this to be no longer the case. It was also clear from the way students answered this question (many circled 20 instead of 15 – 20, or 21 instead of 21 – 25) that, even if students were in the older age group, they were still only one or two years older than most other students, which is insignificant compared to the large age differences between teachers. As their answers followed the patterns of other students, it was clear that these slightly older students did not merit a sub-group of their own in the detailed analysis.

Question 4 – Years of schooling

This question asked for years of secondary schooling. It was clear from their answers that many students misread this question as they wrote numbers with double figures, which were obviously their total years of schooling rather than the asked-for years of secondary schooling. Also, only four students out of 196 (a tiny 2%) claimed fewer than five years (claims that might suggest experience of a secondary curriculum overseas). As these students were so few, they still had three or four years of Solomon Islands' secondary curriculum experience, and their

answers conformed to the general patterns of other students, they also did not merit a sub-group of their own.

b) How many curricula?

In the analysis of this and subsequent sections of the questionnaire, teachers and students have rarely been added together because student responses outnumber teachers' responses by about 3:1, and adding them together would skew the results. Thus teachers' and students' responses are compared and contrasted and sub-group differences are commented on where they occur. All questions referred to may be viewed in Appendices A and B, while the initial letters used to identify specific data responses are explained in Figure 3.12. A summary of questionnaire responses may be viewed in Appendix D.

Figure 3.12 Questionnaire response categories

<i>Letters</i>	SD	D	U	A	SA
<i>Meaning</i>	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree

A time of major curriculum review is an appropriate time to consider whether stakeholders wish to have one national curriculum or are interested in other possibilities, and this was the subject of questions 5 – 8. A large majority of students (25% A and 67% SA) and teachers (34% A and 57% SA) were strongly in favour of the Solomon Islands retaining one national curriculum (Q.5), though teachers less strongly so. Conversely, both groups showed little interest in either provincial educational authorities or schools writing their own curricula (Q.6 and 7). However, in both instances, students were more strongly against (43 and 45% SD) than teachers (20 and 25% SD). School D, however, was something of an

anomaly. Its students and teachers were a little less in favour of one national curriculum, and they showed a little more interest in schools and provinces writing their own curricula. Their divergence is probably due to their recent principal-initiated move towards amending their curriculum to better cater for perceived students' needs.

Opinions about the old two-tier curriculum (Q.8) were somewhat mixed, and there was quite a lot of uncertainty about its merits, particularly amongst students who were less likely to know much about it because of their young age. In general, students were against it (33% SD and 31% D), but as slightly more teachers supported it (45% A+SA) than were against it (34% D+SD), some teachers obviously saw some merit in it. It is also interesting to note that female students and teachers were both far more uncertain (2.6 times) about this issue than their male counterparts, yet female teachers showed the strongest support (58% A+SA) of all groups for the two levels of curriculum.

c) Who should be involved in constructing the curriculum?

Questions 9 –18 were designed to discover opinions about which stakeholders should be involved in helping to construct the Solomon Islands' national curriculum and the degree of perceived interest of each group.

In general, students and teachers were very much in favour (students 74% and teachers 79% A + SA) of involving government education administrators (termed government education officials in the questionnaire) in constructing the curriculum (Q.9), with school C, an important National Secondary School, even more strongly

in favour. Female teachers, however, seemed less inclined to involve them, and school B was far less in favour, particularly their teachers (only 46% A+SA, with 34% D+SD), perhaps because they are not a National Secondary School.

The possible involvement of expatriate education consultants (Q.10) exposed an interesting difference of opinion. 82% of students agreed (32% A and 50% SA), but only 59% of teachers agreed (41% A and 18% SA), with school B teachers as much against the idea as they were for it (47% SD+D versus 47% A+SA). It is also apparent that it was the teachers with Bachelors degrees in their 30s who were the most opposed to expatriate involvement, their degrees and years of experience perhaps making them feel less in need of expatriate assistance than other sub-groups.

Both students (37% A and 51% SA) and teachers (33% A and 65% SA) were strongly in favour of teachers being involved in curriculum construction (Q.11), though the students of schools B and D were more uncertain (15% and 12% U respectively), perhaps because their teachers are younger and less qualified as shown by Figures 3.3 and 3.6. Both groups also thought that teachers would be interested in helping to construct the curriculum (Q.12), but students were less convinced (62% A+SA compared to 77% teachers A+SA). Significantly, teachers were more inclined to agree than strongly agree, with 20% rather uncertain (especially females and teachers with Diplomas) about their colleagues' interest, and one third of students (again, more females than males) were uncertain of their teachers' interest in involvement. Thus although they are the implementers of the curriculum, the extent of teachers' interest in involvement is a little in doubt.

While the first three stakeholder groups discussed have all been involved in curriculum construction before, the next three groups have had little or no involvement. Students were in favour of their own involvement (Q.13), but not by a large majority (21% SA and 37% A) and were somewhat uncertain (17%). Teachers had less interest in involving students (10% SA and 32 % A) and an even higher degree of uncertainty (26%). Interestingly, the teachers of school A displayed far more interest in student involvement (45% A and 15% SA) than the teachers of other schools, particularly of school C where a mere 13 % agreed. Although students estimated their peers' interest in helping to construct their curriculum (Q. 14) more highly than teachers gave them credit for, the largest percentage for both students and teachers were uncertain (students 37% and teachers 39%). Thus even if students are invited to help construct their curriculum, many might not be interested.

There was great disagreement about whether parents should help construct the curriculum (Q.16). Although both students and teachers shared a similar degree of uncertainty (19% and 23% respectively), teachers, especially the males, were 61% in favour (38%A and 23% SA), while students were only 31% (24% A and 7% SA) supportive of the idea and were 51% against (23% SD and 28% D). Both students and teachers were fairly uncertain about the level of parental interest (Q.16) in curriculum involvement (students 35% and teachers 33%), especially the females, although teachers, many of whom are also parents, had a higher degree of faith in parental interest (45% A and 7% SA) than students (26% A and 7% SA) gave them credit for.

The last stakeholder group was business people. With 21% “Uncertain” and the rest evenly divided between agreeing and disagreeing, students were very unsure of involving business people in curriculum construction (Q.17). Teachers were far more convinced of the merits of involving business people (55% A and 12% SA), particularly the teachers of school D who have been considering their curriculum. However, the interest of business people in being involved (Q.18) was doubted, with the largest percentage of both groups expressing uncertainty (students 38% and teachers 49%).

Thus, while there was support for involving all these groups of stakeholders in curriculum construction, there was a somewhat mixed reaction to expatriates, students, parents and business people. It may be that if the questions had stated “...should help give ideas towards...” rather than “...should help construct...”, then some answers may have been more positive.

d) The content of the curriculum

Questions asked in this section (Q.19 – 69) were designed to collect opinions about what subjects should and should not be in the curriculum, and the appropriateness of the content of, and emphases on, current curriculum subjects.

(i) The range of subjects

There was very strong agreement with the suggestion that more subjects should be added to the curriculum (Q.19), with 86% (35% A and 51% SA) of students and 97% (43%A and 54% SA) of teachers in favour, with no uncertainty.

To ascertain what additional subjects would be welcomed, question 20 offered five choices, with respondents able to vote for all, some or none. The results are shown in Appendix E in detail and are summarised in Figure 3.13. As it received 182 votes out of a possible maximum total of 265 (the total questionnaire population),

Figure 3.13 Demand for new curriculum subjects (%)

<i>SUGGESTED SUBJECTS</i>	<i>STUDENTS</i>	<i>TEACHERS</i>
Computer Studies	67	72
Music	37	57
Careers	15	39
Art	12	39
Mechanics	10	25

Computer Studies would clearly be a popular addition, being voted for by 67% of students and 72% of teachers. Music is also in demand, though teachers seem proportionately more keen than students. However, Careers and Art (Creative Arts), which have both been part of the curriculum at some stage, received far fewer votes, with Mechanics even less in demand. From a gender perspective, male students, especially in school A, were far more interested in adding subjects than the females, especially Computer Studies and Music, though the girls showed a little more interest in Careers and Art. There were also different levels of interest in adding subjects to the curriculum. Figure 3.14 shows that teachers tended to be

Figure 3.14 Average number of choices made per person

	<i>School A</i>	<i>School B</i>	<i>School C</i>	<i>School D</i>	<i>Average</i>
<i>Students</i>	1.5	1.1	1.5	1.7	1.45
<i>Teachers</i>	2.4	1.6	2.2	3.1	2.32

more interested in adding subjects than students (perhaps because of their greater knowledge of subjects), and school D, where curriculum discussions have recently taken place, showed the most interest of any school, with school B, which is not a National High School, showing the least.

Question 20 also invited participants to suggest other subjects they would like to see added to the curriculum. There were 42 suggestions in all (a small number to come from 265 participants who could suggest as many subjects as they liked), 29 from male students and teachers (14 and 15 respectively), with only three of the remainder coming from female teachers. The results presented in Figure 3.15 show that school C made the most suggestions, but that nearly one third of their suggestions were already on the curriculum as parts of existing subjects, which implies a certain lack of knowledge about the curriculum. However, the requests (even though they were few) for cultural studies and other subjects related to local

Figure 3.15 Suggested additions to the curriculum

Subjects	School A				School B				School C				School D				T
	Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Cultural studies	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	5		-	1	-	-	4	-	12
Vernacular	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Dance and Drama	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Fishing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Sport e.g. Martial Arts	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	5
P.E.	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Sex education	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Archaeology	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Library	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Photography	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Psychology	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Subjects already on the curriculum in part	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	5	2	-	-	-	1	-	9
Totals	2	0	1	1	4	2	3	0	7	8	6	2	1	0	5	0	42
	2		2		6		3		15		8		1		5		
	4				9				23				6				

culture (such as the vernacular languages, dance and fishing), account for nearly half of all suggestions, and imply that a desire of Solomon Islanders is to learn more about themselves.

If new subjects are to be added to the curriculum, then adjustments will need to be made to make room for them. However, there was a great reluctance to drop any subjects from the curriculum (Q.21), teachers being more strongly opposed to doing so (29% SD and 46% D) than students (26% SD and 32 % D), perhaps because teachers' greater life experience has shown them the benefits of much that they have learned. However, school B teachers, with 40% "Uncertain", were at least twice as uncertain about dropping subjects from the curriculum as all other sub-groups.

Question 22 gave participants the opportunity to suggest subjects that might be dropped from the curriculum, and the results are summarised in Figure 3.16. Most suggestions came from male Arts students, (five of whom wished to drop Home

Figure 3.16 Curriculum subjects questionnaire participants wished to drop

Subjects	School A				School B				School C				School D				T
	Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers		Students		Teachers		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
P.E	-	-	2	-	2	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	8
Home Ec.	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Christian Ed.	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	6
Maths	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
English	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Ag. Science	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Social Stud.	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Business St.	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Creative Arts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Industrial Arts	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
All Electives	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Part of a subject	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
A Fm 6 subject	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
Totals	4	2	3	0	12	4	1	0	8	5	3	0	3	0	0	1	46
	6		3		16		1		13		3		3		1		
	9				17				16				4				

Home Economics, a subject that they are unlikely to have studied), and older, more experienced and more highly qualified male teachers. It is also interesting to note that schools B and C made many more suggestions than schools A and D.

However, in general, suggestions were few, every subject on the curriculum was suggested with the exception of Science, and most suggestions (38 of 46) came from students. Although six students wished to drop Christian Education/New Testament Studies (NTS), one explained that this was because “we have NTS at Sunday school”. The subject that most wished to drop, P.E., is the subject of the next question.

Physical Education is a controversial curriculum subject in the Solomon Islands. Teaching it in Forms 1 – 3 (Q.23) was strongly supported, with students 91% (56% A and 35% SA) and teachers 89% (41% A and 46% SA) in favour. However, P.E. for Forms 4 and 5 (Q.24) received much less support, with teachers only 63% (32% A and 31% SA) and students only 49% (32% A and 17% SA) in favour, and 41% (16% SD and 25% D) of students positively against. Thus students were less in favour of P.E. than teachers and sub-group opinions differed too. Girls seemed more interested in being taught P.E. than the boys. The teachers of school B showed more uncertainty (27%) than any other group, while their students were 54% (26% SD and 28% D) against teaching it in Forms 4 and 5 compared to 68% (49% A and 19 % SA) of students in school A who wanted it in Forms 4 and 5.

As an adjunct to this controversy, the researcher conducted a small survey amongst the Form 6 students of her own school who had previously attended other secondary schools, to discover whether P.E. is being taught. The survey showed that 8 out of 19 schools did not teach P.E. in Forms 1 – 3, while 15 out of 16 did not teach it in Forms 4 and 5 (the lower total is because some schools finish at Form 3). This may not mean that students get no opportunity for physical exercise, as one school runs a non-compulsory games afternoon once a week, boarding

schools have free time when students can play games if they wish, and some schools have an annual sports day. Whilst this survey is very small, the sample includes National, Provincial, Community, Junior High, urban and rural secondary schools that are located in seven out of the nine provinces. Thus this limited survey suggests that even though P.E. is on the curriculum, it tends to be narrowly interpreted as playing games, and is very likely to be viewed as an optional extra-curricular activity.

(ii) The content of subjects

Questions 25 – 33 were designed to discover opinions about the helpfulness of the content of each curriculum subject to life in the Solomon Islands. Only Physical Education and Creative Arts were not asked about as these have been given little or no place on most schools' curricula. Appendix F presents a complete picture of the opinions expressed in these questions, but in general, when the “agrees” and “strongly agrees” were added together, most agreement percentages ranged between 80 – 100. With teachers, there were just four anomalies; Business Studies (73%) in school B, and Mathematics (78%), Science (55%) and Social Studies (55%) in school D (the school that had been discussing amending their curriculum). With students, the only anomalies were Industrial Arts (74%) in school B, and Mathematics (72%) in school C. Every subject had a few detractors, though never many. Teachers were generally more moderate in their approval or disapproval of subjects, whereas students were more extreme, which could be linked to their opinion of individual teachers rather than just based on the value of the subjects themselves. Interestingly, whether the school was secular or Christian

made little difference to the strength of support for Christian Education and New Testament Studies.

Of greater significance is the picture that emerges when subjects are ranked on the basis of the total percentages of agreement (A + SA) with their helpfulness.

Although the differences between percentages are often small, and are therefore arguably not very significant, Figure 3.17 (which is a summary of a table shown in Appendix F) shows that the more practical elective subjects are consistently ranked higher by students and teachers than the compulsory core subjects. Whilst

Figure 3.17 Curriculum subjects ranked by agreement percentages

		Q.	Curriculum subject	Agree (A)	Strongly agree (SA)	Total % (A + SA)	Rank by Total %
S T U D E N T S	Core Subjects	25	English	27	61	88	7
		26	Mathematics	38	48	86	8
		27	Science	36	53	89	6
		28	Social Studies	32	53	85	9
	Elective subjects	29	CE / NTS	27	63	90	5
		30	Business Studies	31	62	93	2
		31	Home Economics	36	56	91	3
		32	Agricultural Science	29	68	97	1
		33	Industrial Arts	42	49	91	3
T E A C H E R S	Core subjects	25	English	48	37	85	7
		26	Mathematics	63	24	87	5
		27	Science	51	23	74	9
		28	Social Studies	54	24	78	8
	Elective subjects	29	CE / NTS	53	34	87	5
		30	Business Studies	54	34	88	4
		31	Home Economics	53	41	94	2
		32	Agricultural Science	46	48	94	2
		33	Industrial Arts	49	49	98	1

there are anomalies, such as the students of school B who seem to have their sights fixed upon becoming business people (Business Studies is ranked first) rather than on becoming carpenters (Industrial Arts is ranked last), and the students of school A who expressed totally opposite opinions to school B, anomalies are very few. The perceived value of electives was also underlined by only elective subjects scoring 100% helpfulness agreement; once with the students of school C

(Agricultural Science), three times with the teachers of school B (Business Studies, Agricultural Science and Industrial Arts), and three times with the teachers of school D (Business Studies, Home Economics and Industrial Arts). Additionally, while female students once again showed more uncertainty than other groups, this only applied to the core subjects and the one elective they knew little about (Industrial Arts), otherwise, they were far more certain. In summary, the content of the four core subjects is perceived as less helpful to life in the Solomon Islands than the content of the five elective subjects, only two of which the students can study in Forms 4 and 5 in the current curriculum.

Question 34 invited those who deemed a subject not helpful to life in the Solomon Islands to explain why. Some participants commented on more than one subject,

Figure 3.18 Unhelpful subjects – the number of explanations offered

	<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Number of student comments</i>	<i>Number of teacher comments</i>	<i>Total comments</i>	<i>Core / Elective Totals</i>
<i>Core Subjects</i>	English	10	7	17	54
	Mathematics	10	3	13	
	Science	3	4	7	
	Social Studies	14	3	17	
<i>Elective subjects</i>	CE / NTS	6	2	8	12
	Business Studies	0	1	1	
	Home Economics	2	0	2	
	Agricultural Science	0	1	1	
	Industrial Arts	0	0	0	
	<i>Totals</i>	45	21	66	

and proportionately, teachers made slightly more comments than students, and males made 3.5 times as many comments as females. As Figure 3.18 shows, the core subjects engendered a lot more criticism than elective subjects. Three general comments about core subjects were particularly insightful. One teacher wrote that they only relate to paid employment and “do not revolutionise the ordinary citizens’ lifestyle”, while a student saw core subjects as “excessively stipulated without any

consideration for practical purposes”, that is, they are taught only in a theoretical way. A teacher supported this view by seeing the core subjects as “geared to passing exams and knowledge-based (with) little emphasis on real-world application of the knowledge received”.

Comments about specific subjects were also enlightening. Students’ complaints about English centred around the fact that “the common language is Pidgin” and that “English is not helping for life”, is “only used at appropriate times” such as “work in business organisations”, and “when I failed and cannot go further in my subjects, I couldn’t go back home and build a house or make a garden using my English skills”. Teachers’ comments about English were similar, and are exemplified by the teacher who did not see English contributing “to the social well-being of Solomon Islands”.

Students also saw what is taught in Mathematics as having little use “in real-life situations” because it is “less likely to provide employment” and “is not really needed in our various Arts fields”. Some teachers also viewed Mathematics as not necessary for survival and question “how Pythagoras’ rule (is) important to the unfortunate ones” (push-outs?), but that it may be more helpful to life if it, along with English, was taught at “different levels for different interests and different capabilities”.

Science was the least criticised core subject, and students’ comments were more of a lament that Science is difficult to use locally, because the “Solomon Islands is still at an early stage of development”. Teachers endorsed this idea and added the fact

that Science was therefore very unlikely to “give them (students) opportunities for jobs”.

Social Studies, on the other hand, was the most criticised core subject, the chief problem according to students being that it is perceived as teaching unhelpful content about the geography, and particularly history, of other parts of the world while neglecting to teach local culture, history and geography, and “things that are currently happening now so that we will know what is happening around us”. A teacher put it more succinctly by stating that “Social Studies needs to be tailored to be appropriate to Solomon Islands”.

New Testament Studies was the most commented on elective subject. From the students’ point of view, this was not because of its perceived irrelevance as might be the case in a more secular society, but because of the possibility of confusion due to doctrinal differences. Teachers, on the other hand, wanted to strengthen the subject by “deepening it” and by teaching it “as a way of life, ... loving God and loving one’s fellow man ... not just filling students’ minds with knowledge”. Of the other elective subjects, one teacher perceived the Agricultural Science syllabus as outdated, and two male students thought Home Economics should be taught at home. No comment was made about Industrial Arts.

Having ascertained the helpfulness of curriculum subjects, Q.35 then asked if subjects taught anything irrelevant to the Solomon Islands. 53% (19% SD and 43% D) of students and 59% (10% SD and 49% D) of teachers thought that the subjects did not. Science students were less certain than others, but school C teachers were particularly strong in disagreeing. However, the 25% (17% A and

8% SA) of students who agreed came up with 36 comments about irrelevance (Q.36), with half of the comments this time coming from girls. Nearly all the comments concerned core subjects, with Social Studies and its unit on Conflict (which includes the Cold war and other aspects of world history) attracting half of all student complaints – this unit “is about all those wars and problems happened in Europe, why don’t they teach only what is happening in Solomon Islands?”. Surds and calculus were cited as irrelevant in Maths, but the two comments about Science were non-specific. Cloze passages were the only perceived irrelevance in English. For the elective subjects, three comments on Business Studies and Christian Education were non-specific, and significantly, no irrelevancies were cited for the three practical electives subjects.

All except one of the sixteen teachers (24% of the total number of teachers) who perceived irrelevancies in the curriculum made comments concerning the irrelevancies, and four of the comments came from females. Eight comments concerned the same Social Studies unit that was a problem for students – “more emphasis should be on the Pacific World War II and other relevant conflicts in Solomon Islands”. With almost no cows in the country, learning about their husbandry was seen as irrelevant in Agricultural Science, and the Social Studies unit on Families is considered by one teacher to overlap with Home Economics. Two insightful general comments that relate to each other were also made; we “should teach more applied Science”, and “the majority of the students are not academic, therefore a lot of life-giving skills are not taught to the majority”. These statements again hint that the curriculum is taught in a very theoretical way.

The last set of questions on the content of curriculum subjects were designed to discover the relationship between the curriculum and Solomon Islands' culture, history, geography and place in the world.

While 95% (43% A and 52% SA) of teachers agreed that the curriculum should teach students to respect their culture and uphold traditional values (Q.38), their response to question 37 revealed they were not so sure that it did (38%A, 6% SA and 16% U). Students, however, were a little less strongly in favour of the curriculum teaching them these things (41% A and 40 % SA), and were even less sure than teachers that it did (32% A, 10% SA and 29% U). A similar picture emerges with learning about their culture (Q.39 and 40). At 93% (42% A and 41% SA) and no disagreement, teachers were adamant that the curriculum should teach students many things about the culture of Solomon Islands, but only 23% (22% A and 1% SA) thought that it did, with 26% uncertainty. While still in favour, the students were once again a little less interested in learning about their culture (40% A and 36% SA) than teachers, and a few did disagree, and with a 32% (26% A and 6% SA) agreement they also thought that the curriculum did a less bad job teaching them about their culture. This all suggests that students' have weaker links to their culture than teachers, and that the curriculum could achieve much more in this area.

Questions 41 and 42 asked about the history of Solomon Islands. Both students and teachers strongly agree that the curriculum should teach students many things about the history of the Solomon Islands (students 90 % A+SA, teachers 95% A+SA). However, opinions differed about its effectiveness in doing so. 50% (38% A and 12% SA) of students thought that it was effective, but only 28% (26% A and

2% SA) of teachers shared that opinion, with 26% uncertain. Students and teachers had similar opinions about Solomon Islands' geography, asserting by large majorities (students 88% A+SA, teachers 95% A+SA) that it should be taught but that it is taught even less effectively than Solomon Islands history (students 37% S+A, teachers 23% S+A).

With globalisation now a fact of life, it is considered important by many countries to know something about the rest of the world. Questions 45 – 48 revealed that 80% (50% A and 30% SA) of students and 88% (52% A and 36% SA) of teachers want the curriculum to teach students about other Pacific Island cultures. Both groups (students 82% A+SA and teachers 92% A+SA) also want the curriculum to help students understand other cultures around the world. Students think that the curriculum is a little more effective in teaching them about the Pacific than about the rest of the world (62% agreement compared to 55%), though teachers thought the reverse (43% agreement compared to 64%) and confessed to much uncertainty in both areas (29% and 25%).

When all the figures are examined, it seems that the curriculum could be more effective in fulfilling students' perceived need to learn more about themselves and their place in the world.

(iii) The emphases placed on parts of the curriculum

What is deemed important in the Solomon Islands' national curriculum is transmitted to students by the subjects that are compulsory (the core subjects), by those that are electives, and by which subjects are included in selection exams.

Questions 49 – 56 deal with perceptions of these issues, and the results are shown in Figure 3.19.

Figure 3.19 *Perceptions of core subjects (%)*

	Q	Subject	SD	D	U	A	SA	SA RANK
STUDENTS	49	English should remain a core subject.	4	3	2	13	78	1
	50	Mathematics should remain a core subject.	5	5	2	23	66	3
	51	Science should remain a core subject.	1	5	3	24	68	2
	52	Social Studies should remain a core subject.	4	5	2	26	63	4
	53	Other subjects should be core subjects.	13	17	4	33	23	-
	55	There should be no core subjects.	23	33	14	17	17	-
	Q	Subject	SD	D	U	A	SA	SA RANK
TEACHERS	49	English should remain a core subject.	1	4	1	32	61	1
	50	Mathematics should remain a core subject.	0	7	1	33	58	2
	51	Science should remain a core subject.	0	7	1	38	54	3
	52	Social Studies should remain a core subject.	1	7	4	36	51	4
	53	Other subjects should be core subjects.	3	4	4	39	49	-
	55	There should be no core subjects.	16	25	7	16	36	-

It is quite clear from questions 49 – 52 that students and teachers wish the current core subjects to remain compulsory, though on average, teachers agreed less strongly than students. The students of school B were particularly supportive of English and Science (79% and 80% SA), while the teachers of school D were especially strong in their support for English and Maths (89% and 79% SA). Teachers with Diplomas were more supportive of English and Mathematics and less so of Science and Social Studies than teachers with Bachelor degrees, while the youngest teachers were more strongly supportive of Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. Of greater significance is the fact that on the basis of the “Strongly Agree” percentages, both students and teachers consider English the most valuable core subject, they differ with Mathematics and Science, but not surprisingly given the criticism levelled against it, Social Studies is considered by both groups the least worthy of being a core subject. Both students and teachers would like to see other subjects becoming compulsory core subjects, teachers

especially so, except for female teachers and the teachers of school B. There is much uncertainty about the suggestion that there should be no core subjects at all, though teachers signal with their 36% SA that they are prepared to consider changes.

Opinions of what subjects might become core subjects is illustrated by Figure 3.20, which is a summary of the responses to Q.54 asking which subjects participants would like to see become core subjects. Gender is the only demographic grouping included as it was the only grouping that seemed related to the number and type of suggestions made. With their smaller population, teachers proportionately made

Figure 3.20 Suggestions for additional core subjects (actual numbers)

SUBJECTS													TOTAL
STUDENTS	School	NTS		Home Ec.		Bus.		Ag. Sc.		Ind. Arts			
		Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.		
	A	8	3	1	0	12	1	8	0	2	0	35	
	B	8	1	1	3	9	6	12	6	1	1	48	
	C	3	2	3	2	4	3	8	3	2	2	32	
D	1	2	2	2	6	7	6	4	1	2	33		
Sub- total		20	8	7	7	31	17	34	13	6	5	148	
TOTAL		28		14		48		47		11			
RANK		3		4		1		2		5			-

SUBJECTS													TOTAL
TEACHERS	School	NTS		Home Ec.		Bus.		Ag. Sc.		Ind. Arts			
		Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.	Male	Fem.		
	A	9	2	7	3	7	2	8	4	8	3	53	
	B	2	0	1	0	3	1	4	0	2	0	13	
	C	1	1	4	2	4	2	8	1	4	1	28	
D	4	2	7	1	6	1	10	2	7	1	41		
Sub-total		16	5	19	6	20	6	30	7	21	5	135	
TOTAL		31		25		26		37		26			
RANK		2		5		3		1		3			-

many more suggestions than students. Boys made almost twice as many suggestions as girls, while school B students gave the most suggestions of the student populations. School B teachers, however, gave very few suggestions, especially in comparison to school A, the contrast possibly due to the big difference

in their qualifications and experience highlighted by the demographic data. The ranking of the choices yields more interesting insights. Firstly, teachers value food and Bible instruction the most highly, while students apparently value money before food or Bible instruction. Secondly, when compared to the rankings illustrated by Figure 3.17, Industrial Arts has slipped from first to third for teachers, and third to fifth for students. The implication here is that while people may recognise the value of a subject, they still may not wish to be compelled to study it. Leaving the rankings aside, the highest number of student suggestions (48 for Business Studies) represents only 24% of questionnaire participants, and while the teachers' highest figure (37 for Agricultural Science) represents 54% of their population, neither of these percentages represents an overwhelming demand to convert any electives into core subjects.

At present, the examination system devalues the elective subjects by either not examining them (Form 3), or by not including their marks for selection to the next level (Form 5). There are movements to include elective subjects in the selection process, but responses to question 56 showed that while teachers were overwhelmingly in favour of doing so (47% A and 44% SA), students are not so keen (42% A and 20% SA, with 13% disagreeing). Lack of student enthusiasm may be related to the extra revision and increased number of examinations that such an inclusion would entail.

The rest of the questions on the emphases of curriculum content, Q.57 – 69, deal with content in general rather than specific subjects.

Questions 57 and 58 show that teachers and students have different perceptions of the academic nature of the curriculum. Students, many of whom may not have thought about such things before, are not sure whether the curriculum is very academic (39% A and 16% SA) with uncertainty as high as 42% (school D), but they are certain that the curriculum should be strongly academic (42% A and 42% SA). Conversely, teachers, with (presumably) their greater knowledge of the curriculum are positive that the curriculum is very academic (49% A and 33% SA), but are divided over whether it should be (49% SA+A versus 47% SD+D). With practical skills and learning factual knowledge (Q.59 – 61), students and teachers think more alike. Both groups strongly want the curriculum to teach more practical skills (students 45% A and 50% SA, teachers 40% A and 49% SA), though the students of schools B and C, and teachers with Diplomas were a little uncertain. But at the same time, both groups believe that not only does the curriculum emphasise knowledge and learning facts (students 58% A and 24% SA, teachers 69% A and 22% SA), but also that it should (students 38% A and 55% SA, teachers 44% A and 37% SA). There are some conflicting desires here.

It is arguable whether values can be taught as part of a curriculum, but they can certainly be identified and illustrated by curriculum content. Teachers were 100% (41% A and 59% SA) in favour of the curriculum educating students about values (Q.62). While students were 85% (48% A and 37% SA) in favour, there was 11 – 14% uncertainty in schools B, C and D. School A students, however, were only 2% uncertain and 96% (58% A and 38% SA) in favour. These differences imply that the students of school A, a Christian school, have a greater understanding of what values are and of their importance than students in the other schools. This also

suggests that values education may be coming from sources other than the formal curriculum.

As discussed in the literature review, governments and businesses are now demanding that education develop certain skills in students (Tien et al, 2003, 1-7), and competency skills are the subject of questions 63 – 68.

Teachers were 100% (46 A and 54% SA) certain that the curriculum should encourage communication skills and students were almost as unanimous (28% A and 65% SA). While 83%/84% of both groups thought that the curriculum encourages the development of communication skills, the teachers agreed a lot less strongly than the students (32% versus 49% SA), and the teachers of school B and those with Diplomas were 20% and 22% uncertain. There was almost total agreement that the curriculum should encourage learning how to solve problems (students 40% A and 54% SA, teachers 34% A and 66% SA), and although two thirds of students and teachers thought that it did, this is less than with communication skills (students 43% A and 24% SA, teachers 47% A and 19% SA), with the students of schools B, C and D, and teachers of school B 20 – 26% uncertain.

For negotiating and decision-making skills, there was again an almost unanimous and strong desire that the curriculum should teach them (students 91% A+SA, teachers 99% A+SA), but an even lower belief than the other skills that the curriculum teaches them (students 35% A and 21% SA, teachers 30% A and 14% SA). Significantly, both groups also displayed much uncertainty (students 19 – 29%, teachers 19 – 31%), while the teachers of school D who have been

discussing their curriculum, were 70% (35% SD and 53% D) sure that the curriculum did not encourage negotiating and decision-making skills.

In short, all the skills mentioned are considered desirable, but the curriculum could transmit them much more effectively, particularly, how to negotiate and make decisions.

Another measure of a curriculum's appropriateness is the extent to which it prepares students for the further education that some of them will receive. Thus, question 69, which asked whether the curriculum provides students with the basic knowledge and skills needed for the regional Form 6 curriculum, has important ramifications. Two thirds of students (34% A and 33% SA), thought that the curriculum gave them what they needed, though school C students were 18% uncertain. Teachers, however, were not so convinced (32% A and 14 % SA), with the teachers of schools A, B and C 25 – 35% uncertain and 39% of the teachers of school D strongly disagreeing. Also of great significance is the contrast in agreement between the different teacher qualification groups. The two groups who do most/all of the Form 6 teaching were only 40% (Bachelors) and 29% (post-graduate degrees, who also expressed 57% uncertainty) in agreement, while the Diplomas, few of whom teach Form 6, were 60% (30% A and 30% SA) in agreement. Clearly, this is another area in which the curriculum could be more effective.

e) Access to the curriculum

In a developing country where education is both fee-paying and non-compulsory, access to secondary education is not assured. While 43% (20% A and 23% SA) of students thought that all Solomon Islands' children of secondary school age have access to secondary school (Q.70), only 19% (13% A and 6% SA) of teachers agreed and 72% (33% SD and 39% D) disagreed. Clearly, the teachers have a greater awareness than students of accessibility to secondary school in the Solomon Islands.

Lack of sufficient places in Forms 1 – 3 and again in Forms 4 and 5 necessitate selection examinations in Standard 6 and Form 3. The attitudes of participants to these examinations are summarised in Figure 3.21 and they show a difference of

Figure 3.21 Opinions about selection examinations (%)

	Nos.	Question	SD	D	U	A	SA
Students	71	The Standard 6 selection exam should be dropped.	27	15	8	10	40
Teachers	71	The Standard 6 selection exam should be dropped.	6	12	10	32	41
Students	72	The Form 3 selection exam should be dropped.	24	15	10	18	33
Teachers	72	The Form 3 selection exam should be dropped.	10	25	4	35	26

opinion. While the percentages of “strongly agrees” are almost the same, the number of “agrees” is quite different, showing that teachers are far more in favour of dropping the Standard 6 examination than students. Both groups are less in favour of dropping the Form 3 selection examination than the Standard 6 examination, and this time the students are nearly 50% against. Clearly, both groups, but the students in particular, see some merit in retaining both these selection examinations.

Access to secondary education may also be affected by such things as gender, rural location, poverty and being a slow learner, and these are the subjects of Questions 73 – 77.

Seventy one percent (49% A and 22% SA) of teachers agree that boys have better access to secondary school (Q.73), but students are not so sure, with only 44% (28% A and 16% SA) in agreement and 17 – 22 % uncertain in schools A, B and C. Both teachers (81% A +SA) and students (72% A+SA) more strongly agreed that urban children have better access than rural children. They also believed that wealth improved access (teachers 77% A+SA; students 66% A+SA), particularly to National Secondary Schools (teachers 80% A+SA, students 64% A+SA). However, with all these accessibility issues, students less strongly agreed than teachers, perhaps reluctant to believe that in this egalitarian society not every child had the same chances as they themselves did. One group that teachers and students thought the same about was slow learners, with only 52% (37% A and 15% SA) of teachers and 53% (27% A and 26% SA) of students believing that slow learners have the same opportunities in the secondary curriculum as fast learners. Thus it is clear that both teachers and students agree that female, rural and poor children have less access to secondary schooling, with slow learners suffering the most.

Another aspect of accessibility that can be discriminatory is access to resources, and it is sometimes expressed that government schools have better access to resources than the private schools (Q.78). Whilst there is much uncertainty about this (19% of students in each of schools A, B and C, and 25 – 33% among teachers of schools A, C and D), on the whole students (21% SD and 27% D) and teachers (12% SD and 36% D) disagree with this assertion. Question 79 suggested that

town schools have access to better resources than provincial (rural) schools to support the curriculum. Whilst 62% (35% A and 27% SA) of students thought this might be true, 80% (38% A and 42% SA) of teachers were sure that it was true. The teachers of school B were 20% uncertain again, but the teachers of school A were 95% (50% A and 45% SA) sure. Thus there are some perceived inequities of resource distribution.

A final accessibility issue is that the students of town secondary schools might be blessed with better qualified teachers than provincial schools (Q.80). Whilst a very small majority of students (26% A and 25% SA) and teachers (35% A and 20% SA) think that they are, percentages are not high. However, some high uncertainty rates of 21% for all girls and students of school C, and 33% for the teachers of school B, suggest a lack of knowledge of this issue.

4. Conclusions and implications

The following conclusions summarise the questionnaire findings and consider the implications of the findings.

a) Demographic Data

In general, differences of opinion between sub-groups were small, but females often showed more uncertainty than males. This may be a consequence of their lower status and exclusion from important decision-making processes in traditional society.

(i) Teachers

In all schools, all teachers had qualifications, though females tended to be less well qualified than males, and more than two thirds of their staff were male. However, there were big contrasts between schools in terms of whether the majority of their teachers held Bachelors degrees or Diplomas, in the ages of teachers and in the lengths of their teaching experience.

These contrasts have several implications for curriculum development. Firstly, an uneven spread of well-qualified teachers may mean uneven student access to good quality education, which is an accessibility issue. Secondly, the small number of female teachers reduces the possibility of girls finding female role models. Thirdly, the large number of young teachers in some schools could mean a more innovative approach to implementing the curriculum, while a large number of mature teachers may be more likely to provide a more stable environment for curriculum development, and may increase the possibility of teacher role models for values education. However, a combination of youth, inexperience and lesser qualifications, may mean a teaching staff that lacks knowledge and confidence. This seemed to be the case in school B, as evidenced by their frequent uncertainty with many curriculum issues. For students to receive the maximum benefit from their secondary education, a teaching staff consisting of a cohesive mix of genders, youth, maturity and experience represents the ideal that needs to be worked towards. Lastly, the demographic data also exposed the fact that teachers who have a significant time gap in between leaving school and commencing teaching may lack knowledge and understanding of curriculum issues. Lack of confidence

and knowledge both have implications for teacher training, teacher induction programs for newly qualified teachers, curriculum workshops and in-service training. This is supported by the fact that school D teachers, who have had some school-based curriculum discussions, have stronger and sometimes different opinions on certain curriculum issues compared to the teachers of the other three schools.

Not all of these implications are directly related to the research questions of this thesis, but they all have an important bearing on the successful implementation of curriculum reforms that the findings of this thesis may help to stimulate.

(ii) Students

The vast majority of student participants in the questionnaire had received all their secondary education in the Solomon Islands and so were well qualified to offer opinions. The schools involved in the questionnaire ran classes for students in both Arts and Science strands, but these classes varied in number and size. All the classes were mixed gender, but while girls were sometimes in the majority in Arts classes, boys strongly outnumbered girls in Science classes.

The existence of large classes in some schools has implications for the quality of education received by Form 6 students. In the light of the United Nations (2001, 3) citing overcrowded classrooms as a factor threatening the quality of education, the wisdom of allowing classes of 55 is questionable, even if it does extend access to higher secondary education.

b) How many curricula?

Questionnaire participants agreed that there should be just one national curriculum. However, the spark of interest in a more localised curriculum that was evident in school D (who had been discussing their curriculum) implies that there may be scope for building into the national curriculum opportunities for schools to vary certain aspects to suit local conditions. Also, the fact that a number of teachers saw some merit in the abandoned two-tier curriculum implies that the idea of different strands in the secondary curriculum is not totally abhorrent, and that if the idea is resurrected and re-framed in a more acceptable format, it may find greater acceptance.

c) Who should be involved in curriculum construction?

Questionnaire participants strongly supported the continuing involvement of government education administrators and teachers in curriculum construction, but students were far more in favour of involving expatriate education consultants than teachers. This implies a student desire for curriculum innovations from overseas, though care must be taken to ensure their appropriateness for the Solomon Islands. There was also support for involving students, parents and business people in curriculum construction, though it was less strong, and their level of interest was somewhat in doubt. Thus, if, and when these groups are involved, their interest may need to be aroused to ensure their participation.

d) The content of the curriculum

(i) The range of subjects

The questionnaire highlighted a desire to add more subjects to the curriculum. This was particularly strong for Computer Studies, which is probably a recognition of the need to be able to use something that dominates so much of modern life. Music was also in demand, and this recognised the fact that the students of this musical nation need to be given the opportunity to develop their talents. However, the much smaller interest in Art suggests that if its teaching is to be successfully revived, the skills taught must be obviously relevant to modern Solomon Islands. Most of the (very few) other subjects suggested by participants were related to local culture, which implies a desire to learn more about their own society.

There was little interest in dropping subjects from the curriculum, but Physical Education was the most common request. This lack of interest, when added to the fact that at the moment Physical Education is rarely taught, means that holistic education will be difficult to achieve, and that opportunities to increase student physical fitness and teach health education are reduced.

(ii) The content of subjects

All curriculum subjects (with the exception of Physical Education and Art which were not asked about) were deemed helpful to life in the Solomon Islands, but the elective subjects, particularly the more practical ones, were deemed the most helpful. Additionally, many more criticisms were levelled against core subjects than against elective subjects, with the Social Studies unit that includes the Cold War

being deemed particularly irrelevant to the Solomon Islands. The perceived usefulness of the content of elective subjects over and above the content of compulsory core subjects suggests that changes need to be made in core subject syllabi, particularly in Social Studies, to make them more relevant and useful in the lives of Solomon Islanders.

The desire of Solomon Islanders to learn more about themselves is also apparent in the strong support for the curriculum to teach more about local culture, history and geography. A little less desire was expressed to learn about their Pacific neighbours and the wider world, but the desire was still there. However, few participants thought that the curriculum was effective in these areas, thus there is room for improvement.

(iii) The emphases placed on parts of the curriculum

Both students and teachers believed that there should be core compulsory subjects and that these should include current core subjects. There was also a small demand to convert elective subjects into core subjects, with Agricultural Science, Business Studies and New Testament Studies the most popular suggestions. This implies a desire to facilitate students' studying a wider range of the subjects deemed so helpful to life than they are able to do at present. However, to counter a certain wariness apparent among students at being forced to study subjects that cannot lead to further education, the elective subjects must be included in the selection process and be available for study at the next level of education.

Teachers perceive that the current curriculum is very academic, with a heavy emphasis on knowledge and insufficient practical skills, whereas they would prefer the curriculum to teach more practical skills, yet still emphasis knowledge without being too academic. Students, on the other hand, want a very academic curriculum that gives much knowledge but that still leaves room for teaching many practical skills. If the curriculum is to be appropriate in both students' and teachers' eyes, as well as achieving social and economic progress, curriculum developers will have to attend very carefully to these somewhat conflicting desires.

Values education is seen as essential. This needs to be born in mind by those who are currently altering the curriculum and subject syllabi, as an evident lack of knowledge about values amongst students of three of the four schools implies that the current curriculum is achieving little in this area.

The questionnaire also showed that students and teachers consider skills such as communicating, problem solving, negotiating and decision-making as highly desirable, but that the curriculum could more effectively help students develop them. This has implications for the types of exercises suggested in textbooks, and the style of both internal and external assessment. Linked to this is the fact that the better qualified teachers who teach Form 6 do not believe that the secondary curriculum gives students all the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for Form 6 and beyond. This suggests that a more concerted effort is needed to align the secondary curriculum with regional Form 6 and 7 curricula and their syllabi.

e) Accessibility to the secondary curriculum

Not all students of secondary school age have access to secondary education, though one third of students seemed unaware of this. There is support for dropping both the Standard 6 and Form 3 selection examinations, but the fact that the support is not that strong, particularly for dropping the Form 3 examination, indicates that both teachers and students see some merit in retaining selection processes. The questionnaire clearly shows that there are inequalities of access to secondary school in terms of gender, location (urban or rural) and poverty, and that it is the slow learners who have the poorest access. Lastly, unequal distribution of resources and qualified teachers seem to conspire against the provision of quality education in rural areas.

f) Summary

When related to the research questions, the questionnaire findings clearly show that one national curriculum is the preferred choice of the various curriculum options, and that expansion beyond educators to include other stakeholders in curriculum construction would be welcomed. They also show that while the content of the curriculum is deemed helpful in some respects, the range of subjects taught, their content, and the emphases placed on the different subjects and knowledge, are not entirely appropriate, while the emphases on values, and competency skills are insufficient. Lastly, not only do all Solomon Islands' students not have access to secondary school, there are also inequalities of access in terms of gender, poverty, location, slow learners, curriculum resources and well-qualified teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTERVIEWS – METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The questionnaire, a quantitative research method, collected many opinions and perceptions. This provided useful data and highlighted areas meriting further research. However, it collected few reasons why people thought as they did, and only collected opinions from two secondary curriculum stakeholder groups (students and teachers – the two most easily accessible groups). Thus interviews, a qualitative research method, were carried out to enhance the validity of the questionnaire findings, by increasing the breadth of the research (through accessing a greater number of stakeholder groups) and by increasing the depth of the research. They did this by tapping into individual stakeholders' experiences and opinions – data not easily obtained by a questionnaire (Minichiello et al., 1996, 12; Gay & Airasian, 2000, 291). Also, since the researcher could explain and clarify both the purposes of the research and individual questions to the interviewees, the interviews were able to elicit more accurate and honest responses than those obtained in the questionnaire (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 291).

1. Methodology

Interviews are an important method of collecting data for grounded theory research. Grounded theory, a qualitative methodology, derives its name from the practice of generating theory from research that is grounded in data gleaned from a particular setting (Babchuk, 1996, 5; Gay & Airasian, 2000, 222). Grounded theory has been

used to study a wide range of problems and practice settings, and has become something of an umbrella term encompassing a wide spectrum of procedures and practices seen as falling under the grounded theory domain (Babchuk, 1996, 8). While both Glaser (1992, cited in Babchuk, 1996, 8) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, cited in Babchuk, 1996, 8) advocate some flexibility in method, central components of grounded theory research are considered to be theoretical sampling and coding procedures (Babchuk, 1996, 5), both of which are discussed in this section. An in-depth discussion of the methods and processes used is important because it helps establish the quality of the study and the meaningfulness and usefulness of the results (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 253).

a) The instrument

Whilst Glaser (1992, cited in Babchuk, 1996, 7) insists that the research problem must be discovered through data analysis, Strauss and Corbin (1990, cited in Babchuk, 1996, 7) believe that research questions in grounded theory may be statements that identify the phenomena to be studied, and Pandit (1996, 6) adds that a good source of research questions in grounded theory studies is the technical literature. In this thesis, the research questions were indeed developed from literature. They then guided the construction of the questionnaire, and both the research questions and questionnaire findings guided the construction of interview questions as shown in Figure 4.1 and Appendix C.

Figure 4.1

The research questions and the interview questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature
1. Should there be one National Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum (as at present), or should provinces and/or schools be given the opportunity to construct their own curricula?	1, 2, 3.	Bugotu et al. (1973), Skulbeck (1994), Brady (1995), Glaser (1998), Brown (2003).
2. Should the range of people involved in curriculum construction be educators only, or should the group be expanded to include other stakeholders?	4, 5, 6.	Skilbeck (1994), Brady (1995), Lovat & Smith (1995), Dodd (1998), Posner (1998), Brady & Kennedy (1999), United Nations (2001), MEHRD (2004), Rodi (2004).
3. Is the current Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of: a) The range of subjects taught in the curriculum? b) The content of various subjects? c) The emphasis placed on different subjects? d) The emphasis placed on knowledge and values? e) The emphasis placed on communication, problem solving, negotiating and decision-making skills?	7, 9, 12, 16. 10, 11, 20 – 22. 17, 18, 19. 8, 13. 14, 15.	Bugotu (1973), Curriculum Handbook (1987), Downs Perry (1994), Skilbeck (1994), Lovat & Smith (1995), Nanzhao (1996), Dimmock & Walker (1998), Gillard (1998), Jensen (1998), Sommers (1998), Armstrong (2000), Kessler (2000), UNESCO (2000), Rodi et al. (2001), UK Gov. (2001), Lowry et al. (2002), Mulvihill et al. (2002), Graham (2003), Tien et al. (2003), Treadaway (2003), Rodi (2004).
4. Do all children of secondary school age have equal access to secondary schooling?	23 – 26.	Wasuka (1989), Glaser (1998), Haycock (1998), UNICEF (2000), Rodi et al., (2001), United Nations (2001), Brown (2003), MEHRD, (2004).
Conclusions and recommendations – prime social needs.	27 – 29.	

Tuckman (1999, 403) recommends that to maximise the neutrality of the interview method and the consistency of the findings, the researcher should follow an

interview schedule that allows the researcher to gather varying perspectives on the same topics by asking the same questions of different people. The researcher did this, and used an approach termed “partially structured interviews” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 221) in which the questions are chosen beforehand by the interviewer, but their order and substance are sometimes modified, and they may also be added to. According to Tuckman (1999, 405), this interview approach (in common with all interview approaches) has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths include making data collection somewhat systematic, facilitating the anticipation and closure of logical gaps in data, and the likelihood of interviews remaining fairly conversational. However, the flexible sequencing of questions may inadvertently omit important and salient topics, while modifying questions may reduce the comparability of responses.

Specifically, the researcher’s interview schedule consisted of 29 main questions (see Appendix G) which were designed to ascertain interviewees’ opinions. They were enhanced by the addition of open-ended and probing questions which clarified answers, gained more detail (Minichiello et al., 1996, 90) and generated new ideas. Thus, data was obtained that the questionnaire could not supply, data such as attitudes, interests, concerns and values (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 219). Though the interview did not cover the ground in quite the same order as the questionnaire, its questions were arranged in groups which largely corresponded to the research questions as shown by Figure 4.1 and Appendix C. The final three questions, Q.27-29 were intended to bring into focus the central point of the thesis – the relationship between the societal needs of the Solomon Islands and the secondary curriculum.

b) The sample

Two interviewees were selected to represent each of six secondary curriculum stakeholders groups, namely, government education administrators, private sector education administrators, secondary students, secondary teachers, parents of secondary school children, and business people. The interviewees included four females, nine males (the existence of a thirteenth interviewee is explained later), ten Solomon Islanders and three expatriates with ten or more years experience in the Solomon Islands. Apart from the students, the interviewees ranged in age from 35 to 65 years of age. One interviewee, although invited to participate as a parent, works in tertiary education, which may be considered to be a seventh stakeholder group. Six interviewees chosen for their membership of particular stakeholder groups, were also members of a second group (usually parents), and two interviewees even had previous experience of a third group. While it might be argued that interviewees' membership of more than one stakeholder group might skew the findings, in such a small community where families are often large, this was unavoidable. It may also be argued, that interviewees who are members of more than one stakeholder group view the curriculum from more than one perspective, and are thus more likely to be balanced in their opinions.

As the people in these different groups have experienced the secondary school curriculum from at least seven different perspectives, and include a range of ages, gender and origins, a reasonably representative picture of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum should emerge and provide a basis for interpreting it (Tuckman, 1999, 403).

c) Interview procedures

The interview questions developed by the researcher were first viewed by her supervisor and were deemed appropriate, and the interviews were carried out over a period of several weeks in August and September 2004. The twelve people chosen to represent the various stakeholder groups were approached individually by the researcher, and after a verbal explanation of what was involved, they all consented to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in private, one in a house, and the other eleven in private offices, either in the researcher's school, or at the interviewee's place of work. All interviewees were given a copy of the interview questions at least one day before the interview, and either beforehand or at the commencement of the interview, were also given a copy of the research information statement that included a consent form to sign. The prepared questions provided the framework for each interview, but the question order was sometimes varied to better suit the flow of the discussion. Also, the open-ended questions were sometimes modified and clarified to increase the accuracy and relevancy of interviewees' responses. The questions were also supplemented by probing questions, to give greater depth to the data, a technique suggested by Gay & Airasian (2000, 219). As the researcher knew most interviewees beforehand, the interviews were usually quite relaxed and conversational.

A few problems were experienced during some interviews. The interviews were all recorded on audiotape, but several interviewees had to be asked to speak up as they sometimes let their voices drop to a whisper, which meant that occasional phrases were lost. Several recordings picked up outside noise, and on two occasions this was so severe that the interviews had to be relocated. Phone calls also interrupted several interviews. This, plus the order of questions being modified

to suit the flow of discussion, resulted in a few questions being inadvertently omitted. When this was discovered, interviewees were contacted again to amend the omissions. The interview that took place in a house was interrupted by the interviewee's spouse. As the spouse was a member of the same stakeholder group as the interviewee, and he expressed a desire to share some opinions, he was invited to join in. Thus thirteen rather than twelve stakeholders took part in the interviews.

The researcher originally intended to supplement the audio recordings of interviews by taking brief notes, a procedure recommended by Minichiello et al. (1996, 100), who maintain that this tends to make the researcher listen more carefully and allows partial analysis to occur. However, in the event, brief notes were only taken of the final summary questions, because, as suggested by Gay and Airasian (2000, 222), the researcher found note-taking a distraction that interfered with the flow of the interview. The very brief additional sessions with interviewees were covered by note-taking. The recordings of the interviews were subsequently transcribed (see Appendix H for a sample transcript), and each interview took between one and two hours.

d) Ethical considerations

Confidentiality is a particularly important ethical consideration, thus no interviewee is identified by name (see Figure 4.2).

Several other procedures were followed to ensure confidentiality of interview data. The interview tapes, unless in use for transcription, were stored in a secure office at

the researcher's home. Transcribing the interviews was a very lengthy process, which necessitated hiring help. The two interviews that contained some slightly sensitive comments about individuals and institutions were two of the four interviews transcribed by the researcher herself, and she entered them into her personal desk-top computer in her home office. Three trained typists, working alone in private situations, transcribed the other eight interviews. None of the computers used were part of networks, and when the transcriptions were completed, they were stored on floppy disks, entered into the researcher's computer, then deleted from the typists' computers. The audiotapes, floppy disks and printed transcriptions were securely stored in the researcher's home office, and on completion of the thesis, the tapes and discs will be wiped clean, and the transcriptions shredded and burned.

e) Data analysis

The interview data has been analysed by grounded theory. One drawback of grounded theory is that it may not yield conclusions that are easily generalisable, (Taft, 1988, 62). However, this is not a problem if the researcher has no desire to generalise beyond the research setting (Gay & Airasian, 253), which was the case with this research, given the unique context of the phenomenon that has been studied.

The "coding" process is a way of rigorously and systematically analysing data, and is at the heart of grounded theory analysis (Babchuk, 1996, 6). A description of how this is done is important for establishing internal validity, and while there are

different types of coding, all forms of coding enhance internal validity (Pandit, 1996, 5).

The researcher analysed the data through open coding. Whereas open coding categories may be developed from the data itself, when particular aspects of a phenomenon are being explored the categories may be defined beforehand (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, 162; Gay & Airasian, 2000, 246), which was the case with this research.

The use of pre-defined coding categories has drawbacks. Gay and Airasian (2000, 244) warn that they may substantially increase the likelihood that researchers will overload and miss categories, and Glaser (1992, cited in Babchuk, 1996, 7) maintains that when researchers force data into a preconceived framework, they may miss its relevance and achieve full conceptual analysis at the expense of theory generation or development.

However, the researcher followed certain steps described by Gay and Airasian (2000, 246-7) to reduce these drawbacks. An important way of sharpening and validating the categories is to see whether one can classify all data pieces (segments of interview transcriptions) into the categories. Apart from instances where interviewees strayed off the topic or had misunderstood questions, data pieces fitted into the pre-defined categories very well. However, a few categories seemed overloaded, so were sub-divided, and a few others with very little in them, were collapsed into broader categories to avoid superficialities. No category needed elimination for lack of data pieces. Thus the categories were refined over time in an iterative process, which is held to be an important characteristic of

grounded theory coding (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 247; Pandit, 1996, 2). When the categories had been validated, and the transcriptions had been read carefully to see what each line, sentence and paragraph were about, the transcriptions were divided by hand into data pieces using a system of numbers and letters, that is, the transcriptions were coded. The data pieces were then copied and transferred into category databases. A few data pieces that were coded for more than one category, a likelihood mentioned by Bogdan and Biklen (1982, 169), were copied into each relevant database.

Thus the interview transcriptions were deconstructed into data pieces and then reconstructed into the meaningful and relevant data categories and patterns shown in Appendix I. These category databases then provided the raw material for the interpretation of interview data that follows.

2. Interview results

This thesis may be described as a study of a phenomenon (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 201 & 202). As such, the focus of the interpretation is on how individuals (the various stakeholders) experienced the given phenomenon (aspects of the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum) that forms the basis of the research questions. The main issue is to identify what is important in the data, why it is important, and what may be learned from it (Gay & Airasian, 2000, 251).

In the following discussion, the thirteen interviewees are referred to using the simple code shown in Figure 4.2. Also, names of people and institutions mentioned in interviews have been disguised to protect anonymity.

Figure 4.2

Interviewees' code

<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>Code</i>
Business person 1	BP1
The spouse of business person 1	BP1S
Business person 2	BP2
Government education administrator 1	GA1
Government education administrator 2	GA2
Parent 1	P1
Parent 2	P2
Private sector education administrator 1	PA1
Private sector education administrator 2	PA2
Student 1	S1
Student 2	S2
Teacher 1	T1
Teacher 2	T2

a) The number of curricula

The Solomon Islands is a small nation, but it has many cultural differences and strong rural-urban contrasts. Thus it is important to consider whether one or several different secondary curricula may best serve the needs of the nation.

(i) One national curriculum

Currently the Solomon Islands has just one national curriculum, and eleven interviewees believed that this should be the case. Their reasons varied, but a very important reason in this egalitarian society is its perceived fairness (P2), with everybody having “a chance to learn the same thing” (S2). This is now built into the latest MEHRD plans which call for a “basic education ... (where) more or less everyone does the same things up till Form 3” (GA2). It was also felt that one national curriculum would facilitate transfers between schools (S1, T1) and avoid confusion among students and teachers (T2). If there are different curricula at different levels, T1 questions, “Who will co-ordinate that?”, whereas at the moment,

“There’s a government there (that) has its own manpower to see that the curriculum is being taught, ... its being monitored”.

However, interviewees were not without reservations. These centred around the feeling that while the one national curriculum “caters for the main needs in the country” (PA2), it is also important to have some choices (PA2, BP2, GA1, GA2).

(ii) Provincial and/or school curricula

Interviewees felt that curricula set at either provincial or school level are generally undesirable. GA2 saw insufficient difference between Solomon Islands’ provinces to merit different curricula. S1 thought that, although provincial or school curricula might have merit at the local level, “If ... they (students) are planning to pursue education beyond the province then they would face some problems”, and T2 believed that different curricula could cause great confusion in exam setting. The existence of sufficient writing skills below government level was questioned. At the province level, “I don’t think we’ve got the skills in an individual province” (GA2). For school curricula, T2 did thought that schools with well-qualified staff might have the capacity to write good curricula, but she also felt that curricula produced by less-well qualified teachers, “Theirs’ won’t be as good”. T1 certainly believed that “Some people might just make up a curriculum that’s not really developed (sic) each child ... as a whole”, and both GA1 and PA1 believed that teachers are too fully occupied to find time to write their own curricula. GA1 also said that, “There is some evidence ... that ... teachers still don’t have that skill and confidence to be able to write their own curriculums”, which may be because “teachers don’t perceive themselves as curriculum designers ... they see their roles as

implementers” (GA1). Even if provinces and schools tried to write curricula, resources would be a problem because, “It’s hard enough to draw (sic) curriculum materials for the ... whole country in ... Honiara” (GA2).

It is quite clear that these opinions all support Brady’s (1995, 7) and Skilbeck’s (1994, 97) assertion that not all teachers or schools (or provinces in the Solomon Islands) have the skills, time or resources to develop their own curricula, and that one national curriculum may make the best use of the skills and resources available (Brady, 1995, 6).

(iii) Other Alternatives

1. The old two-tier system

An early alternative was the two overlapping national curricula (described in Chapter 1) proposed in 1975, in which the National Secondary Schools taught an academic curriculum and the Provincial Secondary Schools, starting in 1976, taught a more practical curriculum. “In those days I thought it was a good idea” (T1), and BP2 still thought it a good idea because the push-outs from Form 3 “learned some of these practical things” which enabled them to “do something for themselves”. However, the two types of schools with their different curricula created divisions. “One group was considered to be higher than the other” (GA2), the National Secondary School students saw themselves as “more brighter ... (and) more better (sic) than the others” (T1), and so it produced the thinking that “one is superior and the other one is inferior” (PA1). The early Provincial Secondary Schools were particularly unacceptable because their largely untrained teaching staff “didn’t have any skills to offer anything ... interesting for students” (PA2). There also was, and

still is, “The concept ... that white collar jobs are the best” (P1), meaning that parents believed that to be successful, their children had “to be a doctor or teacher or pilot or something like that” (P1), and that students perhaps see a practical education as condemning them to “working out in the sun ... (doing) dirty jobs and maybe (getting) less pay” (T2). Not surprisingly, “Everybody wants to be ... included in the ...same system” (PA1). Thus this system that divided students on the basis of exam results rather than choice threatened to divide society and reduced the chances of children receiving the training necessary to pursue their dreams and aspirations (Brown, 2003, 1). Since the 1990s, all secondary schools have followed the academic curriculum.

2. Modern academic and technical strands/courses

A similar idea has recently resurfaced as a policy (which is currently going through the MEHRD) that is proposing that all “secondary schools will offer a choice between a combined vocational (technical) course and a full academic course (for Forms 4 and 5)” (PA1). Most interviewees welcomed this proposal and P1, the lone dissenter of having one national curriculum, is particularly strongly in favour, believing that, “We definitely need a ... more practical-based curriculum and an academic curriculum for schools”.

But what course will students choose? Some interviewees believed that students will go for both choices (BP2, S2) and that students will “go into that (technical course) if (it) offers ... good practical subjects” (T1). S1 observed that:

Some students are not good at the academic and would like to give it up but at the moment there is no choice. ... Some Form 6 (students) really feel the

pressure of academic studies and wish they had had the chance to choose something more practical.

S1 believed that origins may guide choices; “Rural students ... are more likely to choose the technical stream than urban students, few of whom are interested in anything manual”. T2, however, suggested that as the white collar mentality is still strong, “We won’t let them (students) choose, we will chose for them ... because ... they’ll chose, then they’ll go and bomb out”. GA2 acknowledged that people are questioning, “Would everybody choose the academic stream and would the technical stream become second rate? Well, we don’t know the answer to that yet until it happens”.

PA 1 raised a significant problem that will have an important bearing on the successful implementation of this new policy; “It will be very expensive to run good vocational (technical) courses in all high schools because of all the equipment needed”. However, bringing more technical/vocational subjects into mainstream education should allow more young people to succeed in what they are good at, a policy now favoured in the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Government, 2001, 1).

3. Choices within the curriculum

While the two curriculum courses/strands offer alternatives, two interviewees would also like even more choices within the national curriculum, which reflects Brady’s (1995, 3) assertion that student needs can differ. GA1 would like:

... provisions within the curriculum so that teachers can ... teach, or extend, what is already there, so that it’s more specific to the situation ... in the schools. ... For example Agriculture is a subject offered at secondary school level.

... I'm not sure how the Honiara schools are doing it What do you do when you do not have a piece of land, if you do not have equipment?

He also suggested that coastal schools should study reef ecosystems while inland schools study a forest ecosystem.

PA2 would like to see schools being allowed to add to the curriculum, such as the topic Tourism, which he believes would be very relevant to Western Province. PA2 also explains how in the:

Church of Melanesia we have been thinking about at the higher level ... introducing (the) history of the church. ... Students who would like to take it, take it alongside ... the ... national curriculum, and we assess it separately and you get a certificate for that.

In summary, whilst there is overwhelming support for one national curriculum, there is also support for the development of academic and technical courses and more choices within it. These variations may help the national curriculum to serve local needs better, and may help avoid the conformity that Brown (2003, 2) sees as a possible danger of one state-controlled national curriculum.

b) Curriculum stakeholders

Brady and Kennedy (1999, 3) argue that a curriculum is a social and a personal construct, and this view is clearly supported by GA1 when he says:

There are people out there who we should consult, who we should involve in curriculum development. After all, whose curriculum is it? Solomon Islanders' curriculum! And if there are interested parties, we should listen to them. If they

have skills, let's identify their skills and involve (them) where appropriate.

PA 1 also believes that there should be “a wide range of input into the development of the curriculum”. Thus it is important to discover who should be consulted and whether they would be interested.

(i) Government education administrators

The Solomon Islands' government in the form of the MEHRD and its predecessors has been involved with secondary education for more than 30 years. All interviewees supported the continued involvement of government education administrators. This is because “they look after our education” (P1), “They are trained to write up the curriculum” (S2), they are responsible to see that the curriculum is being implemented (T1), and “they have the expertise and ... determine policies, what is acceptable, what is not” (PA2). However, GA 1 warned that they “should not be the only ones to develop the school curriculum”.

(ii) Teachers

All interviewees were in favour of teachers helping to construct the curriculum and not just because “this has been the system” (P2, PA 2). They recognised that teachers “have acquired some kind of training” (GA 1), and perceive teachers as having much knowledge (BP2), both from their past experiences (S1) and because their training has made them “experts in their subject area” (GA1). Thus teachers should “know what the students are needing to learn” (BP1) and “know what concepts to teach at what level” (P1). Also, if teachers are an active part of the curriculum process, “It gives them ownership of the material” (GA2). Additionally, teachers “are responsible to see that the curriculum is ... implemented” (T1), so if

they are involved in constructing it, “They feel that what they are teaching is what they want to teach” (GA2), they will understand it (GA1), interpret it correctly (T2), “Be able to use it without much difficulty” (GA1) and thus, “Be able to implement it more effectively” (P2, PA2). So teachers are seen as the interpreters and mediators of the curriculum (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6).

However, GA2 recognised that teachers don't have the expertise to do everything and BP1 asked, “Teachers know it all, do they?”. Teachers may also be narrow-minded (T1) and might favour their own preferences (GA1), which supports Brady and Kennedy's (1999, 6) warning of teachers being biased by their training. As materials will be “scrutinised by a panel of experts ... (as to their) ... suitability and relevancy” (GA1), these factors may not be a major problem. P1 believed that the curriculum needs to “open up to the wider world perspective”, and an important way of achieving this is to consult other members of the community, including those with international experience.

(iii) Expatriate consultants

The involvement of expatriate consultants is an important consideration in a less developed country like the Solomon Islands where, “We have depended on ... expatriates from overseas for the last 35 years to help us in our curriculum development” (GA1). All interviewees were in favour of continuing to involve expatriates, but some reservations were also expressed.

GA1 supported the involvement of expatriates and confessed that, “I'm not yet really convinced that we can develop materials on our own”, and GA2 added that

“there aren’t enough people properly trained in every subject to handle it (curriculum development)”. Thus there is room for well-qualified expatriates (PA1, T1) who can “give direction” (PA1), and perhaps “wording it (the curriculum), maybe they’ll put it in a more better (sic) way than the locals” (T2), remembering that English is a third language for most Solomon Islanders.

Expatriate consultants also bring with them useful knowledge. “They know what academic level the students need to be at if they are going to further their studies to universities overseas” (BP1). T1 believed that expatriate consultants “come with ideas ...(of) what is happening outside of the country”, and this is important because:

Our curriculum ... must not be only limited to the Solomon Islands. The curriculum should be looking outside ... because once the students get outside of the Solomons, then it’s important they are not out of touch with the rest of the world. (T1)

Also, P1 believed that it is important not to just focus “on something very local or national” because, “We’re a global village and we can’t have an inward focus”. Additionally, sometimes, “Syllabi don’t develop, don’t change, simply because everybody wants to do what they’ve always been doing, (so) people from overseas can give you a push ... (because) they stimulate people’s ideas” (GA2). Change is vital if the curriculum is not to become maladaptive and deter progress (Benjamin, 1939; Glaser, 1998, 7).

The reservations expressed are important to note. PA2 pointed out that there are now “a lot of qualified people in education”, and felt that “where we have local teachers who have the expertise in that area, ... we should make use of them”.

“Where the locals need help they (expatriates) can come, but they may not ... dominate it” (T2). One concern was that they may “put something in the curriculum that is not ... suitable for the culture of the country” (T2). So it is fine for expatriates to “come in (and) give their views, but it’s the people here who will make the last decision for everything, for they are the ones who are going to be affected by it” (S1). Thus it is better if expatriates are “advisors in the true sense of the word” (GA2).

Interviewees’ ideas about why students were more in favour of involving expatriates in curriculum development than teachers (revealed by the questionnaire), were enlightening. They felt that students perceived expatriates as “people with all the good ideas” (T1), that “they are more advanced than us in the Solomons” (S1) and that “they have a wider range of understanding of curriculum writing” (PA1). The preceding discussion lends some credence to these beliefs, but GA2 argues that this “great faith in expatriates (is a) hangover from colonialism”, which has led to the belief that “there’s a prestige in having ... something which comes from overseas”. GA2 also believed that, “An awful lot of students, if you really gave them a choice, would opt to go back to (the) Cambridge Overseas Certificate. Doesn’t that sound better? ... I suspect parents even more than students would choose the overseas course”.

The fact that teachers were less keen on involving expatriates may be because, “Teachers may think it’s their turf, ... (that) somebody’s coming to interfere with their ... particular areas of interest” (P1). However, P1, who has also been a teacher, was adamant that:

If I was a teacher, I would not have any problems with this. They are partners

.... . It's for the good of the curriculum of the country, having it grounded in the Solomon Islands' context, but... exposing (it to) the more international arena.

Thus expatriates are perceived to have an important, if circumscribed role in curriculum development in the Solomon Islands.

(iv) Students

The notion of student involvement in curriculum construction evoked a variety of reactions from interviewees. Some were positive, such as, "It would be nice if they can contribute" (BP2). PA1 thought that the contribution of senior students might be useful because they "have gone through the system and they have seen the advantages or disadvantages of certain subjects or teaching methods and so on". It was also realised that the students are at the receiving end of the curriculum (P2) and that, "If you teach something that they don't want, then you just wasted your time" (BP2). Their time might not have been wasted, but for a teacher interested in curriculum development it would be enlightening "to ask pupils whether they like the topics you are teaching here, and why they have to learn those topics" and to analyse their answers (GA1).

However, some reactions to student involvement were distinctly lukewarm. "I'm not too sure" (BP2), "That's a tricky one" (P1) and, "In some subjects ..., I think not in all subjects" (T1). S2's startled reaction to the idea, "No. Eh! ... They are the ones who should be learning from the curriculum", deserves an explanation. "I think you'll find in the Solomons, most students would say that ... that is something maybe they're not proficient in and they might want to leave it to the experts" (P1).

S1, a high-achieving student agreed.

I just take what comes We're not experts or like people who've gone through a lot. ... even now I'm in Form 6 ... I don't know what I'd put into the curriculum. ... I'm not too interested ... (and) I'm not too sure they're (other students) going to be too interested.

Thus the two students felt that they had neither the competence nor the interest necessary for involvement in curriculum development, and seem to confirm other interviewees' opinions that, "You wouldn't get a lot of them (students)" (PA1), and, "Initially if you ask them, they might sort of shy away" (P1).

So even though Brady and Kennedy (1999, 6&7) strongly recommend involving students in curriculum development it will take time and encouragement in the Solomon Islands, as interviewees comments suggest both a lack of confidence in students' ability to make worthwhile suggestions (P1, S2), and a lack of interest (PA1, P1, S1).

(v) *Parents*

The suggested involvement of parents in curriculum construction also brought mixed reactions. Some reactions were rather negative: "I haven't seen the need for parents being involved in knowing what the curriculum needs to be (BP1)", and, "Maybe it's a good idea ... (but) I don't (know) what they'll contribute (P2)."

However, other reactions were more positive: "It's good, you know, we are able to discuss with parents ... regarding what should be put in the curriculum" (GA1), because "they've gone through life, and they're experienced" (BP2). Parents may

also be able to spot things that are “deficient in the curriculum” and can give guidance in “those sensitive areas” which may involve “breaking customs” (P1).

Interviewees also disagreed about the level of interest of parents. Some believed that parents will be interested because, “They will be helping their kids” (BP2) and because, “Parents are becoming more concerned about the future of the children” (GA1). S1 was sure that parents who have “... faced ... kids being dropped off from Form 3 and being useless at home ... if they have little brothers and sisters coming up, they will be very interested”. So, “Those who are concerned about their children’s education” (T2) are likely to be interested, but these may be confined to the educated parents in town, and not even all of those (PA1, T2). Three interviewees seriously doubted the interest of village-based parents who they believed would say, “Well you people who know the curriculum, you do it, we don’t know anything about it” (P1) and may even avoid involvement “just in case they say or do something that might spoil it” (T1). These perceptions undoubtedly hold some truth. However, when GA2 recently talked to provincial village-based parents about vocational education he found “they were very keen to talk and tell us what they thought”, and felt that “there’s a lot of keenness to be involved if you ask”.

With problems in society now so obvious to all, perhaps the time is now right to make a greater effort to involve parents. P1 certainly would like to see curriculum developers conducting “a little research, focussing on parents” asking, “What would you like the schools to teach?” and believed that “parents can identify some areas” and in doing so, will be very helpful. If this is done, maybe more parents will have faith that the curriculum will help their children, which Brady and Kennedy (1999,5) suggest is a prerequisite for parents strongly supporting schools.

(vi) Business people

In general, interviewees were far more in favour of involving business people in curriculum development than they were of involving students or parents. Perhaps the strongest reason, cited by many, is that, “At the end of the day we’re looking to them to employ our students when they graduate” (T1). Not only is it perceived important for business people “to know what sort of students are we getting (sic) (and) what have they learnt in their curriculum” (T2), it is equally important for curriculum developers “to get to know what us business people would look for in a student when they come to be employed with us” (BP 1).

More specifically, it was felt advisable for curriculum developers to “listen to a broad spectrum of all business people” (BP1), because “they will be able to identify areas that need to be covered” (P1). They could also advise curriculum developers about “... what’s actually happening in the world. That’s a very important thing. It’s no good ... (us) thinking we’ve done the best, but when they (students) go and work, they’re all a failure in the workplace” (T1). So, “If the employers want certain skills ... we should be teaching them” (GA2), because at the end of the day, “We want to educate people who will go out and work, and they can work” (T1).

Whilst some interviewees were a little doubtful about the level of interest of business people in involvement, most felt that they would be interested, and BP2 was strongly of the opinion that, “We, as business people, should willingly do this, because we are helping our future”. The Manufacturers’ Association had recently been involved in discussions on the content of education offered by Rural Training

Centres (P1), and the manufacturers commented, “This is the first time we’ve ever been asked for what people should learn in schools” (GA2). Thus business people are interested in education. “That was very clear in our meeting and I’ve known that for a long time (GA2).”

Thus it seems that the business community of the Solomon Islands is willing to share their ideas with curriculum developers in order to provide students with what Brady and Kennedy (1999, 5 & 7) describe as the essential attitudes, knowledge and skills that will enable students to be productive workers.

In summary, it is fair to say that interviewees generally saw the wisdom of consulting all stakeholders about the secondary curriculum. PA1 believed that, “There should be a wide range of people to get ... information from”, and GA1 is particularly concerned to “consult Solomon Islanders wherever they may be”. If this is done, then the Solomon Islands may have the kind of participatory system recommended by the United Nations (2001, 2) that can produce a secondary curriculum that addresses societal needs.

c) The content of the curriculum

Benjamin (1939) describes how what is taught in schools may become just an academic exercise that is largely irrelevant to modern life. Thus stakeholders’ perceptions of the relevance of the content of the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum were sought in the interviews in order to discover how relevant the content is to modern life and what changes may be necessary.

(i) The range of subjects

It is important to consider what subjects should or should not be included in the Solomon Islands secondary curriculum (the subjects currently included in the curriculum are shown in Figure 1.7).

1. The need for the curriculum to be holistic

When interviewees were asked whether the curriculum should be holistic, their answers, containing words and phrases like, “Definitely” (PA1), “I totally agree” (P1), and, “The idea is excellent” (PA2), indicate a very strong agreement with the concept. GA1 believes that, “To develop a person’s intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual aspects ... it’s fundamental”. GA2 wanted to add “cultural (as) that’s the thing that everybody here wants”. BP1 also believed that holistic education would “benefit the community” because, “Like the physical and social side, if they don’t have that ... they’re a misfit in society”.

Spirituality, commented on by GA1, P1, S1 and S2, was the only aspect of holistic education singled out for special supportive comment. This indicates the strength of the perception that, “Here in Solomons we are spiritual people” (S2), and that, “... Solomon Islands is a Christian country and it should live by that name” (S1). So it was felt that, “The spiritual aspect of students is very, very important ... (as it) ... anchors them to some principles and behaviours they retain for their whole life” (P1). However, when GA1 said that, “I’m glad I went to a church school where I was able to learn ... values ... (which) reinforced what my parents were saying”, he implied that holistic education that includes the spiritual domain has not been a principle of all Solomon Islands’ schools, and the ensuing discussion indicates that

some other domains have not been well-attended to either. However, “the trend has changed”, and Ministry personnel are now saying to Mission schools, “We haven’t done that (practise holistic education), so we need to follow your pattern” (PA1). Thus the MEHRD (2004, 18) has now specifically acknowledged the need for “holistic education” in its latest proposals.

2. Music and Art

Music and Art are perhaps at the heart of what may be described as the aesthetic domain of holistic education, yet in a recent survey of secondary schools, “We haven’t found a single school (teaching Music or Art). It’s sad” (GA2). All interviewees expressed disapproval at this state of affairs. It means that although “Solomon Islanders are incredibly talented in Music and Art, they have no outlet” (GA2), and that they have fewer opportunities to develop “expression”, which BP1S considers an important life skill.

More specifically, interviewees considered that, “As music is part of (our) culture” (T2), the abilities to read and write music and play musical instruments are very desirable accomplishments (BP1, BP2, S1, S2). These abilities would help students get away from just being “copycats” because they will have “the skill to turn it (overseas music) into our own tunes” (S1). Also, at present, students “don’t know anything about the variety of music that ... exists in the world” (PA1), and T1 would like students to be able to “distinguish between good music and the one that just works on this heavy beats (sic)” (T1).

It is a similar situation with Art. “There are a lot of good artistic students ... (but) there’s no proper development or training for them ... so we just admire their natural talent, but that’s an end to it” (T1). Yet there are job opportunities available for those with artistic talent such as sign writing (T2), and BP 1 has been trying to locate someone “interested in learning the art of screen printing ... and I haven’t found anybody”.

It is enlightening to discover interviewees’ perceptions of why neither Music nor Art are taught. T1 considered the cost of materials a limiting factor, and with “either no facilities or resources to teach Creative Arts ... schools don’t seem to cater for this subject” (GA1). T2 and PA1 also blamed the lack of teachers. However, the strongest reason seems to be that Creative Arts is not examined (GA2). The fact that this has given it very low status is reflected in why teachers with the appropriate training are not teaching it.

We’ve trained dozens of teachers in Creative Arts. ... In nearly every school you’ll find two or three teachers who have been trained in Creative Arts and they’ve never had the opportunity to use it, ‘cause immediately they come into the school (the school says) “Oh, we’re short of an English teacher, we are short of a Social Studies teacher” ... and every Creative Arts teacher that’s been trained is teaching their second subject. (GA2)

Thus “there’s a lot of kids that have talent in those fields and they are being disadvantaged” (BP1), and there are students with “talents laying hidden ... (whose) lives are never really ignited” (PA2). Graham (2003, 1 & 2) points out how adolescent artistic developmental potential is often ignored or dismissed as

irrelevant resulting in an impoverished educational experience, and this seems to be the case in the Solomon Islands.

PA2 expressed surprise “that we never do anything about it”, but curriculum developers are now trying to breathe new life into this area. “That’s one of our emphases now” (GA1). Two suggested innovations may improve the situation. The first one is responding to parental requests to help preserve culture by incorporating dance and drama into Creative Arts (GA1). A second suggestion is a “modularised approach to testing” allied to new National Vocational Certificates, which could mean students getting “a certificate in guitar playing, or a certificate in drumming, or a certificate in traditional dancing ... why not?” (GA2). GA2 feels that, “The only possible way to get ... these subjects ... going (will be) to include them in the examining system”. These would seem to be two useful steps towards ending the neglect of this aesthetic domain.

3. Physical education

The questionnaire revealed an ambivalent attitude towards physical education, and interviewees’ comments explained this ambivalence.

While interviewees realised that holistic education includes the physical (S1, BP1), they pointed out that physical education is often narrowly perceived. “You can just put it on the timetable and you go out and play soccer once a week and they say it’s physical education” (GA2). Such an interpretation makes it easy to relegate physical education to students’ “free time” when “after work they can do their physical activity” (P2). Yet other interviewees pointed out that, “Physical education

is not going to the field to kick a ball around and play basketball ... and volleyball. Physical education is more than that" (PA2), and that, "If you're playing all the time in the same way ... then you are not getting any education from what you are doing" (S1). Perceived benefits of physical education included "callisthenics that will get their co-ordination going" (BP1S), "socialising and getting to know each other" (T1), "working together in teams" (PB1S), and also, being physically fit (P1) and mentally fit (S2). Despite these perceived benefits, as was pointed out in Chapter 3, physical education is not always taught in Forms 1 – 3 and is rarely taught in Forms 4 – 5. Hence, P1's statement that, "We need physical education and that's something missing ... in the curriculum".

Reasons for this lack are revealing. First of all, some schools "don't have the facilities" (S1). This could mean limited playing areas for some town schools, but it more especially means that schools "don't have ... (a) range of equipments (sic) ... (that would allow) a variety of activities" (PA2). Perhaps even more limiting is the fact that, "We don't have ... people ... who have majors in ... physical training" (P1). PA1 firmly believed that, "The teacher must be educated to teach physical education, ... he must know what to do, and there must be a proper syllabus". Lowry et al. (2001, 6) certainly indicate that more will be achieved by quality instruction. Unfortunately, "the college doesn't provide any physical education course" (PA1). Perhaps the worst obstacle to developing physical education is the fact that, "Anything that is not examined is not important in the eyes of students, parents, principals, everybody" (GA2), therefore physical education is often perceived as "a waste of time" (P1), because "it's taking up study time" (S2), and people would rather "use those times to do subjects that will be relevant" (T1).

This lack of physical education may be doing Solomon Islanders a great disservice. Students are coming “out of schools not realising the importance of exercise” (P1), and have learnt the negative message that physical education is not essential for a good lifestyle (Issues, 1994, 1). Students are also missing an opportunity to strengthen key areas of the brain (Jensen, 1998, 85), which is something that the extra study time is striving towards.

Two new developments may encourage the development of physical education as a curriculum subject. Firstly, there is a realisation that, “Nowadays, ... the games are big ... they can get money out of it” (BP2), and that “Soccer players ... (may) go to New Zealand or Australia or Fiji” (T1). Secondly and just as important, the Curriculum Development Centre “is going to, probably for the first time ... recruit somebody for this developing (of) a physical education syllabus Under this project we have provision to include physical education” (GA1). PA1 certainly believed that the nation needs a “clear physical education curriculum” and that until people are trained to teach it, “It won’t be taught properly”.

4. Computer studies

Computers are now such an important aspect of modern life that the inclusion of Computer Studies into the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum must be considered.

All interviewees recognised the value of computers. “Everything is done by computers” (S2), “Computers are a tool of these modern times” (P1), and “if you want to gain access to information from the outside, it’s good to know ... about

Internet, e-mail and what have you" (T2). Their importance for education was also recognised. In tertiary education, if students "have not touched a computer in their life ... it sets them back" (P1). "In school, upper level teachers require things to be typed" (PA1), and GA1 pointed out that access to the Internet will help students cope better with the increasing demands of school-based assessment especially where schools have no libraries. In the world of work, "The business world is going into computers ...(so we must) prepare our young people for that" (PA1) and BP1 and BP1S describe how in manufacturing industry, equipment like sewing machines, presses and lathes are now computer controlled. Also, there are "careers in IT" (S1), and people are now making money in "a lot of little businesses in town in computer training" (PA2). So computers are perceived as very important, though if Computer Studies is developed, the emphasis should be "more of using it (computers) rather than understanding" (P1).

Present and future developments will give impetus to the introduction of Computer Studies in schools. The MEHRD would like to "develop a project so that we can supply X number of computers per school" (GA1). However, "Our resources are limited ... (so) it's going to be a very big challenge" (GA1). A current development is the "PF net" that links e-mail to the Solomon Islands' VHF radio network. Thus even remote educational institutions that "have no telephone line ... (can) have e-mail by radio" (GA2).

Although BP2 expressed concern over the bad things that young people can learn on the Internet, the MEHRD (2004, 18) has stated that basic education should provide students with basic skills and competencies required for economic and

social development. Thus the addition of Computer Studies as a subject that can teach students “how to use the computer effectively” (GA1), is essential.

5. Additions and deletions

Interviewees suggested several other subjects in addition to Music, Art and Computer Studies that they would like to see added to the secondary curriculum.

One suggestion was that, “When it comes to the final year ... there should be a careers curriculum” (BP1), because “the kids don’t even know what they want to do” (BP1S). As an adjunct to this, BP1 described how, “I’ve offered my factory to the Home Economics teachers to bring their (students) ... to see how it works ... for those interested in a sewing skills job. ... I’m sure other business people would allow that too if it was scheduled.” However, short-term work experiences (experienced by neither student interviewee) are promoted by very few schools and are not necessarily seen as a beneficial aspect of a possible careers curriculum. “I can’t teach them what I’m doing in two weeks; my sort of skill takes two years” (BP1). Also, P2, an office worker who has observed students doing work experience says, “What do you expect them to know in two weeks?”. P1 would prefer to see work experience at the college level and a careers advisor in schools rather than a careers curriculum, which has been done in the past. It might be very beneficial to the secondary school curriculum and the economy of the Solomon Islands to conduct research into the feasibility and desirability of student work experiences in the context of careers education.

Other suggestions for new subjects include Pidgin Literacy (GA2), Cultural Studies (P1), Typing Skills to help with computers (P2), Tourism (PA2), and Languages such as Japanese and Chinese, as these are the languages of important trading partners (PA2). Also, "Health Studies is one thing that ... many people think we should do more of" (GA2).

However desirable and advisable new subjects are, "The problem is trying to fit them in ... a tight timetable" (PA1). GA2, who would like to see "all sorts of things" added, may have the answer.

The only way is to break it down into small units and do a modularised approach. ... That kind of approach can be done to include some of these things without too much pressure on the timetable. So given that, then there's lots and lots of subjects I think we can probably put in.

A modularised approach may be the only way to make room for new subjects as no-one wanted to drop any subjects. "I don't think there's anything in the curriculum that's useless" (GA2). "The broader the base in our curriculum, I think it will be more beneficial to them (T1)." Also, PA2 observed that, "Once we have something, (we) get used to it and it's difficult to drop". But PA2 would also like to "widen choices and (then) ... we will see any areas where they can't survive, they will just have a natural death and that's it".

Thus new subjects are desirable, but a radical change in timetabling may be necessary if they are going to be fitted into the curriculum.

(ii) The contents of subjects in the curriculum

A curriculum may appear holistic in terms of the subjects offered. However, just as important is the content of subjects, that is, the appropriateness to the local context of the knowledge and skills that they offer.

1. The perceived helpfulness of core subjects versus the electives

An area of concern since “Education for What” (Bugotu et al., 1973) has been the balance (or imbalance) between academic subjects, which have become the core subjects, and the more practical subjects, which have become the elective subjects (see Figure 1.7). The questionnaire revealed that students and teachers consider the practical electives more helpful to life in the Solomon Islands. Interviewees were not surprised to hear this and explained why. “These are ... the very skills that youngsters need to cope with the challenges that they are going to be faced with in the village” (GA1), and BP1, GA1 and P2 all used the term “life skills” in their answers. Urban Solomon Islanders need the skills from the practical subjects too, because “if anything happens, you’re back in your village” (T2). Thus most people understand the importance of learning practical skills through the elective subjects.

2. The high status of knowledge versus practical skills

However, “If you look at the ... selection of subjects in the secondary school ... you would find that those (elective) subjects are the last ... one(s) to be chosen” (PA2). This section explains how this situation has come about, its consequences, and suggests possible remedies.

Attitudes to knowledge and practical skills.

Knowledge is highly valued in the Solomon Islands. Some understanding of why this is so is important for the generation of appropriate changes in the curriculum.

Perhaps the strongest factor giving high status to knowledge in the Solomon Islands is the “white collar mentality” mentioned earlier, which means that “parents (and students) look down on ... practical school subjects” (PA1) even though they provide “life skills”. Following the same thinking, “The national curriculum ...(also) ... has a lot of emphasis on knowledge” (GA1) and whilst “there is some practical stuff, ... most of the time it’s with knowledge and learning” (S1). Thus knowledge, particularly through academic subjects, has become the focus of the curriculum.

The attitude to knowledge itself has caused additional problems.

The attitude of many Solomon Islanders is that education is about the transferring of knowledge ... and people don’t see education as the transfer of skills or the learning of skills, and therefore they feel it’s the theory that counts, and I think most teachers would probably feel that if the student learns the theory ... without actually practising it, that’s okay. (GA2)

That this is “an attitude to education that needs changing” (GA2) is shown by a description of its consequences.

Consequences

The consequences are many and far-reaching. To begin with, PA2 believed that “students ... are so geared towards developing the academic that they don’t use their hands and so they become lazy”.

Another consequence is that, “The vast majority of students will tell you that ... the practical subjects are taught mainly in theory”, and that, “Even the teachers will admit this” (GA2). GA1 knows that:

There are ... teachers who are ... teaching Agriculture as an academic subject. ... The teacher spends most of the time in front of the blackboard and writes notes after notes, ... but (they) do not have a poultry farm, (they) do not have a vegetable garden.

This has resulted in students who have studied the practical subjects but who still have few practical skills. BP2 finds that when high school students come to her business, “I ask them to do something (and they reply) ‘We don’t know’”, while BP1 complains that students “can’t even read ... a simple tape measure”.

A similar situation exists with the academic subjects.

If there is a teacher who doesn’t ... do a lot of experiments ... (in Science), (and) spends most of the time writing notes for the students, then ... they’re not going to learn the scientific skills, (nor) the mathematical skills or the skills in English. (GA1)

According to GA2, there are such teachers. This means that there are “people who have a lot of knowledge ... but they have no skills ... of any kind. So what can they do with all this knowledge? Not very much really” (GA2). This is illustrated by the story of an educated urbanite who because of redundancy, “Went back to the village, he just stays in the house, can’t even go to the garden and work and feed the family and even build a house” (T2). Furthermore, during the “social unrest, ... people with academic background(s) ... could not carry on working, whereas

people with practical skills continued to work ... and were able to earn some money (PA2).

People also seem unable to apply their knowledge. PA2 described how some new university graduates have been complaining, “Our government is not giving us any jobs.’ ... I was very happy with somebody (who) spoke out ... in the paper saying, ‘Well you (have) got the knowledge, ... look at using that knowledge’” (PA2).

Perhaps they did not learn in school how to apply their knowledge.

With perhaps 2% of the population achieving an academic career (PB1S) and about 80% of school leavers unemployed (GA2), “We’ve got some very ... unhappy people out there who can’t be employed or who can’t fit into the society; they see themselves as failures” (P1) and just “roam around town” (PA1). This unhappy scenario harks back to Brown’s (2003, 3) comment about education not necessarily solving misery, and illustrates how traditional knowledge-based education is no longer appropriate (UNESCO, 2000, 14).

Changing the attitudes

Lovat and Smith (1995, 11) believe that high unemployment should generate concern about what education is doing, and interviewees were concerned. GA1 believed that Solomon Islanders will “have to change ... (their) whole attitude of what education is for, what it’s all about, and that’s not easy”. Perhaps not, but interviewees have seen that attitudes are changing. The white collar mentality, “It’s starting to die” (T1), and “the country is starting to recognise ... the fact that, in order to survive .. you need ... to develop some skills in life” (PA1). PA1 believed

that “it will take a while”, but people are starting to see that “there is a demand for practical skilled people” (T2) and that “while a scientist is roaming around the street, ... you do business, you become an agriculturalist, have your hands dirty ... and you can earn your living” (T2). Some students are also now wisely looking at “what is available on the job market” (T1), and “nowadays you find that (some) boys, they do go and take Home Economics and (some) girls are taking ... Industrial Arts” (T1).

Whilst this shift in attitudes is very much a step in the right direction, it needs further encouragement from the curriculum. Remedies to the over-emphasis of knowledge include increasing the teaching of practical skills (BP2, GA2), particularly so students will have “some sort of practical skills they can use if they don’t end up in paid employment” (GA2). This should help the curriculum move away from producing students who merely amass facts, a danger of traditional knowledge-based curricula (UNESCO, 2000, 14), towards producing people “who should be equipped with knowledge and skills and also be able to apply it to their situation” (GA1). But curriculum developers must also be aware that:

There’s a great danger in what we are doing at the moment, of moving to a curriculum which is too much based on practical skills. Maybe that was another problem with “Education for What”, ... there wasn’t enough ... input from other aspects of the curriculum. (GA2)

Thus the new curriculum needs to be carefully balanced (PA2, S1, GA1).

Some change in syllabi content may be helpful, but GA2 observed that the Agriculture and Industrial Arts syllabi are already entirely based on practical

projects, so unless teachers change their teaching methods, “They would still be doing the theory because that’s what they believe in”. In order to teach practical skills effectively, GA2 suggested learning from Rural Training Centre X, which is practising “Learning by Doing” with very noticeable success. However, many secondary schools are at present handicapped in this respect because they have “no tools and equipment, not enough time to do the practical, ... no space, ... no proper workshop and teachers who are not well qualified” GA2). Thus, changes in budget, space and time allocations, and teacher training are needed. All these things are necessary if the MEHRD (2004, 14) is to achieve its stated aim of assisting students to apply knowledge to everyday life.

3. Knowledge and Skills for Form 6

To continue on and be successful in Forms 6 and 7 (which use regional curricula), students need a good foundation from the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum both in terms of knowledge and skills.

With the strong emphasis on knowledge in the secondary curriculum, it would be rather surprising if there were a problem in this area. The general feeling among interviewees was that students “are adequately prepared” (PA2) for the South Pacific Board of Educational Assessment curriculum, and S1 believed that the secondary curriculum did “give me a good background knowledge about what I am having now in Form 6”. However, students who go on to do University of the South Pacific courses, “They struggle a bit”, because the Solomon Islands and USP syllabi do not link very well (P1). Also, the USP courses are seen as very academic (T1) and as “it’s the only university we have around us” (T1), this may make it for

difficult for the Solomon Islands to move away from their very academic knowledge-based curriculum.

P1's comments also suggest some mis-alignment between the secondary school curriculum and Form 6 courses. In a Principal's meeting in June 20004, some principals commented on "a need to align the Form 5 topics with the Form 6" (GA1). PA1 believed that "there was a gap ... but I think over the years teachers ... have seen the gap and ... (have) narrowed the gap". However, in some subjects that have not been reviewed since 1985, GA1 conceded that, "There is a need to bridge the gap".

So the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum generally provides an adequate knowledge base for further study, but skills are a different matter as might be expected from the previous descriptions of how teachers teach. GA2, also a teacher, said that, "I am not horrified by the lack of knowledge or skills in Form 6", but conceded that he tells Form 6 students that, "This is where you change from being ... a spoon-fed teacher-centred kind of student ... to ... being somebody who learns on your own". This will be very difficult for the students who "have not (previously) grasped the fundamental skills (necessary) to become independent learners" (GA1).

Interviewees shared several examples of inadequate skills development in Forms 1 – 5. BP1 and BP1S have observed that calculating and mental arithmetic skills are weak in school leavers. GA 1 said that, "By the end of Form 3 ... I'd like students to be able to light a Bunsen burner, you know, basic skills. ... I've heard stories that even in Form 6 there are students not able to learn (practise?) those

basic skills". This is not surprising if Science teachers only teach the theory. GA2 described how after six months in Form 6 (and 5 years of the secondary school curriculum) some students "still put China in Africa". GA2 also admitted that, "We can probably do a bit more literature skills in English Some schools do it and some don't. It varies a lot according to the teacher".

The ability to research is a vital skill for Form 6 internal assessments. However, it was clear from S1 and S2, that while they did a Science project for their Form 5 SISC exam, they had had very few opportunities to learn and practise research skills lower down the school – "You are not given a very good background knowledge on how to research" (S1). Surprisingly, in view of the proposed introduction of internal assessment in the Form 3 exam and its expansion in the Form 5 SISC, GA2 said of research skills, "I wouldn't expect them (students) to know that, and that's why we teach them in Form 6". Perhaps one reason that GA2 has to explain to Form 6 that, "This is the most difficult year of your life in education" is because they are attempting it without having all the skills they need. T2 certainly believed that the secondary curriculum should encourage the development of research skills, but also realised that if they are not explicitly mentioned in subject syllabi, then "maybe they (will) overlook the research part of it".

To summarise, students "do learn some skills ... if they are taught properly" (GA2). However, "It depends on teachers' teaching a lot. ... The curriculum does provide them (skills), but many times teachers ... think this skill will take more of my time to do, (so) that's where the problem comes into it" (T1). Thus students do not enter

Form 6 with all the academic skills they need, but the reason may be as much to do with teaching methods as to do with subject syllabi.

4. Competency skills

Schooling should prepare workers for the 21st century by teaching competency skills necessary for industry and commerce (Grubb, 1996, 1; Brown, 2003, 3).

These skills include communicating, problem-solving, decision-making and negotiating (MEHRD, 2004, 18; Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 4; Gray, 1998, 3; Tien et al., 2003, 3). Interviewees were asked whether they thought the secondary curriculum should develop these skills in students and whether it does.

In general, interviewees were unanimous in seeing the need to develop these skills in students. “Every one that you’ve mentioned, yes.” (BP1). They are needed (BP1S, PA1) and “they are important skills that ... should be encouraged and students should have them” (PA2). However, when asked whether the curriculum helped develop these skills, T2 said, “I don’t think it does”, while PA2 said, “I haven’t really seen a lot myself ... but ... it is (an) appealing idea and something that should be encouraged”.

Communication

Communication needs to be considered from two points of view – communication skills in general, and the language of communication.

Interviewees were clear on the need for good communication skills. “They are needed by everybody aren’t they?” (GA2). P2 observed that when members of the

business community “are doing an interview, they have to know that this person can communicate with them”. PA1 viewed communication skills from a different perspective, believing that they are particularly important for helping people with problems because, “If you don’t know the skill of communication, you won’t be as tactful as somebody who knows how to use words”.

Interviewees’ comments, however, revealed that communication skills are not what they need to be. Generally, BP2 thought that, “Sometimes we don’t communicate well and ... we don’t understand each other”. Listening is an important communication skill, but S1 recalled how, “Listening was a skill that had to come by itself. ... Students concentrate on what the teacher is writing and copy it down, they don’t really listen. I didn’t really learn to listen until I got into Form 6.” In view of these problems, it is not surprising that the current curriculum is seen as developing communication skills only “to some extent” (GA1) and that, “It does help us (develop communication skills) but not like very effectively” (S1).

The language of communication is a vital consideration. The ability to communicate in English is seen as particularly important. S1 believed that for Form 6 students, “When someone ... talks to you in English, ... you shouldn’t be ... not knowing what to say”. BP1S saw poor English skills as a great handicap if people are going to run their own business; “If they are dealing with Australia, New Zealand and Singapore” – which many Solomon Islands’ manufacturers and retailers do – “then they have to have ... perfect English to be able to talk to them”. Poor English skills are also a handicap for further education overseas (BP1).

However, while students “are a bit confident when speaking in Pidgin” (S2), and may “get practice speaking when you answer teachers’ questions” (S1), there is “a nervousness about speaking English” (GA2) which means that many students speak English “very little, and maybe none at all” (T2). Perhaps the main reason for this is explained by GA2.

The way you teach English is largely up to each individual teacher. ... Some teachers do discussion and group work and get people to do debates and public speaking. ... Most teachers just follow the textbook, do a comprehension one day, and a cloze passage the next day, and writing an essay on the next day. G2 also said that the current English syllabus does not suggest methodology. Although “it does include speaking skills”, listening skills “die away after the Junior Forms” (T2). An additional problem is that English exams concentrate on grammar (GA2), giving teachers little incentive to develop English communication skills. However, “There’s a new draft (English syllabus) ... which may be moving further towards actually suggesting methods” (GA2). This would seem to be a move in the right direction.

To compound this language issue, GA2 said:

I would like to see Pidgin used in school ... because communication here is Pidgin, it’s never going to be through English I don’t think. ... If you’re really serious about talking communication skills, ... then it’s got to be communication skills for the vast majority of the people.

This is an understandable, if controversial view. However, GA1 pointed out that currently “every printed matter is in English”. He also said that, “The printed matter ... that will be developed under this project and the material in the future will still be

in English” and he “cannot imagine learning new concepts without ... understanding English”. Furthermore, the MEHRD is proposing a policy that English be the medium of instruction from Standard 3 upwards (GA1). However, while “teachers will be encouraged to speak in English”, GA1 knows that at present “a lot of teachers are speaking in Pidgin (in the classroom)”.

Whilst this confused situation may still produce students with reasonable reading and writing skills, listening and speaking skills are likely to remain a problem. Consequently, GA1 sees language “as a barrier to learning in Solomon Islands”. It certainly seems to be a barrier to developing good communication skills.

Problem-solving, negotiating and decision-making

In general, interviewees believed that, “All these skills are needed because more and more people are ... being placed in the situation now where they need this (these)” (P1). The skills were seen as particularly useful both in the business world (PA1) and in education, where GA1 sees the development of skills as a means of weaning students off being “spoon-fed all the time” and becoming, “Independent learners” instead. T1 also regarded these as important social skills, very necessary in places like school Y where, “We almost have all the people from different provinces work(ing) here”.

More specifically, T1 pointed out how traditional culture did not encourage important *decision-making* on an individual basis; “What is taboo is basically taboo” and “everything must be done for the best of the community rather than (for) an individual”. For P1, this meant, “I was not really prepared to make my own

decisions” when he went overseas for further education. However, “Modern life ... is very complicated now” (PA1) and the society “quickly copies and adopts things as changes ... without much decision-making” (T1). Also, people “only see the immediate benefit they can get now, and they don’t see whether ... (their) decisions will affect others” (T1). Thus it is important for “students ... to know these things when they’re still young”, but the curriculum is not transmitting them effectively (S1). Perhaps this is because the curriculum “never really encourages our young people to look at an issue and discuss it openly ..., look at all the advantages and disadvantages, then from there you make a correct decision” (T1).

Problem-solving was seen as very necessary, because modern life brings more problems to solve now than in the past (T2, S2) and because people need “to learn how to solve problems rather than getting upset and beating another person” (T1). GA1 was firmly of the opinion that, “We need to ... encourage our youngsters to become good problem-solvers”. The fact that BP1, in her workplace, has observed that young people, “They don’t know how to solve a problem”, suggests that the curriculum has not been helping them. GA2 believed that, “Problem-solving should be part of every syllabus”, but also explained that:

If the syllabuses we have are taught in the way they are meant to be taught, I think we have a lot of problem-solving, but the problem is they are not. ... It goes back to the attitude, doesn’t it, that we’re not there to help students solve problems, or get their own ideas, we’re there to tell them facts and get them to learn it (them).

Negotiating is seen as another desirable skill as, “We need to negotiate with all these Aid donors” (S2), “Negotiate for land, for places for a house” (T2), and most

importantly given the recent ethnic problems, “Negotiate issues ... before it (they) blow up” (P1). However, “A lot of us don’t have it (negotiating skills) because I don’t think we’ve been introduced to the methods” (P1). Interestingly, GA2 confessed, “How to negotiate; I’m not quite sure whether it comes in (the curriculum), or even how you would (include it)”. That the researcher was able to suggest how the development of negotiating skills could be encouraged in the particular Social Studies unit that was being talked about implies that syllabus writers might not have thought of including the development of negotiating skills in syllabus content. GA1 believed that curriculum subjects could include case studies that should help students develop appropriate methods of solving disputes, and that “we can strengthen that aspect of the curriculum”.

It seems then that the curriculum could be helping students develop competency skills, and the fact that it is not effectively doing so at present may be partly due to the overemphasis on knowledge transmission.

5. Values

Downs Perry (1994, 96) claims that all healthy societies pass on their values and moral traditions to the next generation, but is the secondary school curriculum playing its part in this transmission?

The need for values and their teaching

All interviewees saw values development of students as vital for the Solomon Islands. GA1 said that, “Values education, it’s fundamental, and I’m a great believer, if we are to change this country, we have to focus on the attitudes of

students and behaviours". GA2 went even farther and argued that values, moral and spiritual development are:

More important than anything else ... (because) that's what's going to determine the nature of society. ... You can have people who can do brilliantly at academic subjects or ... any other part of the curriculum, but if they go out and they are selfish and ... they are dishonest ... displaying all the wrong values, then we'll have a bad society.

Interviewees saw evidence of a lack of values everywhere. "In the home, ... in school, probably in church too, there's a breakdown in the emphasis of moral values, (and) spiritual development (PA1)." T1 mentioned the careless attitude to the environment evidenced by much rubbish, S2 cited criminal activities and the rising crime rate, while BP1 and BP1S have observed lack of respect amongst employees in their workplace and think that "a lot of that (respect) went out of the door with the tension and we're having to rebuild it up again" (BP1). In a later section discussing current societal needs, interviewees become even more specific about the values most needed in the Solomon Islands.

Should values development be a part of the curriculum? T1 believe that "the developing of a value system, it's very important in all levels of education", and saw "high school, where they become more logic(al) and reasoning" as a very appropriate place for it. A great deal of literature agrees with him (Kohlberg, cited in Dudley, 1999, 16; Lovat & Smith, 1995, 13; Nanzhao, 1996, 244; Sommers, 1998, 2; Williams, 2000, 1; Brown, 2003, 3).

However, interviewees generally agreed that the curriculum has been “attempting to (develop values) but not doing a good job of it” (P1). There are several reasons for this. Values may not be there in syllabi content. GA2 knew that values development is included in one unit in Social Studies, but admitted that there’s “not nearly enough” in the rest of the Social Studies syllabus. T1 described seeing some curriculum material developed overseas where “the values are coming out clear(ly) ... (but) in the objectives with our current curriculum system, I don’t see it”. Thus it is not surprising that T2 felt that the curriculum “gives you the content”, but whether or not values are brought out “depends on the teacher”. T1 agreed, and said that teachers’ main interest was “coming to deliver our content. ... We are just basically gearing to pass students (through the examinations) and we think that’s the most important thing”. So teachers “don’t worry about the other stuff (and) won’t get (values) across in their teaching” (T2). This shows, “As far as the teachers are concerned, ... a lack of seriousness” (PA1) about teaching values.

It was generally felt, however, that Mission schools are far more likely to attempt values development than secular schools, where it may be “treated very lightly” (P1). P1 explained that, “One of the reasons why I chose to put my kids (in) ... church schools. ... They ... helped me develop ... what I believe in and how I conduct myself”.

GA1 explained how values education could be improved. In the curriculum development now taking place, “We want to integrate values education where it is appropriate”, and he believed that, “You can teach values education in every subject”. GA2 however, pointed out that values may be even better taught by “the whole way a school is run, and ... the way the teachers live, especially in boarding

school". PA1 strongly agreed and complained that, "We are not modelling enough to consolidate what we ... say to students".

So it seems that, to the detriment of society, the teaching of values has largely been left to chance, a problem that UNESCO (2000, 14) has observed elsewhere.

Values, spirituality and the teaching of Bible subjects

The search for values is an integral aspect of spirituality, and P1 saw "the spiritual aspect of students (as) very important (because) it anchors them to ... principles and behaviours that they retain for their whole life". Both Kessler, (2000) and UNESCO (2000, 14) agree with him. GA1, S1 and S2 all see the Solomon Islands as a Christian country, so the Forms 1 – 3 subject Christian Education, and the Forms 4 – 5 elective subject New Testament Studies (which BP2 and GA1 would like to see become compulsory), are obvious avenues for developing both values and spirituality. GA1 certainly communicated this to the Christian Education panel of curriculum developers in the June 2004 curriculum workshop.

Engebretson (2003, 9) believes that religious educators must help students to interrogate the mindset of their own generation as a means of developing values. However, while GA2 believed that the current Christian Education syllabus is "a good course" that was written from the point of view of values development, PA1, a former Bible subjects teacher, believed that, "The curriculum just teaches (the) Bible as stories" with "very little emphasis on moral values and spirituality". GA1 would like to reform both the Christian Education and New Testament Studies syllabi, and explained that, "It's good to learn about what happened when Jesus

Christ was alive. ... (But) teaching Christian principles in the Solomon Islands' context is to me far more important". An additional problem is that "unless the teacher is conscious about the importance of spiritual and moral values, he won't do it" (PA1). This is very likely in schools where teachers of "Bible classes and New Testament Studies aren't really religious instructors ... and so the approach they use is more telling the stories rather than ... searching out the values" (P1).

The United Nations (2001, 2) believes that governments have a major responsibility to design school curricula that support values transmission, and the Solomon Islands now apparently agrees with them (Rodi et al., 2001, 13; MEHRD, 2004, 18). If values are clearly there in new syllabi objectives and student outcome statements, then, "Maybe if it's written, they (teachers) will do it" (T2).

6. Solomon Islands information

As curriculum can create reality for learners because it is selective (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 12), it may be considered advisable to ground that reality in the local context. Thus interviewees were asked about the desirability of learning about the culture, history and geography of the Solomon Islands.

Culture

Interviewees had several good reasons for agreeing with Nanzhao (1996, 239) who states that culture is an essential part of the curriculum. GA2 spoke for several interviewees when he explained that, "Much ... culture is being lost and we're all being Westernised", while PA1 saw indigenous culture as being thought of as "second rate". Many children who "grow up in town don't know their culture" (P2),

and this is a problem because, “When they go back to the village, they don’t fit in” (T1) and “you may show disrespect but will not be aware of what you’re doing” (S1). This suggests some alienation from their cultural world, a danger warned of by Disla (2000, 2). The loss of culture was also equated with a loss of identity (GA2, PA1, S1), as culture “makes us into Solomon Islanders, or Malaitans, or whoever we are” (GA1). So without knowledge of your culture, “You don’t have a base, ... you don’t really know what being a Solomon Islander is really like” (S1). But it is also important to learn about the cultures of other Solomon Islanders because of increasing intermarriage (BP1), and as GA1 said, “If I was sent to Z Province, ... how would I know about the protocols there, ... how I should behave?”. Perhaps worst of all, P1 perceived the loss of custom as the reason why “the (previously) strong customs of each culture ... (were) not able to resolve some of these issues” that were involved in the recent social unrest.

If interviewees were united in their desire to include culture in the curriculum, they were divided about the efficacy of the present curriculum in transmitting it. PA2 believed that it has been doing well enough, GA2 thought that there is more culture in the curriculum than people realise, GA1 awarded the curriculum a 40% mark, S1 says it teaches culture a little bit, and P1 believed that the teaching of culture is “deficient in the curriculum of Solomon Islands”. These varied opinions suggest that the curriculum is not the efficient cultural transmitter that Nanzhao (1996, 239) argues it should be.

To improve the curriculum’s record, GA1 would like “to emphasise culture in our formal school curriculum”. He would also like to “incorporate dance and drama ... (into) the Arts and culture subject”, and by finding the meanings behind the dance

and music, students will learn about other provinces. There will be problems however. PA1 believed that, “As far as our church is concerned, I think there are some things in culture that is better kept out”. Also, while rural Community High Schools can invite local people to talk about specific customs in that area (GA2), overall, the Solomon Islands has many cultures, “So I don’t know how you’ll put them all in” (T1) and, “Which ones would they teach?” (P2).

Clearly, much work remains to be done if the curriculum is going to help students to explore and respect their traditional culture as desired by the MEHRD (2004, 14).

History

All interviewees believed that it is important for Solomon Islands’ students to learn about the history of Solomon Islands. They believed that history “is to do with identity” (GA1) and that, “If you learn about Solomon Islands’ history, it links with knowing culture. ... (so) you are very grounded and know who you are” (S1). “As a nation we should know how we came about, and the struggles this nation went through”, and this might help Solomon Islanders “to be a little more committed to the development of this country” (P1). “We can only learn from our history ... our failures and our strengths” (T1), and it is particularly “important to look at our own mistakes because we made them and should learn from them” (S1).

Thus the importance of history is clear, and while GA2 thought that the curriculum taught enough of it, others disagreed. S1’s comment was very enlightening:

Most Solomon Islanders don’t know a lot of their history, about colonialism etc.

It is taught in the curriculum just as another thing to help you get to the next

level of education, but it's not taught as an important topic. I don't know much about my own history. ... I know more about the Cold War.

One reason for this lack may be that students do not have easy access to information about their history (GA2), but there seems a clear need for students to learn about their history more effectively.

Geography

Interviewees also perceived a need for students to learn about the geography of the Solomon Islands, "Especially the physical geography ... (as) we've got a lot of interesting features" (GA1). It was also felt that, "We are in the Solomon Islands and should know" (T2), and that we should perhaps, "Learn about ourselves before we learn about other things" (S2). Whilst S1 felt that the curriculum had taught him enough Solomon Islands' geography, S2, taught by a different Social Studies teacher, could not remember learning any Solomon Islands' geography. Thus the perception that the local geography component of the curriculum is inadequate (GA1, PA1, PA2) is probably correct, and that students may "know where the islands are, but ... not ... the features and the landforms, not the skills part of it" (PA2). A major reason for this deficiency may be the lack of "any good text books that could help students to do it" (PA2), and GA2 explained that, "The idea was to write a physical geography of Solomon Islands for the Form 2 (Social Studies) course (but) it was never done".

To amend these deficiencies, GA1 would like to "restructure the Social Studies syllabus so that you can have aspects of human geography, history and physical geography".

7. The Pacific and other cultures/countries

Many interviewees felt that it is good to know your neighbours (P2, PA1) because “they impact on us” (PA2) and that doing so would help to unite the Pacific as a group of nations (PA1). BP2 and P1 both pointed out that Solomon Islanders will increasingly travel, and P1 believed that, “We need to know the rest of the world”, because “more and more (we) need to deal with people from outside, and understanding them is important”. In opposition to these ideas is GA2’s belief that, Solomon Islanders can be very parochial and that, “A lot of teachers would throw out everything (that is not about the Solomon Islands and would say), ... ‘Don’t learn from overseas at all’”. S1 sympathised with this view and said that, “If we are looking at their way of life, their culture, then we are not concentrating on ours which is slowly dying awayWe need to ... concentrate on ours and keep it (alive)”.

Perhaps the best idea is the balance advocated by GA1 and PA2. GA2 “would hate to think that we only learn about ourselves”, and he went on to point out that with:

Globalisation and all the rest of it, the whole world is now one place. ... The World Trade Organisation ... is going to have a profound effect on what’s happening in the Solomons ... (and we cannot) all fit into our little boxes and ignore the rest of the world.

As McCarthy et al. (2003, 4) pointed out, globalisation is transforming life around the world, and it would be wise if the curriculum helped students make sense of those changes that will inevitably affect them.

8. Irrelevancies

It is important to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to modern life (Benjamin, 1939) and with educational reform being increasingly internationalised, this should include the contextual relevance of curriculum material coming in from overseas (Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 8). Thus interviewees were asked about any perceived irrelevancies in the Solomon Islands curriculum. Their responses varied.

P2 said, “I don’t think I have seen anything in particular. ... I’m a strong believer that anything we learn is really useful”. P1 also thought that everything is relevant and that “it’s just a matter of the way people apply the knowledge”. BP2 said, “I’ve never heard ... students complain about that”, but other interviewees have.

The topic criticised by questionnaire respondents was the Cold War (in Social Studies), and in a recent Form 6 exercise conducted by GA2, “A surprising number of students mentioned the Cold War” as irrelevant. However, interviewees would not evict this topic in its entirety. S1 saw the Cold War’s relevance in terms of learning about mistakes. T1 believed that such history “helps a lot with making your own decisions”. P1 perceived a “need to study some of that to understand why we should not have wars, or any conflict for that matter”. However, PA1 thought that, “It is maybe good to know about (the Cold War), but not all the details”, and both GA1 and GA2 recognised the need to revise the Cold War topic.

There are also other possible irrelevancies. T2 thought that the physical geography of other countries is not relevant, while GA2 thought that the Industrial Revolution is

irrelevant, with, “Arkwright and Cartwright and spinning jennys ... even the kids in England probably don’t learn that nowadays”. It is interesting to note, however, that in the present curriculum reform, Social Studies teachers want to retain this. GA2 believed this is due to the fact that “they (teachers) don’t want to change”, because “once we change the syllabus radically ... they will have to revise their old notes”.

S1, a high-achieving Form 6 student, showed an interesting attitude to irrelevancies. He said:

I’m not too sure I can remember anything from them (Forms 1 – 5), because ... I just took what came. I didn’t think. All I thought about was reaching up (to the next level of education). I wasn’t that concerned about ... what would help me living in Solomon Islands.

This relates back to the questionable level of student interest in helping to develop the curriculum. When S1 reflected a bit more, he commented that, “Anything in the curriculum that’s learning about how people from other countries lived and what they were like, that’s not going to benefit the people in Solomons, so maybe those are irrelevant”. From their previous comments, both GA2 and P1 would strongly disagree with him.

These mixed perceptions of what is, and what is not relevant, highlight confusion, and underline the importance of consulting many different stakeholders about the content of the secondary school curriculum.

9. The content related to societal needs

Some societal needs have emerged in the preceding discussion. When interviewees were asked to state what they thought were particular societal needs

and relate them to the curriculum, 14 of the 17 needs may be related to curriculum content in terms of knowledge, skills or values, and the remainder relate to access. (See Appendix J for the full list of interviewees' perceived societal needs).

Knowledge-related needs

Healthful living was cited by BP1, GA1 and PA1 as an important societal need. PA1 said that, "There's a lot of different types of disease ... now ... and people don't know what to do to avoid these diseases" (PA1). GA1 added that, "There are many areas in the health sector" that he would like promoted, and is particularly concerned about HIV and Aids. "The secondary curriculum needs to be adjusted to accommodate all these" (PA1) so that people may be empowered by education to make good health-related decisions (GA1).

A second knowledge-related societal need is the teaching of *culture*.

I would like to see the culture of Solomon Islands being taught in ... the curriculum ... from day one of school. Our customs have so much strength ... and they could have been used to cure a lot of social problems, social unrest that we have. ... (This) is a very important part ... that is missing in our curriculum. (P1)

PA1 also believed that, "Solomon Islanders ... need to know each other and understand each others' problems and needs so that they may be able to work together (PA1)." Working together is something vital for *development*, and interviewees felt that knowledge related to appropriate development and the ability to apply that knowledge (GA1) are very important needs. S1 wanted the education

system to produce “people who can ... help the country” because “we need doctors, nurses, teachers and economists”. In a similar vein, BP2 “would like to see ... us Solomon Islanders doing something for our country, not waiting for ... others I don’t like to see us begging all the time”. Interviewees would also like to see the curriculum cover preservation of the environment (BP2, T1) and conservation management (GA1). T1 is particularly concerned about the environmental and social consequences of developing resources as, “Not many Solomon Islanders seem to learn about these things because these issues are not in the curriculum”. PA 2 envisaged knowledge gained from curriculum subjects helping rural development through enabling people to set up such enterprises as low cost, but cost-effective tourism schemes.

A societal need with strong implications for successful development is education for *birth control*. P1 is particularly concerned about this because:

Our birth rate is just too high... . We can’t ... afford having families of five and six. ... It’s a serious issue for this country. If we don’t get our birth rate under control, this country’s going to be a very, very poor country in ten to fifteen year’s time.

With the Solomon Islands’ very high growth rate of 2.8% (1999 Census), P1 has a point, but the religious and cultural implications of this topic make it a very sensitive issue.

Skills -related needs

The first and most obvious skills-related need is *more practical skills*. This has already been discussed at length, but it should be noted that seven interviewees,

the largest number for any one societal need, saw this as important, so much so, that P1 sees it as “a big hole in the curriculum” and thus, “We are definitely not fulfilling that need” (GA2).

Competency skills and the ability to use them wherever a person is located (GA1) are also cited as societal needs. Negotiating is a very necessary skill for solving land disputes, which T2 cited as a major problem in the Solomon Islands. Not surprisingly for a businessperson, BP1 thought that an important need is to “improve the knowledge of English so that students can understand it and communicate in it more effectively”. GA1 wished to build into the formal curriculum management skills, particularly time management. All of this may be assisted by learning-by-doing teaching strategies and a move towards competency-based assessment rather than a radical change in curriculum content. It is also important to note that increased competency should also help to banish the “lack of self-esteem and ... lack of self-confidence” which GA2 has observed in many Solomon Islanders.

Just as knowledge is important for development, so practical and competency skills may also facilitate rural development, a need already noted. Specifically, PA1 saw them as helping to reduce urban drift, drawing people back to villages and rendering rural people more able to develop their resources.

Values-related needs

Not surprisingly, given the recent problems of the Solomon Islands, the largest group of perceived societal needs are related to values.

It has already been shown that interviewees perceived values education as very important, but interviewees also wished to single out four values that they see as particularly needful in modern Solomon Islands' society. The first, and most commented on (by six interviewees), is *honesty*. "We need honesty" (GA2) because corruption may now be found "in the church, in the government, in society, in the village" (BP2). "Fighting corruption is something that we need to ... address seriously ... and I believe the school system can do that (P1)." Secondly, *sharing* is a traditional value of Solomon Islands' collective cultures that has fallen prey to the development of the monetary economy, and BP2 would like to see it restored. Thirdly, *racial harmony* is something that T1 would particularly like to see developed, and thought that, "What we learned from the ethnic tension should come in as part of the Social Studies new curriculum". That may happen, as work has commenced with UNICEF to develop a package called the "Peace Education Curriculum", which may be incorporated into Social Studies or other areas (GA1). The fourth value is *fidelity in marriage* as an antidote to increasing divorce and broken marriages (T2). All of these could be at least partially addressed through values education integrated into the content of a variety of curriculum subjects.

Inglehart (1996, 653) argues that education leads to populations who increasingly evaluate their leaders by relatively demanding standards. The Solomon Islands seems to illustrate this with five interviewees stressing the great need for good leaders who "realise some of the weaknesses they have ... and they are not corrupt, so that they are accountable, transparent in whatever they do, especially in financial aspects" (GA1). S1 also wanted leaders who:

Know how to handle situations, who know how to make good decisions ...
who have moral values, who know that they are in a Christian country, who

know how to handle things in a Christian way because they know Solomon Islands is a Christian country.

GA2 was doubtful “to what extent ... we can use the secondary curriculum to achieve that”. However, GA1, P1 and S1 believed that the formal curriculum can be utilised to teach students about leadership qualities. S1 suggested using “New Testament Studies and the Bible subjects as a way ... of getting the message across” about how to behave, and also comments about learning about mistakes from history. However, S1 intuitively observed that the informal curriculum can be an even bigger influence on students, particularly at present, with values education only coming through the curriculum in “little bits and pieces”. Thus teachers must realise the importance of role-modelling good leadership.

Another values-related societal problem is *law and order*, and T2 believes that, “Problem number 1 is to minimise the ... criminal activities going (on) around the country”. Neither she nor S2 saw the curriculum aiding in this endeavour, but once again, through values education, it could.

A values issue that is perhaps more especially a cultural issue is the *status of women*. BP1 and BP1S have observed much lack of respect for women in the workplace, and BP2 would like to see women able to take part in important decision-making, as she perceived that, “These men, they just want to get the money... (while) ... us women, we are the ones (who are) worried for the food for today, for tomorrow”. The curriculum may be able to help with this, but as this is culturally entrenched, it may take time to change.

The need for *Christian living* (PA1) was seen as the final (though not the least important) societal need in the Solomon Islands, “A Christian country” (GA1, S1, S2). If people “have God in their lives, ... once they have that, ... they would appreciate the value system ... (and) all ... would fall in line to that (sic)” (T1). PA1, “would like to see ... schools emphasise the importance of ... our relationship with God ... and ... model the importance of Christian living”. If this is done, “Then all will know God is important ... then it’s easy to teach all of this (values and spirituality)” (T1). Thus the secondary curriculum can and should be “adjusted to ... accommodate all this” (PA1), but may achieve little unless teachers also model Christian living.

To conclude this section it is fair to say that the effective development and transmission of curriculum content is vital if that content is to supply societal needs. PA2 complained that, “Nothing is really happening fast these days”, and sees a big need to employ “more staff in the curriculum office so they (can) develop more opportunities” in the curriculum, create new courses and generally “get things going”. This is currently starting to happen. To improve transmission and implementation, GA1 envisaged the newly developing subject syllabi including introductory notes that, “Describe key areas of learning and teaching” and would like to see each subject teaching literacy and numeracy rather than teaching them in isolation. GA1 would also like to see frequent in-service training of teachers, and to encourage at the school level, “Sharing of ideas and resources, ... curriculum committees ... and collegial relationships”. These things could have a profound effect on the transmission of curriculum content.

c) The emphasis on subjects

Skilbeck (1994, 97) argues that the core curriculum has to offer something of value to every student. Currently, the core subjects in the Solomon Islands are English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. With the Forms 4 and 5 elective subjects, GA2 described how, because new Testament Studies is compulsory in many schools, and because Business Studies is the most popular elective subject, then maybe as many as 80% of students take none of the “real practical subjects” (Home Economics, Agriculture, and Industrial Arts). With the big curriculum development project underway, it is pertinent to ask whether this situation should be changed to cater better to present needs. To this end, interviewees were asked whether there should be core subjects, and if so, what should they be and why, particularly in the light of a recent suggestion to reduce the number of compulsory core subjects in Forms 4 and 5 from four to two (Mathematics and English). This suggestion has set people “rethinking where we want to go” (GA1) and generated mixed feeling among interviewees.

1. What should be core subjects?

Firstly, what are the perceptions of the relative merits of the current core subjects? English is clearly perceived as the most useful subject and attracted many comments. P1 stated that people may complain about English “because of the difficulty they find in learning English ... it’s not an easy language”. However, it was also seen as “indispensable” (GA1) and a “tool to learn other subjects” (PA1). “If you don’t know English, how are you going to read text books in Agriculture, Home Economics and Industrial Arts?” (S1), or “maps or (sewing) patterns?” (BP1). English was also seen as essential for higher education (BP1, PA2) and

communication overseas (BP2). Mathematics is also described as indispensable (GA1). If you don't know Mathematics, "You aren't going to know what figures mean" (BP1) and, "How are you going to calculate in business?" (S1). Clearly, literacy and numeracy were highly valued. However, little was said about the other two core subjects except that Science was useful for Industrial Arts (S1) and that Social Studies was important because you can learn from people's mistakes in history (S1). Thus it is not surprising that GA1 believed that we need to rethink whether Science and Social Studies should remain core subjects.

Secondly, what subjects would interviewees like to see as core subjects?

Opinions covered a wide spectrum. Two interviewees (BP2 and T1) wanted all subjects to be compulsory, though T1 admitted that this may be too many! Two interviewees (P2 and S2) wished to retain the current four subjects as cores, but S2 would like to add New Testament Studies and have five core subjects. Five interviewees (BP1, GA1, GA2, P1, and S1) – the largest number for any one choice – favoured just Mathematics and English. T2 and PA2 thought that only English should be a core subject, with PA2 liking the idea that, "Maths in Form 4, those who can't cope ... might like to hop out of it". Although PA1 saw merit in English, he suggested that there be no core subjects. This spread of opinion roughly parallels the results of a similar survey of teachers conducted by GA2 that showed a majority wanted to abolish two, three or four of the core subjects. Such freedom to choose is seen as a positive thing because, "Then there is no more of this, 'Oh, this is a better subject because it is compulsory'" (PA1). Whilst opportunities to choose might not "boost the students to do more practical things, ... it gives them that option" (P1).

2. Should elective subjects be included in selection?

With four selection exams affecting entry into Form 1 and progress through to Form 7, it is true to say that, “The school system that we have here is heavily exam-based” (P1). At present, the selection at Form 3 only examines English and Mathematics, and while all the four core subjects and two electives are examined at Form 5, the electives’ marks are not used for selection into Form 6.

Most interviewees expressed disapproval at subjects not counting for selection and recognised several negative consequences. Perhaps the greatest problem, because it forms the root of all other negative effects, is the fact that, “Anything that is not examined is not important in the eyes of students, parents, teachers, principals, everybody else” (GA2). This has greatly affected teaching. In Form 3 (which culminates in a selection based on English and Mathematics examinations), “Science and Social Sciences (Studies) are not taught properly” (PA2), and S1 said, “When I was in Form 3, I didn’t have a good education with the other subjects ... (as the) emphasis (was) on Maths and English all the time”. S2 believed that this “makes them (students) lazy” and disinclined to take subjects other than English and Mathematics seriously. Even worse, “A lot of Community High Schools, they’re really just doing English and Maths ... (and) are not doing any practical subjects at all” (GA2). This means that when students “get on to Form 4, they struggle with their ... other subjects” (T2) and “they don’t know anything; ... it’s a big problem” (GA2). With effects like this, and given the previous discussion on the importance of practical skills, the core curriculum cannot be said to consist of learnings judged to be basic and essential for all students as recommended by Skilbeck (1994, 98).

The negative effects extend even further. In Community High Schools:

Students regard ... (practical subjects) as second rate ... even in Form 1 and 2. ... if a school is short of teachers they'll ask a teacher to teach Science even if he's an Agriculture teacher. When you budget at the beginning of the year, they'll make absolutely sure that you have all the Science equipment, but they won't worry about timber for woodwork. ... You can't become a head of department for the practical subjects. So ... it even affects your status as a teacher. ... You can only become a head of subject. (GA2)

It is hardly surprising that GA2 completed this tale of woe by saying that, "This core business just goes throughout the whole system", nor is it surprising that both GA1 and GA2 believed that examining elective subjects will increase their status.

However, there are currently proposals to examine elective subjects, although they have yet to be finalised. "The Ministry examination officers are talking about having a general paper (for practical subjects at Form 3) (GA1)." This would be supported by PA2 who believes that, "We cannot expect everybody to take all those subjects ... in Form 3". Also, S2 was "not too sure they'd (Form 3 students) be too happy in having all of them examined ... they already have a heavy loading". However, GA1 and GA2 believed that if people really want to increase the status of practical subjects, then an examination paper for each subject is an essential, if expensive, way to go. Whatever is decided, the situation at the moment is that, "Examination(s), dominate our whole system" (GA2), and this is a clear illustration of Hill's (1995, 41) claim that, "Assessment techniques tend to be the tail that wags the dog".

To summarise, it seems that most people will be happy to see a fairly radical change in what subjects are compulsory and what may be chosen. It is also apparent that changes must be made and that all subjects must be examined and count for selection if practical subjects are going to gain status.

d) Access to the secondary curriculum

Brown (2003, 2) maintains that to enable a society to progress, education must be widely available, but how do interviewees perceive the situation in the Solomon Islands?

(i) The current situation

It is well recognised that in the Solomon Islands, “There’s a lot of kids who do not have access to schools” (P1). This is true of primary schools, but even more so of secondary schools (see Figure 1.5), and PA2 believed that, “There’s still a third of our students not getting through to Form 1”. Interviewees did not approve of this situation. “I really don’t like this drop-out system ... it would be nice to think that every child can be educated (BP1).” “You’re still a kid in Standard 6, you don’t get that much skills (sic)” (S1), and these “Class 6 (push-outs) can’t take a job; ... maybe they (can) do something at home, but ...I don’t think they can do business” (P2). This is because they “miss out on ... deeper, wider, knowledge” (PA1) and practical skills which may teach them “something to help them make a living for themselves” (S2). “I’m always disheartened when I see kids ... not able to get into high school (P1).” So, presumably, are many parents because, “Most Community

High Schools are developments initiated by parents; they want their children to go to high school” (GA1).

Thus access to secondary education is limited, but is considered highly desirable.

(ii) Obstacles to access

There are several factors responsible for preventing many children from attending secondary school.

One may be related to location. T1 explained that urban parents “know that you just have to educate your children if they are going to survive”, whereas rural parents, even if their children have no schooling, they can teach them “skills which will ... support their children to survive (sic)”. This may be partly true, but with Community High Schools “mushrooming all over the place” (P1), rural parents are clearly placing more value on secondary education than perhaps they did in the past. There are several other more serious factors.

1. The Standard 6 selection examination

The selection exam at Standard 6 is the first assessment obstacle that children have to overcome. PA2 believed that, “Grade 6 drop-outs is a real crime” and that, “Everybody is really waiting ... to see that one go”. P1 said that, “I don’t see the need for Grade 6 exams at all”. However the two teachers interviewed, did:

It depends on how one sees it. ... To educate them further, and then after that it (education) just stop(s) (at Form 3), it’s ... frustrating for young people. To be a drop out in Grade 6, then you just basically stay in the village. Most children,

they fit in much better into the community than ... (if they) go into Form 3 or Form 5. (T1)

T2 also predicted that some "... kids coming into the secondary school, they won't cope, and we'll have a hard time to ... teach them, (as) even the ones that are coming through the (present selective) system ... are finding it hard".

Thus there are some problems involved with dropping this selection examination. However, "The policy is very clear now, it is universal basic education to Form 3" (GA2). The year that this will happen is not clear, but PA2 warned that, "I haven't seen any additional classrooms yet being built".

2. The Form 3 selection examination

GA 1 believed that, "The longer you keep a child (in school), the better", and so would like "students to do up to Form 5", while BP2 would like them to do Form 6 as well. However, the majority of interviewees would like to keep the Form 3 selection examination, although GA2 and T2 made a point of saying that all subjects should be examined, and not just the English and Mathematics as at present. S1 believes that, "You need to be tested on what you've learned. ... We have to go through some sweat and pain to get what we want". PA1 felt that, "Standard 6 ... kids are really small and young to be leaving the system, but when they reach Form 3, they're a bit more mature, and so if they are dropped out there, then it's not so bad". This contradicts T1's previously stated opinion. However, interviewees wishing to retain the Form 3 examination did not necessarily envisage this being the end of education for the push-outs. PA2 suggested a novel approach to extending access to the secondary curriculum for "those (students) who drop out

early". He envisaged "university student(s) who have no jobs to set up small tutoring groups", which may help some push-outs acquire certificates, and help otherwise unemployed university graduates earn some money. GA2, P1 and S2 would like to see push-outs channelled into practical courses at an expanded number of Rural Training Centres, because "by the time they've been there for another couple of years, are 18 or 19, they can do and use some of the skills they learn" (GA2). They might even continue farther with their practical studies (P1). With these provisos, even with the retention of the Form 3 selection examination, the Solomon Islands could still have a more educated populace than at present.

3. Gender

Friel, (2003, 2) describes how, globally, boys are more likely to be educated than girls and this is true of the Solomon Islands too, but the situation is changing. In the past, girls were not allowed to go to school (BP2) and their place was considered to be in the house or in the garden (BP2, P1). Because of this, few dormitories were built for girls and this still limits the number of girls in some secondary boarding schools today (GA1, PA2). Also, if money is short, parents tend to send the boys to school rather than the girls (P1), a possibility warned of by Friel (2003, 2). However, T2 believed that, "We all have the same capabilities (and) knowledge ... so we might as well have equal opportunities for boys and girls". Many parents would now probably agree with her; "Parents have started to see the importance of educating the ... girls. ... Educated parents have now seen that even girls can ... perform and ... can find a job and work" (PA1). Consequently, "There has been a marked improvement over the years in (the) participation of girls in secondary school" (GA1). Another reason for the improvement is the

development of Community High Schools, which means that village parents can send their daughters to a day school and still have them “to live at home, not exposed to (the) dangers of leaving home” (GA2). This also exposes urban-rural differences. While “in town ... girls and boys have equal opportunities” (S1), in villages without access to Community High Schools, there are still “many girls being held back by parents” (P1).

So there was, and still is (though to a lesser extent), a gender imbalance in children attending secondary school. An interesting side issue is the differing cut-off marks used for selection in the different examinations. Because on average girls seem to do less well in the examinations than boys, in order to fill what places in schools are available for girls, girls cut-off marks may be lower (PA2). S1, a boy, believes this is unfair and is very much against it.

4. Poverty

Poverty is an important issue in Solomon Islands’ education. When there is little money, at best, parents say to the children, “You go as far as Grade 6 so that you can read your name ... and just learn to say yes or no to whoever writes to you”, but at worst, the “children ... (are) basically just staying at home” (T1). P1 also pointed out that:

It’s not only paying the fees. ... If he (the child) feels that he is not being supported well, he loses motivation. ... Embarrassment in front of their peers is ... an important thing. ... (So if he feels) “I can’t afford to have things like that, then I just leave”.

The problem is also getting worse. “A few years ago ... it was quite rare for a Solomon Islands’ child not to be educated because they didn’t have enough money” (GA2). BP1 says that, “I hear ... a lot more about it now. ... Parents are upset because ... they’ve had to scale down on the workforce in the government departments ... and that’s having a big impact ... (on) children being able to stay in school”. This is regardless of the children’s performance in school, which T2 thought was very unfair. However, “It’s lucky in a sense that we’ve suddenly got all the Community High Schools at a time when money’s short and parents can’t afford the fees in the other (more expensive) schools” (GA2).

Children missing out on secondary school is one problem caused by poverty, but there are two others. Firstly, “More and more, I’m afraid, we are educating an elite” (GA2). Thus, in the struggle for education, some striking class inequalities are being created in a traditionally egalitarian society, illustrating fears expressed by Wasuka (1989, 9) and Connell (1991, 9). A second consequence is a decreasing quality of education. GA2 talked of a secondary school where less than 50% of the fees were collected in 2004, and how the continuance of many children’s education “depends how strict schools are on school fees”.

The general feeling of people is that ... it’s better to keep them there (in school) even if they don’t get as much of what they should get, rather than throw half of them out and then give the others ... a much better deal. (GA2)

The result in such schools is that there is no “money to buy text books, library books, anything like that at all ... and I’m sure that’s true in most schools” (GA2).

Free education, which UNICEF (2000, 1) believes should be provided, is not necessarily a viable or wholly desirable solution to this poverty problem. Whilst

there was some support in principle for the idea of free education, and this would certainly be “fair to everybody” (P2), T1 was of the opinion that, “Only the politicians ... want it so they (can) get the voters”. This is probably an overstatement, but as P1 explains, “We need to be realistic, we can’t afford free education. ... Nobody’s going to come and give you money to support free education. ... Right now the country doesn’t ... have the capacity to support free education, then user must pay”. As to the desirability of free education, T1 believed that the saying, “Nothing without labour”, is true; “Everything costs money, and we have to work to ... get whatever, and that is what our children should be taught too. ... Only then, I think will they value education” (T1). T1 believed that free education would mean that students “won’t be too concerned about their studies”, and BP2 agrees, saying that, “Having to pay might make them work harder because they’ve seen their Mummies and Daddies struggling”. Thus, with a very weak economy, free education in the Solomon Islands is likely to remain “a kind of dream” (T1).

5. Slow learners

GA1 recognises, along with Petrus (1997, 1) and Dunaven (1997, 1), that some children are slow learners, but GA2 pointed out that, “We’re very much a system which caters only for those who are bright”. This means that, “In our present overcrowded classrooms, they (slow learners) just don’t have any show at all” (PA2) and PA2 foresaw that increasing class sizes will make the problem worse. “All the kids are lumped together, so a slow learner will get left behind sooner or later (P1).” Consequently, “The slow learners ... don’t have equal opportunities of getting into high school” (S1). “Many of them will drop out before Standard 6... Even if they get to Standard 6, they’ll probably fail the exam” (GA2), and even if

they get to high school, “Some teachers, they treat them the same ... that’s why some of them get dropped off in Form 3” (S1).

GA1, in agreement with Rodi et al. (2001, 11) and the MEHRD (2004, 12), thought that, “We should cater for these slow learners”. We should train our teachers to identify this kind of children (sic) so that we can ... address the issue”. PA 1 recommended that:

The teacher should be responsible to cater to them in his own classroom
... A separate class for slow learners is ... telling the kids that, “You are slow learners, you are not as good as the others”, and that ... demoralises them.

On the other hand, PA2 would like schools to “go into streaming”, then slow learners will be “in a position where they can achieve”, although he recognises that streaming does also has a stigma attached to it

This will be a difficult issue to resolve, and in the meantime the slow learners will continue to get an education that curtails their opportunities (Glaser, 1998, 9).

(iii) Obstacles to increasing access to secondary schools

Interviewees gave several reasons why the increasing demand for places in secondary education may not be met in the near future.

To begin with, not only are there insufficient places in existing schools now (PA2, P1), “I haven’t seen any additional classrooms yet being built” (PA2). It is also being suggested that, “No more Community High Schools should be allowed to add Form 4 and 5 until there is a satisfactory standard of education up to Form 3”(GA2).

Additionally, there are not enough secondary schools (BP1, T2). P1 explained that, “After Independence, the number of schools that they had ... was fixed for a decade or so... . They should have opened up schools as we went along”. The high birth rate noted earlier by P1 is only going to compound these problems. P1 said that the situation may be “getting better now with the opening up of a lot of Community High Schools” (P1), and PA1 describes how “the Japanese government is planning to establish fifty more”. But PA1 foresees two significant problems ahead. One problem is, “How we are going to maintain (them)”. Another problem is that Community High Schools were intended to be expansions of village primary schools. Some villages cannot supply enough students for their high school so they have to take in boarders, sometimes from other islands, but, “Because it’s a village, you can’t expand to a boarding system”. So PA1 saw that “the whole idea about community schools is ... just disintegrating”, and believed that for them to work, you have “to have Community High Schools out of the village (where) you don’t have village influence”. But then they would not be “Community” High Schools any more. This is a dilemma.

There are other obstacles. Even at present, there are insufficient trained teachers (T2, PA1), and not enough are being trained for the future (PA2). This situation has been exacerbated by the recent ethnic tension reducing teacher graduations from the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (BP1).

However, the root cause of most of these problems is finance (BP1). As GA1 recognised, instructional and educational materials and infrastructure are very expensive, “But we have to face it, if we are really concerned about the future of our younger generation”. Schafer (1999, 1) describes how developing countries

around the world are struggling with economic decline leading to educational stagnation. The Solomon Islands is obviously no exception, but foreign aid is now helping to alleviate the situation.

(iv) Quality of education – rural versus urban

Equal access to quality education is a final accessibility issue. The United Nations (2001, 2 & 3) recognises that the quality of education may be threatened by untrained teachers and poorly equipped classrooms, so interviewees were asked for their perceptions on the quality and number of teachers and resources available in urban compared to rural areas.

1. Teachers

Interviewees were unanimous in their opinions. Not only are “most of the qualified teachers ... based in the urban centres” (GA1), but also “many of the best teachers are in Honiara (the capital)” (PA2) and “the further you go from Honiara, the more unqualified people you will find” (GA1). P1 illustrated this by describing a Provincial Secondary School in a remote province which had “only two degree holders teaching in the whole school”. This is a huge contrast to the teaching staff of the Honiara area schools who took part in the questionnaire (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4). Thus, “Honiara schools are overcrowded with teachers, whereas ... (province Z) schools are understaffed” (PA2). Worse than that, in some rural schools, “Because there’s not enough teachers, ... they just look at ... some young ... or old people that ... have done high school and they get them ... to help out” (T1). Thus, “The rural schools have it really tough” (P1) and “the kids are missing out” (BP1). The situation is particularly bad in rural Community High Schools which have “very few

qualified teachers” (GA2) and where “half the teachers ... are actually primary trained” (GA2). Thus, it is likely that, “The (teaching) strategies they use will not be effective enough for the children to understand those concepts” (GA1).

If this situation is to be amended, it is important to understand why the best trained teachers are concentrated in town. Firstly, there are the positive attractions of Honiara. GA1 saw Honiara as “a sort of lighthouse to Solomon Islanders” that provides “an easier way of life” (BP1), with “better conditions” (PA2), “bright lights and entertainments” (T2) and useful amenities such as “electricity ... computers ... and photocopy machines” (T1). S1 considered such things particularly attractive to teachers coming back from “university in overseas countries where it is very luxurious”. Teachers, naturally, also “want their children to attend the best schools” (GA1). Secondly, there are problems of rural locations. Although a few new rural schools’ facilities may be good and thus not be a problem to teachers (PA2), in most rural schools the teacher will find, “No good house for him ... and ... he doesn’t have access to computers” (BP2). Instead of a constant supply of electricity, “Students study ... (by) pressure lamp After 9 o’clock everything is dark” (T1). P1, as a parent, thought that, “One very important consideration ... is the (poor) quality of primary schools that are close by for their children”, and for this reason, “I can’t allow my daughter to go to a primary school there”. A final problem is that, “Sometimes the environment also affects the teachers. The environment in rural schools where you have villagers all milling around the school ... (means that some) teachers don’t feel secure in staying in rural schools” (PA1).

Interviewees were not wholly unanimous in their opinions and two saw problems with living in Honiara. PA1 believed that a few teachers feel “too much of a stress,

this staying in Honiara, and they want to go out in the country". GA2 also believed that:

As urban schools have the problem that there's no housing (provided) and that the cost of living is very high ... an awful lot of qualified teachers would prefer to teach in a, probably, good Provincial Secondary School or a (rural) National Secondary School.

However, in the light of the preceding discussion, the number of teachers thinking in these ways must be small, and redressing the urban-rural imbalance of qualified teachers may be difficult.

2. Resources

The distribution of resources presents a similar picture. GA1 stated that the Solomon Islands does not have "enough resources to provide a good learning environment for many students", and that, "The further you go away from Honiara ... the less resources there are available in schools". Also, the "town schools are better off ... (because if) they don't have them (resources), they go to other schools and borrow and photocopy" (PA2), which the many isolated rural schools obviously cannot do. PA2 and S2 commented that they think that the National Secondary Schools (half of which are in or close to Honiara) have the best resources, "The Provincial Secondary Schools have some, Community High Schools, some of them have none" (PA2). Two interviewees painted a particularly bleak picture of resources in Community High schools: "All it is, is just some buildings put up and a blackboard, and that's it" (P1); and, "The Community High Schools ... have ... no tools, no equipment for doing practical subjects, no textbooks, ... you've got a lump of chalk and ... an exercise book and that's about it" GA2). When asked why they

had nothing, GA2 explained that they were “started ... without authority from the Ministry ... so ... they weren’t resourced from the beginning”. With a grant from the European Union (GA2) and “a whole lot of secondary school equipment and ... textbooks coming out soon” (PA1) courtesy of another Aid donor, things may improve.

Taking the maldistribution of qualified teachers and resources together, it is clear that there is a very big difference between urban and rural schools. However, it is not just “a simple urban/rural split” (GA2), as the differences also translate into a “huge difference between the ... Provincial, National and the ... Community High (Schools)” (GA2). Thus, not surprisingly, it is perceived that, “Students going into National Secondary Schools have a better chance of progressing on” (P1). Also, “From what the records can tell us, usually the educated persons ... their children are the ones who always get to National High Schools” (PA2), whereas the Community High Schools, which are “mushrooming all over the place without proper ... planning ... are giving a false sense of hope” (P1). This is recognised by people saying in Pidgin, “‘Oh hemi nem nating no moa yet’ – it’s just a name, they’re just called a school” (GA2). This may be an overstatement, but this is the reason why “no more Community High Schools should be allowed to add Form 4 and 5 until there is a satisfactory standard of education up to Form 3” (GA2). Whilst BP2 thought urban students are more likely to squander their education because of urban distractions, the concentration of good teachers and resources in town does seem to be reinforcing the education of an elite.

(v) Access and societal needs

With so many problems related to access to secondary education, and with education inextricably linked to a productive economy and high living standards (Brown, 2003, 3; Inglehart, 1996, 654), it is not surprising that some interviewees' perceived societal needs are linked to access to the secondary curriculum (see Appendix J).

The most important access-related need is the need for *more secondary schools* (P2, S1). GA1 believed that, "It's fundamental that we need to educate everyone", and that, "Education can empower people, and ... enable ... (them) to do marvellous things". It was also felt that more secondary schools will help prevent some societal problems. In urban areas, "We'll have a lot of children going through to high school, and then we won't see a lot of Masta Lius (unemployed young people) in town" (P2). But there are problems in rural villages too. S1 has seen children in his home village, "... just roaming all over the place and ... into sex, drugs, alcohol, but they're still kids, it's not their fault, it's because ... there is no education, there's nothing to keep them in focus".

Interviewees saw two other accessibility issues as needing solving for the sake of students' receiving a good education. Although S1 realised that *free education* is, "Something that's not going to happen", he also believed that it would really help students receive a more effective education, because, "Friends in school, ... what brings them down most of the time is money, schools fees; if they have a school fee problem, they are discouraged and their mind isn't focussed". Interviewees would also like to see something done about *teachers*. That is, there should be more of them (P2), they should be well trained/qualified (P2, S1), committed (P2), and they

should be evenly distributed throughout the nation in all types of school and not just concentrated in the National Secondary Schools and in towns (BP2, S2).

None of these needs will be easy to meet. However, it must not be forgotten that a highly educated workforce is seen as essential for attaining high levels of economic development (Inglehart, 1996, 654), so for the sake of the social and economic development of the Solomon Islands, these needs must eventually be met.

3. Conclusions and implications

The following conclusions summarise the interview findings and consider some implications of the findings.

a) The number of curricula

In general, interviewees felt that both provinces and individual schools lacked the expertise and also, perhaps, the interest, in writing their own curricula, and preferred one centralized national curriculum that could make the best use of skills and resources. However, they were not necessarily in favour of retaining the national secondary curriculum in its present form. Whilst they mostly disliked the old two-tier academic and practical curricula because they created divisions, they were in favour of changing the curriculum to bring more technical and vocational subjects into mainstream education, perhaps through parallel strands, and advocated more choices within the curriculum.

b) Curriculum stakeholders

Interviewees were generally in favour of involving a variety of stakeholder groups in secondary curriculum construction, although their support for some groups was stronger than for others. The involvement of government education administrators and teachers was considered essential, and the involvement of business people extremely useful, though their level of interest was questioned. The involvement of expatriate consultants was also considered useful, particularly in areas where local expertise is lacking, but it was felt that their role should be as partners or advisors and not controllers. Some interviewees saw benefits in involving students in curriculum construction, but others were uncertain, and it was felt that students would tend to lack confidence and interest in participation. While some interviewees were keen to involve parents, others doubted their level of interest, particularly of rural parents.

c) The content of the curriculum

(i) The range of subjects

There was unanimous support for the curriculum being holistic, which from interviewees' subsequent comments, it clearly is not. Interviewees supported the inclusion of the creative arts in the secondary curriculum, particularly music, which is viewed as an important local talent that is not being developed. While some interviewees were strongly in favour of physical education, others were ambivalent, perhaps because of the prevalent very narrow interpretation of what physical education involves, and a lack of trained teachers. Lack of interest in the creative arts and physical education was also attributed to them not being examined,

something that would need to be changed if these subjects are to be successfully incorporated into a new curriculum. Interviewees were unanimous in wishing to include some kind of computer literacy in the curriculum, seeing it as very necessary for modern life, and individuals made a few other suggestions of what might be usefully added to the curriculum, such as the teaching of languages. It was noted, however, that it will be difficult to introduce more subjects into an already full timetable, and a modularised approach was suggested as a solution to this dilemma.

(ii) The content of subjects

All interviewees recognised that practical subjects provide life skills, but that they were not popular choices in schools because of the “white collar mentality”. Linked with the high status of knowledge for its own sake, this has produced a situation where students often learn mostly theory and frequently lack practical skills and the ability to apply knowledge, resulting in high unemployment of school leavers. However, interviewees believed that attitudes are starting to change, but that this change needs encouragement from changes in teacher training and in what subjects schools ask teachers to teach.

It is important that the curriculum prepares students for further study in Form 6 and beyond. It was felt that the secondary curriculum provided an adequate knowledge base in most subjects, but that it did not provide sufficient skills, especially the skill of self-motivated research.

All interviewees saw competency skills and values development as highly desirable, but felt that the curriculum was not doing a good job of helping students develop either of these, perhaps because of the great emphasis on knowledge transmission, which controls how all subjects are taught.

All interviewees felt that the curriculum should be transmitting knowledge about the Solomon Islands, though they disagreed somewhat about how much. Teaching students about their culture and history was considered particularly important, because both are linked with a sense of identity, because culture is being lost, and because history allows one to learn from past mistakes. Some knowledge of local geography was also considered advisable. However, most interviewees felt that the curriculum was not being particularly effective in transmitting knowledge of local culture, history, or geography, and that the Social Studies syllabus and supporting resources need to be amended if this situation is to be improved. Interviewees also recognised the need to learn about places outside of the Solomon Islands because of globalisation, though they felt that this should be balanced with local content.

No single curriculum subject was seen as irrelevant, though some interviewees did question the relevance of certain aspects of the Social Studies syllabus, and it was suspected that there might be some teacher resistance to removing irrelevancies because of the need to amend teaching notes.

Most interviewees felt that the curriculum content could be changed/enhanced to cater better for current societal needs. Accordingly, they would like to see content developed on healthful living, culture, development and birth control. They would also like to see greater efforts to develop students' practical and competency skills,

and values, especially honesty, sharing, racial harmony and fidelity in marriage. It was felt that developing these would help the Solomon Islands solve the current law and order problem, raise the status of women, and have the kind of leaders it needs.

(iii) The emphasis on subjects

Interviewees clearly thought that the present situation of four compulsory core subjects needs changing. Their suggestions ranged from all subjects being compulsory, to none, but there was most support for just Maths and English being the “core compulsory” subjects. Most interviewees disapproved of elective subjects not being examined and not counting for selection. This was because it discouraged students, teachers and schools from taking elective subjects seriously, which has resulted in large gaps in students’ knowledge and skills. This all suggests a clear need to change current emphases on subjects.

d) Access to the secondary curriculum

Interviewees believed that access to secondary education in the Solomon Islands is desirable, but limited. The majority would like to see the Standard 6 selection exam for entry into secondary school eliminated, though both teachers predict this will increase the number of students who cope poorly with secondary education, and will also increase the number of young people who cannot fit back into village life. Whilst there was some support for allowing all students to progress through to Form 5, most interviewees preferred to keep the Form 3 selection examinations, though with the proviso that they be extended to include more, or all, subjects. They also

wanted to see opportunities for the push-outs to gain more practical skills through courses in Rural Training Centres.

Interviewees recognised inequalities in the type of child attaining secondary education. Notably, they saw that slow learners are easily eliminated by the selection system, they saw more boys in the system, and most worryingly, they saw fewer children from poor families attending secondary schools, leading to the creation of an educated urban elite and consequent class divisions.

Interviewees also recognised that it will be difficult to increase access to secondary schools because of such problems as lack of infrastructure, lack of finance, and lack of teachers. Even if access is increased, interviewees recognised the fact that most teachers, the best qualified teachers, and most resources, are concentrated in and around Honiara, the capital city, leading to large differences in the quality of education attainable in urban versus rural schools.

Not surprisingly, some interviewees saw increasing access to well-staffed secondary schools as a very important societal need, but did not see that making secondary education free was necessarily achievable or wholly desirable.

e) Summary

When related to the research questions, interview findings show a distinct preference for one national curriculum, though with the proviso of building into it more choices than at present. Also, expanding the number of stakeholder groups involved in curriculum construction would be generally welcomed, though the role of

expatriates should be circumscribed, and parents and students may be less interested than others in being involved. Interviewees' comments showed that while the curriculum content provides much knowledge, it is not holistic, and is developing few skills and values (though teaching practices is an important factor here), both of which are important societal needs. Lastly, interviewees recognised that not all Solomon Islands' children receive secondary education, and of those who do, there are inequalities in terms of poverty, location and slow learners, with the maldistribution of teachers and resources affecting access to good quality education.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter summarises and draws conclusions from the main findings of the research, findings which have been derived from an analysis of the questionnaire and interview data. It also makes recommendations based on the findings, and suggests topics for further research.

1. The research questions

This thesis has studied aspects of a phenomenon – the secondary school curriculum of the Solomon Islands – through researching how a variety of its stakeholders experienced it. The secondary curriculum is a large phenomenon, so a study of its entirety was beyond the scope of this research. However, a contextual overview and a review of relevant literature, revealed concerns regarding the construction, content appropriateness and accessibility of the secondary curriculum. These formed the basis of the research questions which will now be answered.

1. Should there be one national Solomon Islands' secondary curriculum, or should provinces and/or schools be given the opportunity to construct their own curricula?

Although the Solomon Islands' provinces have their own governments and there has been talk of statehood, this interest in decentralisation clearly does not extend to the secondary school curriculum, with the vast majority of questionnaire

respondents and interviewees wishing to retain just one national secondary curriculum. Like Skilbeck (1994, 97) and Brady (1995, 6), interviewees perceived many benefits in a curriculum constructed, supported and monitored at a level (central government) where there is expertise, sufficient personnel and a greater likelihood of sufficient resources. One national curriculum would also give every student in this small nation “a chance to learn the same thing” (S2), which is a very important consideration in an egalitarian society. Additionally, interviewees believed that not all teachers, schools or provinces have the requisite skills, time, interest or resources for developing their own curricula, as expected by Brady (1995, 7) and Skilbeck, (1994, 97). As GA1 said, “There is some evidence ... that ... teachers still don’t have the skill and confidence to be able to write their own curriculums”.

In line with this preference for one curriculum was a general dislike of the now defunct two-tier system of a very academic curriculum in National Secondary Schools, and a more practical curriculum in Provincial Secondary Schools. It was seen as divisory, producing the thinking that, “One is superior and the other is inferior” (PA1), and also as discriminatory, with the more practical curriculum condemning its graduates to “working out in the sun ... (doing) dirty jobs and maybe (getting) less pay” (T2). This method of ensuring some practical education (proposed by Bugotu et al., 1973, 5.05) was clearly unacceptable.

However, 45% of teacher questionnaire respondents saw some merit in the old two-tier curriculum, and interviewees supported the introduction of academic and technical courses/strands in upper secondary school (proposed in 1996), which the students could choose between. But interviewees also feared that most students

would choose the academic strand because of the very prevalent “white collar mentality” (T2), and that, “It will be very expensive to run good vocational (technical) courses in all high schools because of the equipment needed” (PA1). Interviewees also felt that even more flexibility should be built into the curriculum. They suggested adding provisions to the curriculum to allow teachers to “extend what is already there, so that it’s (the curriculum) more specific to the situation ... in the schools” (GA1). Additionally, they suggested that schools be allowed to add subjects that are particularly relevant to their location or philosophy. This would also allow schools to utilise community-based knowledge and skills, which is something recommended by Brady (1995, 3), Glaser (1998, 9) and Treadaway (1996, 35). This all suggests that the current curriculum has created too much conformity, a danger inherent in mandatory curricula under state control (Brown, 2003, 2).

Thus stakeholders wish to have one national secondary curriculum, but would like it to be far more flexible than it is at present.

2. Should the range of people involved in curriculum construction be educators only, or should the group be expanded to involve other stakeholders?

A curriculum is a construct of the social and political philosophies, and personal ideas, skills, values and practices of the people who write it (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 2&11; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 3). In the Solomon Islands, these people have so far largely been limited to government education administrators, teachers and invited expatriate advisors.

As the curriculum is a major factor determining the knowledge and skills of its citizens, and hence their capacity to contribute productively to society, then it is logical for the Solomon Islands' government to take a great interest in their schools' curricula, as many countries' governments now do (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 5 & 7). Questionnaire respondents and interviewees were strongly in favour of continuing to involve government education administrators in curriculum construction, pointing out that it is their responsibility and that they have the expertise.

Questionnaire respondents and interviewees were also very strongly in favour of involving teachers in curriculum construction because they have appropriate knowledge and experience, because it "gives them ownership of the material" (GA2) and because it enhances their ability "to implement it (the curriculum) more effectively" (PA2). They also believed that teachers would be interested in involvement. But interviewees also cautioned that teachers do not have all knowledge and experience and might favour their own preferences, a very real possibility according to Brady & Kennedy (1999, 6). However, GA1 believed that this problem should be overcome by curriculum materials being "scrutinised by a panel of experts ... (as to their) ... suitability and relevancy".

Expatriate consultants have previously been important members of curriculum construction teams, but their continued inclusion received only qualified support. In general, the data showed that less highly educated individuals were the most in favour of expatriate involvement, feeling that they would bring with them useful knowledge and expertise. Moderately educated individuals tended to be the least in favour, citing as reasons increased local expertise and a fear that expatriates might want to develop content inappropriate to the culture. Perhaps most

realistically, the most experienced and most highly educated acknowledged that there is still insufficient local expertise for the Solomon Islands to be self-sufficient in curriculum construction. So the continued involvement of expatriates may be wise, although the consensus was that their role should be limited to being “advisors in the true sense of the word” (GA2).

Whilst literature is strongly in favour of involving students in curriculum construction because of their knowledge of their own needs (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6 & 7), data showed limited support for their involvement and great doubt in their interest (neither student interviewee was interested). Interviewees believed that students would lack confidence in their ability to give worthwhile suggestions and are largely content to just “take what comes” (S1).

Parents are important stakeholders in the curriculum (Dodd, 1998, 461) and are more likely to support it if they believe it will help their children achieve their potential (Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 5). Whilst some interviewees thought that parents might make a valuable contribution to curriculum content, particularly in the area of culture, other interviewees were not so sure. This paralleled questionnaire findings. There was also much uncertainty and pessimism regarding parents’ interest in involvement, with lack of knowledge and confidence cited as the main reasons. This pessimism, however, may prove unfounded, as “parents are becoming more concerned about the future of their children” (GA1), and GA2, who has consulted parents about other curricula, felt that parents will be keen, if only they are asked.

Students questionnaire respondents were very unsure about the value of involving business people in curriculum construction, but teachers were far more convinced, as were interviewees, who favoured the involvement of business people above that of students and parents. This is because business people, as employers, can identify skills students need, and when all is said and done, “We want to educate people who will go out and work, and they can work” (T1). Although many were doubtful about the interest of business people in involvement, the business people interviewed were very interested, and felt that, “We, as business people, should willingly do this, because we are helping our future” (BP2).

GA 1 summarised opinions well when he said:

There are people out there who we should consult. ... After all, whose curriculum is it? Solomon Islanders’ curriculum! And if there are interested parties, we should listen to them. If they have skills, let’s identify their skills and involve (them) where appropriate.

Thus the range of people involved in curriculum construction could be very usefully expanded beyond government education administrators, teachers and expatriate consultants to include other stakeholders such as business people, parents, and students, if their interest can be aroused.

3. a) Is the current Solomon Islands’ secondary curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of the range of subjects taught?

Much literature (such as White, 1903; Best, 1996, 15 &16; Nanzhao, 1996, 24; UNESCO, 2000, 8; Rodi et al., 2001, 12; MEHRD, 2004, 18) strongly argues the necessity of a curriculum being holistic in order to achieve the full flowering of an individual’s potential, that is, that it should develop a person’s cognitive, moral,

spiritual, physical, aesthetic and affective faculties. All interviewees strongly supported this concept, and added that it would “benefit the community”, because, “... the physical and social side, if they don’t have that ... they are a misfit in society” (BP1). Thus a holistic curriculum was perceived as an individual and societal need.

All curriculum subjects may aid cognitive development. Although a few students wished to drop a subject from the curriculum (see Figure 3.16), the vast majority of questionnaire teachers saw no current subject as irrelevant to the Solomon Islands, nor did any interviewee. There was, however, much interest in adding subjects (see Figure 3.13), particularly Computer Studies, as computer skills were seen as essential for upper secondary and tertiary education and for conducting business. There was also a small demand for some kind of Careers Education that included visits to workplaces, because students “don’t know what they want to do” (BP1S), though P1 preferred to have careers advisors in schools and offer work experience at the college level. Other suggestions for new subjects had very few proponents and were often parts of subjects already on the curriculum. However, it is noteworthy that two interviewees’ suggestions, and 20 out of 42 questionnaire respondents’ suggestions (see Figure 3.15), related to culture, illustrating a desire of Solomon Islanders to learn more about themselves. There will be a big problem, however, “Trying to fit them (new subjects) in(to) a tight timetable” (PA1), and a modularised approach (GA2’s suggestion), may be the only way to achieve this.

Literature contends that the development of values and spirituality in the moral domain is essential for healthy societies, and that the curriculum should play an important role in their development (Sommers, 1998, 4; Downs Perry, 1994, 97;

Nanzhao, 1996, 244; UNESCO, 2000, 14; Kessler, 2000, xiii & x). As interviewees perceived the Solomon Islands to be a Christian country, it is appropriate for the Bible to be utilised as a resource for values and spiritual development. The curriculum attempts this through the subjects Christian Education (Forms 1 – 3) and New Testament Studies (Forms 4 – 5), though the latter is an optional elective that is not studied by all students. Thus, in theory, the secondary curriculum attempts moral development, though how effectively it does so is discussed later.

Literature maintains that physical education (and its modern equivalent, PDHPE) enhances physical, social and mental health (Armstrong, 2000, 2; Hollander et al., 2003, 1-3; Jensen, 1998, 85) and therefore is an essential part of a holistic curriculum. However, PE is a controversial subject in the Solomon Islands. It is very narrowly perceived as just playing games once a week, is not always taught in Forms 1 – 3, is rarely taught in Forms 4 – 5, and few wish it to be taught in Forms 4 – 5. Reasons for its unpopularity include poor equipment and lack of trained teachers, but essentially, it is perceived as a “waste of time” (P1) because “anything that is not examined is not important in the eyes of ... everybody” (GA2). Thus, the physical domain is only very weakly attended to and students not only miss a valuable opportunity to strengthen their bodies and minds, they also learn the negative message that physical education is not essential for a good lifestyle (Issues, 1994, 1).

Literature argues that the ability to act creatively is necessary to support life in the 21st century (UNESCO, 2000, 14) and that a strong arts curriculum lays the foundations for positive, measurable and lasting academic and social benefits (Jensen, 1998, 87). The subjects Art and Music are prime tools for stimulating

creativity and imagination in the aesthetic domain, and Creative Arts is, in theory, part of the curriculum, yet it is not taught. Data showed much disapproval of this situation because it means that even though “Solomon Islanders are incredibly talented in Art and Music, they have no outlet” (GA2), and that, “Some young lives are never really ignited” (GA2). The main reason why Creative Arts is not taught is because it is not examined, so Creative Arts teachers are all diverted to teaching examinable subjects. Yet data revealed a demand for Art, and especially Music, to be taught (see Figure 3.13). This state of affairs, plus the weak emphasis on other creative practical subjects (discussed later), means that students’ artistic developmental potential is being ignored, resulting in an impoverished education (Graham, 2003, 1 & 2).

To summarise, quite a broad range of subjects are taught, and the cognitive and moral domains appear, superficially at least, to be attended to, but the physical and aesthetic domains are largely or completely neglected, and of the affective domain, there is little sign. Thus, in terms of the range of subjects, the secondary curriculum is neither holistic, nor attending to all individual and societal needs.

3. b) Is the current Solomon Islands’ secondary curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of the content of the various subjects (in general terms)?

Benjamin’s (1939) classic allegory of the sabre tooth curriculum illustrates how, if the content of a curriculum does not evolve over time, it can become largely irrelevant to modern life, so it is important to question the appropriateness of subject content.

Most questionnaire respondents believed that each curriculum subject taught content helpful to life in the Solomon Islands. Significantly, the five optional elective subjects, only two of which can be studied in Forms 4 and 5, were considered more helpful than the four compulsory core subjects (see Figure 3.17). This was because the core subjects were seen as providing knowledge/theory that only applies to examinations and paid employment, whereas the elective subjects were perceived as providing life skills. However, one life skill that interviewees saw as lacking from curriculum subjects, is how to live a healthy life (see Appendix J).

Every curriculum subject (except Industrial Arts) had a few critics. Significantly though, more criticism was levelled against academic core subjects than against electives (see Figure 3.18), and most criticism was levelled against Social Studies, particularly its unit on the Cold War, though interviewees would not remove it from the syllabus because of its ability to teach students about learning from past mistakes. The details of the Industrial Revolution were also criticised, and the perception was that these topics crowd out more relevant content such as current affairs.

As curriculum can create reality for learners because it is selective (Lovat & Smith, 1995, 12), it is important to ground that reality in the local context lest students feel alienated from their cultural worlds (Disla, 2000, 2).

A very important aspect of the local context is culture, and literature maintains that the curriculum should be an agent of cultural transmission (Nanzhao, 1996, 239; Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 8; UNESCO, 2000, 8; MEHRD, 2004, 7). Questionnaire respondents and interviewees agreed with this concept as they saw local culture

being lost and thought of as “second rate” (PA1) causing a loss of identity and reduced understanding of other Solomon Islands’ cultures. The MEHRD (2004, 7) also believed that including culture in the curriculum is very important if the indigenous knowledge and skills vital for sustainable development are to be preserved. However, most questionnaire respondents were either uncertain whether the curriculum was transmitting culture effectively, or were sure that it was not, with P1 adamant that the teaching of culture is “deficient in the curriculum of Solomon Islands”.

Questionnaire respondents and interviewees considered it extremely important for Solomon Islanders to learn about the history of the Solomon Islands because of its links with culture and identity, and its ability to help students learn from past failures and mistakes. However, there was disagreement over how effectively the curriculum has been doing this. Some student questionnaire respondents thought it effective, yet few teachers did, and S1 said, “I don’t know much about my own history ... I know more about the Cold War”. Data also showed a demand for learning about Solomon Islands’ geography, but questionnaire respondents believed that it is taught even less effectively than history, and S2 could not remember learning any Solomon Islands’ geography. Poor access to information on Solomon Islands’ history, and a lack of textbooks dealing with Solomon Islands’ geography, were cited as significant contributors to these curriculum failures.

There is a danger, however, that increasing curriculum content on the local context could make the curriculum too parochial, and GA2 believed that many teachers would say, “Don’t learn from overseas at all”. However, most interviewees and questionnaire respondents believed that the curriculum should teach students

something of their Pacific neighbours. With globalisation now transforming life around the world (McCarthy et al., 2003, 4), it was also deemed important to learn something of the rest of the world, though once again, the curriculum was not thought to be very effective in this area.

In summary, whilst much subject content is appropriate for the context, there are problems. The details of the Cold War and the Industrial Revolution are somewhat irrelevant. Also, people's need to learn more about healthy living, and their desire to learn more about their culture, their neighbours and their place in the world, are insufficiently catered for. Thus, the contents of curriculum subjects are not wholly appropriate for societal needs.

3. c) Is the current Solomon Islands' secondary curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of the emphases placed on different subjects?

The most recent edition of the Curriculum Handbook (1987, 11) states that many Solomon Islanders "believe that academic education is the most valuable ... because paid employment in towns has usually offered material rewards". In line with this belief, the four compulsory core subjects of the secondary curriculum – English, Maths, Science and Social Studies – are all academic subjects. When this is linked to the fact that New Testament Studies is often made compulsory, and Business Studies is the most popular elective subject, it means that many Form 4 and 5 students study no practical subjects at all. Yet data showed that there is a huge demand for the curriculum to teach more practical skills, which it cannot easily do with the current core/elective system. Clearly, some change is advisable.

Questionnaire respondents showed little interest in change, though of the core subjects they valued English the most, and Social Studies the least (see Figure 3.19). Regarding which elective subjects might become core subjects, they ranked Agricultural Science, Business Studies and New Testament Studies the highest (see Figure 3.20), but their requests were comparatively few.

Interviewees, however, showed much more interest in change. They saw great value in English remaining a core subject, believing it to be an essential tool for learning all subjects, for higher education and for international communication. Students becoming numerate through the study of Mathematics was also considered indispensable, but little was said in support of Science or Social Studies remaining core subjects. When asked what they would like to see as core subjects, interviewees' answers ranged from everything, to just English, but the largest number (five out of twelve) favoured just English and Mathematics. Significantly, this roughly parallels the results of a similar survey of a large body of secondary school teachers at a June 2004 workshop in Honiara. Certainly, PA1 saw more freedom for students to choose subjects as a positive thing because, "Then there is no more of this, 'Oh, this is a better subject because it is compulsory'". It remains to be seen whether reducing the number of compulsory academic subjects will "boost the students to do more practical things ... (but) it gives them that option" (P1).

The examination system has also tended to devalue elective subjects by either not examining them at all (the Form 3 selection), or by not including their marks for selection (the Form 5 selection). When this is added to the fact that, "Anything that is not examined is not important in the eyes of ... everybody" (GA2), it has meant

that other subjects (including Science and Social Studies in Form 3) are not taken seriously by students, are not always taught properly, or are not taught at all. This has resulted in students reaching Form 4 who “struggle with ... other subjects” (T2) because they “don’t know anything” (GA2). This situation has generated much demand for the inclusion of all subjects in selection, though there was some concern that the load, certainly at Form 3, might be too much for students.

At present, there are no firm plans to make any changes in the core/elective system, though it is understood that Science and Social Studies examinations will be added to English and Mathematics for the Form 3 selection in 2006, and that other subjects will follow. In the meantime, whether it is a core or an elective subject, and whether or not it is examined and counted for selection, will continue to control the status of a subject. Skilbeck (1994, 98) stated that the core curriculum should provide students with all “learnings” judged to be basic and essential, yet the effects of the core/elective and selection systems, make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Solomon Islands’ secondary curriculum to achieve this. Thus the current emphases on subjects may actually be preventing the secondary curriculum from meeting societal needs.

3. d) Is the current Solomon Islands’ secondary curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of the emphases placed on knowledge and values?

Knowledge

As has already been discussed, a “white collar mentality” in the Solomon Islands has equated an academic education with wealth (Curriculum Handbook, 1987, 11). This has resulted in a curriculum that “does provide some practical stuff ... (but) most of the time it’s with knowledge and learning” (S1), and in which practical

elective subjects “are the last to be chosen” (PA2). Thus knowledge, particularly through academic subjects, has become the focus of the curriculum. Many questionnaire students approved of this, but others did not, seeing the lack of a practical education as “a big hole in the curriculum” (P1) that needs to be filled for the good of society.

Another facet of the knowledge versus practical skills problem is that education is viewed as the transferring of knowledge, not skills. Consequently, both academic and practical subjects are frequently taught in a theoretical way, with “the teacher most of the time in front of the blackboard ... (writing) notes after notes” (GA1) and not teaching any skills. The teaching of practical skills is also discouraged by secondary schools often having “no tools and equipment, ... no space, ... no proper workshop, and teachers who are not well qualified” (GA2). Thus secondary school graduates may “have a lot of knowledge ... but they have no skills of any kind” (GA2). Consequences of this include educated people who struggle to survive when unemployment forces them back to their village, university graduates who cannot apply their knowledge, and large numbers of school leavers who just “roam around town” (PA1) because they “can’t be employed ... (and) can’t fit into ... society” (P1).

A third facet of the ‘emphasis on knowledge’ problem is how well the secondary curriculum prepares students for further education in Form 6 and beyond. Not surprisingly, the curriculum is perceived as providing adequate knowledge, though there may be knowledge gaps in certain subjects that need bridging, but there is a problem with skills. “In Form 6 there are (some) students not able to ... (practise) basic skills” (GA1), and many others who were “... not given a very good

background in how to research” (S1), a particularly vital skill for Form 6 internal assessments. Perhaps the reason why Form 6 students are sometimes told that, “This is the most difficult year of your life in education” (GA2) is because they are attempting it with insufficient skills.

This all illustrates how traditional knowledge-based education is not longer appropriate for modern life (UNESCO, 2000, 14).

Values

Values education is a straightforward idea that is hard to challenge (Zern, 1997, 1), and questionnaire respondents were strongly in favour of the curriculum educating students about values. Yet interviewees have seen evidence of a lack of values “in the home (and) in school” (PA1), in the rising crime rate, and in a general loss of the traditional value, respect. One reason for this lack is that the curriculum “has been attempting to (develop values) but not doing a good job of it” (P1). Reasons for this inefficiency include a lack of values in curriculum subjects’ objectives and content, and a lack of seriousness about teaching them, particularly in secular schools where the emphasis is on delivering knowledge to get students through examinations. This even extends to the two Bible subjects where “the curriculum just teaches (the) Bible as stories”, with “very little emphasis on moral values and spirituality” (PA1).

Thus there seems to be very little emphasis on values development in the curriculum, and this is despite recognition of its importance (Treadaway, 2003, 8; Rodi et al., 2001, 13; MEHRD, 2004, 18) and despite Bugotu et al. (1973, 4.02) stating that there can be no holistic development of students without values

education. This has obviously been detrimental to society, as interviewees placed values high on their list of societal needs (see Appendix J), particularly honesty, law and order, sharing, racial harmony, and fidelity in marriage. Interviewees were also hopeful that through values education, the curriculum would help produce leaders who are “accountable, transparent in whatever they do” (GA1), “Who have moral values ... (and) ... who know how to handle things in a Christian way” (S1). However, it was also observed that the informal curriculum has a very big influence on students, so if the formal curriculum is to successfully develop values in students, then values must be modelled by “the way a school is run, and ... the way the teachers live, especially in boarding school” (GA2).

3. e) Is the current Solomon Islands’ secondary curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of the emphasis placed on communication, problem-solving, negotiating and decision-making skills?

This list of competency skills are viewed by literature (Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 4; Tien et al., 2003, 2; Elias et al., 1997, 7; Minehan, 1996, 1) as vital to success in the workplace, especially in industry and commerce (Grubb, 1996, 1; Brown 2003, 3), and are particularly important for teenagers in their movement towards independence in both judgement and action (Gray, 1998, 2). Thus the promotion of these key competencies has become an integral part of some secondary curricula, both in the developed and less developed world (Tien et al., 2003, 1-7; Samath, 2002, 2; Dimmock & Walker, 1998, 4).

Questionnaire respondents and interviewees were almost unanimous in believing that the secondary curriculum should teach competency skills - “They are important skills ... and students should have them” (PA2). Their development was also seen

as a means of students becoming “independent learners” rather than being “spoon-fed all the time” (GA1). However, there were many doubts about the efficacy of the curriculum in teaching these skills.

Communication skills were perceived as essential to everyone. Questionnaire students believed that the curriculum provided them with communication skills, but teacher questionnaire respondents and interviewees, were less convinced and pointed out such problems as, “Listening was a skill that had to come by itself” (S1).

The language of communication is particularly problematic. Whilst the ability to communicate in English was deemed vital for business and for further education, it was apparent that while some students are confident in communicating in Pidgin, many students are so nervous about speaking English that they speak it little, if at all. One reason for this lack of confidence seems to be that most teachers just concentrate on teaching English grammar, because that is what English examinations concentrate on, and because the current English syllabus suggests little methodology. To compound this problem, “A lot of teachers are speaking in Pidgin (in the classroom)”, and while GA2 would like to formalise this, “because communication here is (in) Pidgin, it’s never going to be through English I don’t think”, GA1 pointed out that, “Every printed matter is in English” and said that he “cannot imagine learning new concepts without ... understanding English”. This confused situation is “a barrier to learning in Solomon Islands” (GA1), and it certainly renders the secondary curriculum inefficient in developing students’ communication skills.

Data revealed much doubt about the curriculum helping students to develop other competency skills. Interviewees felt that the curriculum is not transmitting decision-making skills effectively because it “never really encourages ... young people to look at an issue and discuss it openly” (T1), consequently, the “society quickly copies and adopts ... changes ... without much decision making”, and people “don’t see whether ... (their) decisions will affect others”. The ability to negotiate is also an extremely important skill, given recent ethnic problems and frequent land disputes, yet, “A lot of us don’t have it because I don’t think we’ve been introduced to the methods” (P1).

The situation with problem-solving skills is similar. With modern life bringing more problems, there is a real need for Solomon Islands’ “youngsters to become good problem solvers” (GA1). Thus, it was generally agreed that, “Problem solving should be a part of every syllabus” (GA2). Yet BP1, in her workplace, has observed that young people “don’t know how to solve a problem”. GA2 identified the underlying reason for the curriculum not helping students develop problem-solving and other competency skills when he explained that:

If the syllabuses ... are taught in the way they are meant to be taught, I think we have a lot of problem solving, but the problem is they are not. ... It goes back to the attitude ... that we’re not there to help students solve problems or get their own ideas, we’re there to tell them facts and get them to learn ... (them).

The MEHRD (2000, 18) stated that basic education should provide students with the basic skills and competencies required for economic activity, and three interviewees named competency skills as important societal needs (see Appendix

J). Also, increased competency may help to eradicate the “lack of self-esteem and ... self confidence” which GA2 has observed in many Solomon Islanders. Thus it is important to help students develop competency skills. While the secondary curriculum seems to be developing some communication skills, its effectiveness in developing other skills has been poor, and the main reason for this failure seems to be the heavy emphasis on knowledge transmission.

4. Do all children of secondary school age have equal access to secondary schooling?

Education is pivotal to life’s chances and self-fulfilment (Musuota, 1994, 4) and must be widely available for society to progress (Brown, 2003, 2), but in the Solomon Islands, there are several issues limiting access to secondary education.

One issue is selection examinations. Whilst the government now has a policy to eliminate the Standard 6 selection and provide “universal basic education to Form 3” (GA2), the year this will happen is unclear. This policy was strongly supported by some – “Grade (Standard) 6 drop-outs is a real crime” (PA2) – but not all. Many questionnaire respondents wanted to keep the Standard 6 selection examinations, and so did the two teacher interviewees who believed that the extension of education to Form 3 would create more misfits in village communities, and that it would put into secondary schools students who “won’t cope” and who teachers would “have a hard time to ... teach” (T2). There was even less support for dropping the Form 3 selection because, “We have to go through some sweat and pain to get what we want” (S1), although interviewees wanted to amend it by examining all subjects, and would like to see push-outs channelled into practical courses in Rural Training Centres.

The main reason for these selections is that there are insufficient secondary schools with insufficient places. The huge growth in parent-initiated Community High Schools has eased the problem. However, most Community High Schools only have Forms 1 – 3, and may be prevented from adding Forms 4 and 5 “until there is a satisfactory standard of education up to Form 3” (GA2). This will be difficult to achieve because there are insufficient trained teachers and little or no finance for maintenance. Thus it will be difficult to significantly increase access to the secondary curriculum in the near future.

Gender is a second accessibility issue. “In town, ... girls and boys have equal opportunities” (S1), but in rural areas, where traditionally a girl’s place was considered to be in the house or garden, this is not so. Government figures (see Figure 1.2) show that at present, more boys receive secondary education than girls. However, attitudes are changing, and the imbalance is being somewhat redressed by the development of day Community High Schools that remove the need to expose girls to the “dangers of leaving home” (GA2).

Poverty is another important accessibility issue. When money is short, students in schools often suffer embarrassment and lose motivation, some parents settle for their children receiving minimal education, while other parents send their sons to school, but not their daughters. With the collapse of the economy, this problem has worsened, though, once again, it has been somewhat ameliorated by the growth of the less expensive day Community High Schools. Another consequence of poverty is decreasing fees income for schools, resulting in a reduction in the quality of education provided. Whilst UNICEF (2000, 1) espouses free education as a

solution to the poverty problem, this is not seen as realistic in the Solomon Islands' context – “Right now, the country doesn't have the capacity to support free education” (P1). Neither is it seen as wholly desirable, because “everything costs money, and we have to ... work to get whatever, and that is what our children should be taught” (T1).

Another accessibility problem is that, “We're very much a system that caters only for those who are bright” (GA2). Interviewees perceived that slow learners get left behind in overcrowded classrooms and rarely progress as far as Form 3, and thus receive an education that curtails their opportunities (Glaser, 1998, 9). Rodi et al. (2001, 11), the MEHRD (2004, 12) and GA1 all believe that, “We should cater for these slow learners” (GA1), although with separate classes and streaming deemed demoralising, it may be a difficult issue to resolve.

Equal access to quality education is a final accessibility issue. The United Nations (2001, 2 & 3) recognises that the quality of education may be affected by untrained teachers and poorly equipped classrooms, and this appears to be the case in rural Solomon Islands. The best, and greatest number of teachers are perceived to be in urban centres, particularly Honiara the capital city, because of the better living and working conditions and better educational opportunities for their children. Consequently, rural secondary schools, particularly Community High Schools, have “very few qualified teachers” (GA2). With resources, “The further you go away from Honiara, ... the less resources there are available in schools” (GA1), and isolated rural schools cannot share resources like urban schools can. Rural Community High Schools are particularly badly resourced, with some having “no tools, no equipment for doing practical subjects (and) no textbooks” (GA2). These problems

translate into such a “huge difference between the Provincial, National and the Community High (schools)” (GA2), that some Community High Schools are seen as “giving a false sense of hope” (P1). With 58% of all secondary school students attending Community High Schools (see Figure 1.8), this is a major concern.

All in all, it is quite clear that there are problems in the Solomon Islands with access to secondary education. With education inextricably linked to a productive economy and high living standards (Brown, 2003, 3; Inglehart, 1996, 654), and with “... a lot of kids who do not have access to schools” (P1), interviewees viewed more secondary schools that are staffed by sufficient teachers who are well trained and committed, as a major societal need (see Appendix J). They also believed that increased access to secondary education would help solve the problem of urban Masta Lius and aimless village children. It is praiseworthy that the Solomon Islands’ government (Rodi et al., 2001, 12; MEHRD, 2004, 7) now intends to make education available to all young Solomon Islanders regardless of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background, but there are several issues to solve before that can be achieved. In the meantime, “More and more ... we are educating an elite” (GA2) and creating striking class inequalities in a society that was traditionally very egalitarian. This is a negative consequence of education warned of by Wasuka (1989, 9) and Connell (1991, 9).

2. Recommendations

The data suggested many courses of action that could be taken to help the secondary curriculum cater better for individual and societal needs. These are outlined in the following recommendations.

1. One national secondary curriculum should be retained, but it should be made more flexible through such means as:
 - a) Following through with the proposal to develop academic and technical strands in upper secondary schools.
 - b) Increasing choices between subjects by reducing the number of compulsory subjects.
 - c) Offering scope within subjects to enable schools to make better use of their local context, such as in Science, coastal schools studying coral reef ecosystems while inland schools study rainforest ecosystems (as suggested by G2).

2. The number of groups involved in secondary curriculum construction should be expanded to include business people, parents and students. Students, however, will need to have their interest aroused by such things as debates in schools – with their comments being passed on to the relevant Subject Advisory Committees (SACs) – and by the secondary curriculum being the subject of some of the student speech contests that regularly occur. It would also be wise to include tertiary educators, who can advise on linking secondary and tertiary curricula, and medical personnel, who can advise on the health-related issues that interviewees requested be added to the curriculum.

3. To aid the drive towards self-sufficiency, areas where there is as yet little or no local expertise in curriculum construction should be identified, with a view to training Solomon Islanders to fill those areas.

4. In order to make the curriculum more holistic, it is recommended that:
- a) Physical education be developed as a proper curriculum subject because “we need physical education and that’s something missing from the curriculum” (P1). This could be facilitated by:
 - Recruiting a PE Curriculum Development Officer (as suggested by GA1) to develop a modern PDHPE syllabus that includes units on such things as Healthful Living and HIV and Aids Awareness, both of which were identified as societal needs.
 - Training people to teach PE/PDHPE.
 - Enhancing the attractiveness of PE/PDHPE as a subject by awarding some certificates.
 - b) Creative Arts be resurrected as a curriculum subject and be revitalised by incorporating into it dance and drama (as recommended by GA1), and thus be a means of preserving culture as well as of developing creativity.
 - c) A serious attempt be made to develop values in students through such means as:
 - Integrating values where appropriate into the content of all subjects (suggested by GA1).
 - Identifying values in new syllabi objectives and student outcome statements, then, “Maybe, if it’s written, they (teachers) will do it” (T2).
 - Avoiding where possible using teachers to teach Christian Education and New Testament Studies who “aren’t really religious instructors ... (because) the approach they use is more telling stories ... than ... searching out the values” (P1).

- Schools making an effort to ensure that their school culture demonstrates the use of values, because at present, “We are not modelling enough to consolidate what we ... say to students” (PA1).

5. In order to balance curriculum emphases on knowledge transmission, application of knowledge and skills development, it is recommended that:

a) Teachers modify their teaching strategies to include the transmission of skills inherent to their subjects. Encouragement to do this could take the form of:

- Putting skills development and testing in syllabus objectives and student outcomes, as both teacher interviewees believed that if skills are not specifically mentioned in syllabi, then they are very likely to be overlooked or even ignored.
- Incorporating the testing of skills in selection examination papers.
- Reactivating proposals to include internal assessment in all selection examinations.
- Frequent in-service training courses (suggested by GA1). This would also increase teachers' knowledge of the curriculum and help to overcome the many uncertainties evident in questionnaire data.

b) The development of competency skills is also integrated into subject syllabi.

This may be done through such means as:

- Units and their supporting texts including activities (such as discussions, debates, simulations, games, drama and so on) that attempt to develop these skills.
- Including case studies of real disputes and how they were, and/or could have been resolved (as suggested by GA1).

- Giving more emphasis to the developing and testing of listening and speaking skills, especially in the English language.
- Moving towards competency-based assessment (a possible option suggested by GA2).

6. The content of the curriculum needs to be revised in terms of individual subjects and their syllabi to make it more relevant to current needs.

- a) The addition of new subjects needs to be considered, with Computer Studies the most pressing need. A modularised approach also needs to be considered as a way of making room on the timetable for extra subjects.
- b) Data showed that Solomon Islanders want to know more about themselves and their place in the world, so it is recommended that:

- More information on Solomon Islands' culture be included in all curriculum subjects where appropriate. However, this will need to be done sensitively because interviewees pointed out that as far as some Christian denominations are concerned, there are some things in culture that are better left out, and that the Solomon Islands has so many different cultures that it will be difficult to include them all.
- More content on Pacific and global issues be added to any/all curriculum subjects where appropriate.

- c) A subject's content may always be improved upon, but it is particularly recommended that the Social Studies Subject Advisory Committee:

- Consider reducing the amount of detail in their much-criticised Cold War and Industrial Revolution units.
- Consider incorporating more Solomon Islands' history, and human and physical geography, as suggested by GA1. This would need to

be facilitated by making resources on history more readily available and by the production of classroom texts on Solomon Islands' geography.

7. In order to give the Solomon Islands a more educated populace and produce more of the skilled trades-people that the economy and society greatly need, it is recommended that:

- a) Some thought is given to how slow learners may be given an education that will maximise rather than curtail their opportunities.
- b) Interviewees' suggestion of developing more courses in Rural Training Centres offering practical skills for Form 3 push-outs is acted upon.

3. Recommendations for further research

Data exposed several issues related to the secondary school curriculum that could be profitably researched.

1. GA 1 said that, "It's good ... (to) discuss with parents ... regarding what should be put in the curriculum", and P1 recommended that "a little research focussing on parents" asking "what would you like the schools to teach?" be done. This would be a useful exercise because parents have "gone through life and they're experienced" (BP2). Thus, parents are in a good position to identify areas that are "deficient in the curriculum" and give guidance in "those sensitive areas" which may involve breaking custom" (P1).

2. Questionnaire data revealed that the teachers of school A showed far more interest in student involvement in curriculum construction than the teachers of school C. This may have implications for teaching practices, student-teacher relations and school culture. Thus it could be very instructive to research why there was such a difference of opinion.

3. Interviewees doubted whether students would choose wisely when faced with choosing between academic and technical/practical subjects or strands. It would therefore be useful to research what subjects students chose in the past and why, and what they are likely to choose in the future and why. This would help to develop strategies to encourage students to make choices that suit their interests and capabilities, and the needs of society.

4. Given student uncertainty about future careers, it would be useful to conduct some research regarding the desirability, feasibility and content of some kind of student work experience in the context of careers education.

5. In that the affective domain appears not to be attended to by the curriculum, it is recommended that each curriculum subject is researched to ascertain whether it is attempting to develop students' affective domain in any way, and how it may help in this area.

6. The examination system seems to be the "tail that wags the dog" (Hill, 1995, 41) because it controls what is taught and affects how things are taught. Thus it is recommended that the following be researched for each secondary curriculum subject.

- a) How it is examined (multiple choice, short answer, essays, diagrams etc.).
- b) The level of difficulty (easy or hard or a mixture).
- c) What *is* tested (knowledge, application of knowledge, skills etc.).
- d) What *should be* tested.
- e) How examining the subject may be amended to encourage teachers to teach skills and values in their classes.

7. Interviewees pointed out that good communication and language skills are vital for good quality personal and business relationships and for education, yet students' listening skills and English-speaking skills are weak, and language has become a "barrier to learning" (GA1) in the Solomon Islands. It would therefore be appropriate to research how other countries, particularly Pidgin-speaking countries where English is taught as a second language:

- a) Attempt to develop listening skills (in any language) through the secondary school curriculum.
- b) Encourage teachers and students to practise speaking English both inside and outside the classroom.

Such research would aid the development of strategies that may help remove this barrier to learning.

8. According to some interviewees, many Form 3 push-outs are social misfits in rural areas. In order to more fully understand this phenomenon and generate strategies to prevent it happening, it would be very useful to research:

- a) Where Form 3 push-outs go after they fail the selection.
- b) In what ways those who return to their villages are misfits.
- c) Of the students who stay in town:

- Why they stay in town and do not go back to their rural villages.
- How they occupy themselves.
- What could be done to encourage them to go back to their villages and feel comfortable there.

9. The United Nations (2001, 2) argues that when future mothers are educated, whole nations are educated. Thus it would for the good of the nation to research in more detail why the gender imbalance exists, why it is that girls seem to do less well in examinations than boys (as reported by PA2), and how the gender imbalance may be eliminated.

10. In order to address the rural/urban maldistribution of trained teachers it would be useful to research in more detail, why teachers prefer to teach in urban schools, why they do not wish to teach in rural schools, and what may persuade them to teach in rural schools.

4. Conclusion

This thesis began by establishing the fact that education has a very long tradition in human society, and that it is inextricably linked with economic development, prosperity and social progress (Brown, 2003, 3; Inglehart, 1996, 654; Wasuka, 1989, 99; Bugotu et al., 1973, 4.04; UNESCO, 2000, 14-18). Yet recently, the Solomon Islands has been characterised by economic and social problems, which suggests that the secondary school curriculum may not have been achieving all that it should have been. Thus, this research gathered and analysed perceptions of curriculum stakeholders regarding the construction, appropriateness and

accessibility of the Solomon Islands national secondary school curriculum, in the hope that it may provide constructive input into future curriculum development.

The first aim of this thesis was to discuss who should be involved in constructing the Solomon Islands' secondary school curriculum. Data clearly showed the necessity of continuing to involve government education administrators, teachers and expatriate advisors because of their knowledge and expertise. But data also showed that it is desirable to involve other stakeholder groups (especially business people) whose knowledge of students' and society's needs have so far been largely untapped. It was also clear that it was deemed best for all these groups to work together at the level of central government to develop just one national secondary curriculum that, through increased flexibility, would be able to cater better for individual, local and societal needs.

The second aim of this thesis was to discuss the appropriateness of the content of the secondary curriculum for the local context. The curriculum has certainly been satisfying to a large extent the demand for knowledge. However, data revealed a few gaps in the knowledge provided (particularly in self-knowledge) that need to be filled. Data also revealed that the great emphasis on knowledge transmission and passing examinations has largely crowded out the teaching of skills – academic, practical and competency skills – resulting in a workforce that has few practical skills and little ability to apply its knowledge. The heavy emphasis on knowledge transmission has also largely crowded out of the curriculum any subjects, syllabus content and teaching strategies that can help develop students' moral, physical, aesthetic and affective faculties, resulting in a curriculum that is neither holistic nor

balanced, and as such, it cannot be said to be wholly appropriate to either individual or societal needs.

The third aim was to discuss the accessibility of the secondary school curriculum. It is well known that, largely due to financial constraints, there are insufficient places in secondary schools and that plans are in progress to give increasing numbers of young people access to secondary education until at least Form 3. However, data also showed that there other accessibility issues needing attention. These include a lingering gender imbalance, poverty, slow learners who rarely achieve secondary education, and a serious imbalance in the rural-urban distribution of resources and of good, qualified teachers. This last problem is perhaps the most detrimental to society because it has allowed the creation of an educated urban elite in a previously egalitarian society - which may be regarded as negative rather than positive social progress.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the findings of this thesis will encourage stakeholder groups to co-operate together in partnership (as advised by Skilbeck, 1994, 99, and Brady & Kennedy, 1999, 6) to develop a secondary school curriculum that provides the multi-faceted education that Lewis (1998, 1) and Lee (1997, 1 & 2) argue is so essential for economic and social progress in the 21st century. Such a curriculum would also cater to societal and individual needs because it would create resourceful and responsible citizens – a stated desire of the Solomon Islands' government (Rodi et al., 2001, 12; MEHRD, 2004, 18) – and would help individuals attain the full flowering of their potential.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Teacher questionnaire

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

SOLOMON ISLANDS' SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Return of this questionnaire indicates that you have consented to take part in this study.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research is conducted, it may be given to a researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, or phone Australia 2 4980 2161 or fax Australia 2 1980 2190.

All questions refer to the curriculum in secondary schools.

.....

A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please circle the things that describe you.

1. Training - Certificate / Diploma / Bachelor / Other _____

2. Gender - Male / Female

3. Age Group - 21 – 30 / 31 – 40 / 41 – 50 / 50+

4. How many years have you been teaching the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum?

For the following statements, please circle the letters that best describe your opinion.

SA = Strongly agree

A = Agree

U = Uncertain

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly disagree

B. HOW MANY CURRICULA?

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 5. There should be one National Curriculum for all schools. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. Provinces should write their own curricula. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. Schools should be allowed to write their own curricula. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. There used to be two curricula. The National High Schools' curriculum was more academic, whereas the Provincial High School curriculum was more practical. This was a good idea. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

C. WHO SHOULD CONSTRUCT THE CURRICULUM?

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 9. Government education officials should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. Education consultants from overseas should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. Teachers should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 12. Many teachers would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. Students should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. Many students would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 15. Parents should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 16. Many parents would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 17. Business people should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 18. Many business people would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

D. THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM

The Range of Subjects

19. There should be more subjects added to the curriculum. SD D U A SA

20. If you agreed with Question 19, (circle) which of the following subjects you would like to see added, and/or give other suggestions.

Art Careers Education Computer Studies Mechanics Music

Other _____

21. Some subjects, currently part of the curriculum, should be dropped. SD D U A SA

22. If you agreed with Question 21, state which subject(s) you would like to see dropped.

23. There should be PE classes for Forms 1 – 3. SD D U A SA

24. There should be PE classes for Forms 4 and 5. SD D U A SA

The Content of Subjects

25. What is taught in **English** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands SD D U A SA

26. What is taught in **Mathematics** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

27. What is taught in **Science** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

28. What is taught in **Social Studies** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

29. What is taught in **Christian Education** (Bible) and **New Testament Studies** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

30. What is taught in **Business Studies** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

31. What is taught in **Home Economics** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

32. What is taught in **Agricultural Science** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

33. What is taught in **Manual Arts** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

34. If you disagreed with any of Questions 25-33, please state why.

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 35. The curriculum teaches things that are not relevant to Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 36. If you agreed with Question 35, please give an example from one subject. | | | | | |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 37. The curriculum encourages students to respect their culture and to uphold traditional values. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 38. The curriculum should encourage students to respect their culture and uphold traditional values. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 39. The curriculum teaches many things about the culture of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 40. The curriculum should teach students many things about the culture of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 41. The curriculum teaches many things about the History of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 42. The curriculum should teach students about the History of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 43. The curriculum teaches many things about the Geography of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 44. The curriculum should teach students about the Geography of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 45. The curriculum teaches students about other Pacific Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 46. The curriculum should teach students about other Pacific Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 47. The curriculum helps students understand other cultures around the world. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 48. The curriculum should help students understand other cultures around the world. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

The emphasis placed on parts of the curriculum

At present the curriculum has four core subjects.

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 49. English should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 50. Mathematics should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 51. Science should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 52. Social Studies should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 53. Other subjects should become core subjects. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

54. If you agreed with Question 53, circle which of the elective subjects you would like to see become a core subject.

New Testament Studies Home Economics Business Studies Agricultural Science Manual Arts

- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 55. There should be no core subjects; every subject should be treated equally. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 56. Elective subjects should be included in selection exams. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 57. The curriculum is strongly academic. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 58. The curriculum should be very academic. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 59. The curriculum should teach more practical skills. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 60. The curriculum emphasises knowledge and learning facts. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 61. The curriculum should emphasise knowledge and learning facts. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 62. The curriculum should educate students about values. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 63. The curriculum encourages communication skills e.g. speaking and listening as well as writing. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 64. The curriculum should encourage communication skills. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 65. The curriculum encourages learning how to solve problems. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 66. The curriculum should encourage learning how to solve problems. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 67. The curriculum encourages learning how to negotiate and make decisions. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 68. The curriculum should encourage learning how to negotiate and make decisions. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 69. The curriculum provides students with all the basic knowledge and skills they need for Form 6. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |

E. ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM

- | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 70. All Solomon Islands children of secondary school age have access to secondary school. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 71. The Standard 6 selection exam should be dropped. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 72. The Form 3 selection exam should be dropped. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 73. More boys have access to secondary education than girls. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 74. Town children have better access to secondary schooling than village children. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 75. Children of rich parents have better access to secondary education than children of poor parents. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |

76. Children of rich parents have better access to National High Schools than children of poor parents.	SD	D	U	A	SA
77. Slow learners have the same opportunities in the secondary curriculum as fast learners.	SD	D	U	A	SA
78. Government schools have better resources to support the curriculum than private schools.	SD	D	U	A	SA
79. Town schools have better resources to support the curriculum than provincial schools.	SD	D	U	A	SA
80. Town schools have better qualified teachers than provincial schools.	SD	D	U	A	SA

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX B

Student questionnaire

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

SOLOMON ISLANDS' SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Return of this questionnaire indicates that you have consented to take part in this study.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research is conducted, it may be given to a researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia, or phone Australia 2 4980 2161 or fax Australia 2 1980 2190.

All questions refer to the curriculum in secondary schools.

.....

A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please circle the things that describe you.

1. Class - Arts / Science

2. Gender - Male / Female

3. Age Group - 15 – 20 / 21 – 25

4. Years of Schooling - How many years have you been a student in a school where the Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum is taught?

For the following statements, please circle the **(letters)** that best describe your opinion.

SA = Strongly agree

A = Agree

U = Uncertain

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly disagree

B. HOW MANY CURRICULA?

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 5. There should be one National Curriculum for all schools. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. Provinces should write their own curricula. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. Schools should be allowed to write their own curricula. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. There used to be two curricula. The National High Schools' curriculum was more academic, whereas the Provincial High School curriculum was more practical. This was a good idea. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

C. WHO SHOULD CONSTRUCT THE CURRICULUM?

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 9. Government education officials should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. Education consultants from overseas should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. Teachers should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 12. Many teachers would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. Students should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. Many students would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 15. Parents should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 16. Many parents would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 17. Business people should help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 18. Many business people would be interested to help construct the curriculum. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

D. THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM

The Range of Subjects

19. There should be more subjects added to the curriculum. SD D U A SA

20. If you agreed with Question 19, (circle) which of the following subjects you would like to see added, and/or give other suggestions.

Art Careers Education Computer Studies Mechanics Music

Other _____

21. Some subjects, currently part of the curriculum, should be dropped. SD D U A SA

22. If you agreed with Question 21, state which subject(s) you would like to see dropped.

23. There should be PE classes for Forms 1 – 3. SD D U A SA

24. There should be PE classes for Forms 4 and 5. SD D U A SA

The Content of Subjects

25. What is taught in **English** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands SD D U A SA

26. What is taught in **Mathematics** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

27. What is taught in **Science** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

28. What is taught in **Social Studies** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

29. What is taught in **Christian Education** (Bible) and **New Testament Studies** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

30. What is taught in **Business Studies** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

31. What is taught in **Home Economics** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

32. What is taught in **Agricultural Science** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

33. What is taught in **Manual Arts** is really helpful for life in Solomon Islands. SD D U A SA

34. If you disagreed with any of Questions 25-33, please state why.

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 35. The curriculum teaches things that are not relevant to Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 36. If you agreed with Question 35, please give an example from one subject. | | | | | |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 37. The curriculum encourages students to respect their culture and to uphold traditional values. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 38. The curriculum should encourage students to respect their culture and uphold traditional values. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 39. The curriculum teaches many things about the culture of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 40. The curriculum should teach students many things about the culture of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 41. The curriculum teaches many things about the History of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 42. The curriculum should teach students about the History of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 43. The curriculum teaches many things about the Geography of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 44. The curriculum should teach students about the Geography of Solomon Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 45. The curriculum teaches students about other Pacific Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 46. The curriculum should teach students about other Pacific Islands. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 47. The curriculum helps students understand other cultures around the world. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 48. The curriculum should help students understand other cultures around the world. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

The emphasis placed on parts of the curriculum

At present the curriculum has four core subjects.

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 49. English should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 50. Mathematics should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 51. Science should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 52. Social Studies should remain a core subject. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 53. Other subjects should become core subjects. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

54. If you agreed with Question 53, circle which of the elective subjects you would like to see become a core subject.

New Testament Studies Home Economics Business Studies Agricultural Science Manual Arts

- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 55. There should be no core subjects; every subject should be treated equally. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 56. Elective subjects should be included in selection exams. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 57. The curriculum is strongly academic. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 58. The curriculum should be very academic. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 59. The curriculum should teach more practical skills. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 60. The curriculum emphasises knowledge and learning facts. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 61. The curriculum should emphasise knowledge and learning facts. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 62. The curriculum should educate students about values. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 63. The curriculum encourages communication skills e.g. speaking and listening as well as writing. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 64. The curriculum should encourage communication skills. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 65. The curriculum encourages learning how to solve problems. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 66. The curriculum should encourage learning how to solve problems. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 67. The curriculum encourages learning how to negotiate and make decisions. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 68. The curriculum should encourage learning how to negotiate and make decisions. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 69. The curriculum provides students with all the basic knowledge and skills they need for Form 6. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |

E. ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM

- | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| 70. All Solomon Islands children of secondary school age have access to secondary school. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 71. The Standard 6 selection exam should be dropped. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 72. The Form 3 selection exam should be dropped. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 73. More boys have access to secondary education than girls. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 74. Town children have better access to secondary schooling than village children. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |
| 75. Children of rich parents have better access to secondary education than children of poor parents. | <i>SD</i> | <i>D</i> | <i>U</i> | <i>A</i> | <i>SA</i> |

76. Children of rich parents have better access to National High Schools than children of poor parents.	SD	D	U	A	SA
77. Slow learners have the same opportunities in the secondary curriculum as fast learners.	SD	D	U	A	SA
78. Government schools have better resources to support the curriculum than private schools.	SD	D	U	A	SA
79. Town schools have better resources to support the curriculum than provincial schools.	SD	D	U	A	SA
80. Town schools have better qualified teachers than provincial schools.	SD	D	U	A	SA

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX C

***The research questions related to questionnaire and
interview questions***

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. Should there be one National Solomon Islands secondary school curriculum, or should provinces and/or schools be given the opportunity to construct their own curricula?	5 – 8	1 – 3
2. Should the range of people involved in curriculum construction be educators only, or should the group be expanded to include other stakeholders?	9 – 18	4 – 6
3. Is the current Solomon Islands secondary school Curriculum appropriate for societal needs in terms of:		
a) The range of subjects taught in the curriculum?	19 – 21	7, 9, 12, 16
b) The content of various subjects (in general terms)?	25 – 48	10, 11, 20 – 22
c) The emphasis on different subjects?	49 – 58	17 – 19
d) The emphases on knowledge and values?	59 – 62	8
e) The emphasis placed on communication, problem-Solving, negotiating and decision-making skills?	63 – 69	13
4. Do all children of secondary school age have equal access to secondary schooling?	70 – 80	23 – 26
		Conclusions/ Recommendations 27 – 29

APPENDIX D

A summary of questionnaire responses (%)

QUESTIONS	STUDENTS						TEACHERS				
1	Demographic data						Demographic data				
2											
3											
4											
	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>		<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>
5	5	2	2	25	67		4	4	0	34	57
6	43	31	5	13	8		20	45	12	22	1
7	45	32	7	8	7		24	35	11	15	15
8	33	31	16	12	8		17	26	12	23	22
9	6	10	9	42	32		9	9	3	57	22
10	5	7	6	32	50		13	18	10	41	18
11	2	3	7	37	51		0	0	1	33	65
12	2	4	33	38	24		1	1	20	52	25
13	8	17	17	37	21		6	26	26	32	10
14	4	14	37	31	14		9	20	39	28	4
15	23	28	19	24	7		12	6	22	38	23
16	15	18	35	26	7		10	9	33	45	3
17	16	19	21	30	14		13	6	14	55	12
18	12	18	38	22	9		6	10	47	28	9
19	8	7	0	35	51		0	3	0	43	54
20	Open responses						Open responses				
21	26	32	15	13	13		29	46	16	4	4
22	Open responses						Open responses				
23	3	4	3	56	35		0	4	7	41	48
24	16	25	10	32	17		7	21	9	32	31
25	2	6	5	27	61		0	9	6	48	37
26	2	5	8	38	48		1	4	7	63	24
27	1	3	7	36	53		0	9	17	51	23
28	3	6	6	32	53		3	7	12	54	24
29	3	2	5	27	63		0	4	9	53	34
30	0	1	5	31	62		0	1	10	54	34
31	1	1	6	36	56		0	1	4	53	41
32	2	0	2	29	68		0	3	3	46	48
33	2	1	7	42	49		0	0	3	49	49
34	Open responses						Open responses				
35	19	34	22	17	8		10	49	18	21	3
36	Open responses						Open responses				
37	8	21	29	32	10		14	26	16	38	6
38	1	6	13	41	40		0	0	4	43	52
39	11	32	25	26	6		13	38	26	22	1
40	3	8	13	40	36		0	0	7	42	51
41	7	29	14	38	12		9	37	26	26	2
42	2	2	6	41	49		0	1	3	59	36
43	12	24	27	28	9		9	41	28	20	3
44	0	3	10	43	45		0	1	4	46	49
45	4	18	16	50	12		6	20	29	42	3
46	4	5	11	50	30		0	4	7	52	36
47	5	14	15	47	18		3	10	25	53	9

48	2	6	7	49	37		0	3	4	51	41
49	4	3	2	13	78		1	4	1	32	61
50	5	5	2	23	66		0	7	1	33	58
51	1	5	3	24	68		0	7	1	38	54
52	4	5	2	26	63		1	7	4	36	51
53	13	17	14	33	23		3	4	4	39	49
54	Open responses						Open responses				
55	23	33	11	17	17		16	25	7	16	36
56	13	16	9	42	20		0	7	1	47	44
57	4	10	31	39	16		0	9	9	49	33
58	4	5	7	42	42		9	38	4	37	12
59	2	2	2	45	50		0	4	7	40	49
60	2	6	10	58	24		0	0	8	69	22
61	1	3	4	38	55		3	10	6	44	37
62	1	4	10	48	37		0	0	0	41	59
63	4	6	7	34	49		3	1	12	52	32
64	1	3	4	28	65		0	0	0	46	54
65	2	13	18	43	24		9	16	9	47	19
66	0	3	4	40	54		0	0	0	34	66
67	3	18	23	35	21		9	28	19	30	14
68	2	1	6	38	53		0	0	1	38	61
69	11	12	9	34	33		12	19	23	32	14
70	19	26	12	20	23		33	39	9	13	6
71	27	15	8	10	40		6	12	10	32	41
72	24	15	10	18	33		10	25	4	35	26
73	23	17	16	28	16		7	13	9	49	22
74	15	10	3	32	40		6	3	9	49	34
75	20	10	4	29	37		7	12	4	36	41
76	21	11	5	24	40		6	7	7	41	39
77	14	16	17	27	26		22	16	10	37	15
78	21	27	18	16	18		12	36	25	20	7
79	13	11	14	35	27		6	6	9	38	42
80	19	13	17	26	25		9	19	17	35	20

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire requests for new subjects from a given list

STUDENTS

	ART			CAREERS			COMPUTER STUDIES			MECHANICS			MUSIC				
SCHOOL	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	TOTAL	VOTES PER PERSON
A	4	3	7	8	4	12	25	5	30	5	0	5	13	5	18	72	1.5
D	2	2	4	1	5	6	14	16	30	2	1	3	12	5	17	60	1.1
C	5	2	7	5	2	7	25	22	47	4	1	5	10	11	21	87	1.5
D	2	4	6	2	2	4	13	12	25	5	2	7	9	8	17	59	1.7
TOTALS	13	11	24	16	13	29	77	55	132	16	4	20	44	29	73	278	Av. 1.45

TEACHERS

	ART			CAREERS			COMPUTER STUDIES			MECHANICS			MUSIC				
SCHOOL	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	Male	Fem.	Total	TOTAL	VOTES PER PERSON
A	6	1	7	5	2	7	9	5	14	3	1	4	11	4	15	47	2.4
D	2	1	3	4	1	5	6	4	10	0	1	1	3	1	4	23	1.6
C	4	1	5	5	1	6	11	1	12	2	1	3	8	1	9	35	2.2
D	8	4	12	7	2	9	11	3	14	7	2	9	6	5	11	55	3.1
TOTALS	20	7	27	21	6	27	37	13	50	12	5	17	28	11	39	160	Av. 2.32

APPENDIX F

The helpfulness of the content of curriculum subjects

STUDENTS

QUESTION	SUBJECT	AGREE %	STRONGLY AGREE %	TOTAL %	RANK BY TOTAL
School A					
25	English	27	69	96	2
26	Maths	35	58	93	5
27	Science	30	60	90	8
28	Social Studies	35	56	91	7
29	CE/NTS	38	54	92	6
30	Business Studies	33	54	87	9
31	Home Economics	35	60	95	3
32	Agricultural Science	21	73	94	4
33	Industrial Arts	42	56	98	1
School B					
25	English	22	65	87	6
26	Maths	41	50	91	4
27	Science	33	61	94	3
28	Social Studies	30	56	86	7
29	CE/NTS	28	61	89	5
30	Business Studies	20	76	96	1
31	Home Economics	30	55	85	8
32	Agricultural Science	24	72	96	1
33	Industrial Arts	33	41	74	9
School C					
25	English	31	49	80	8
26	Maths	34	38	72	9
27	Science	43	43	86	6
28	Social Studies	36	48	84	7
29	CE/NTS	18	72	90	5
30	Business Studies	38	57	95	4
31	Home Economics	46	51	97	3
32	Agricultural Science	38	62	100	1
33	Industrial Arts	46	52	98	2
School D					
25	English	26	65	91	5
26	Maths	42	52	94	3
27	Science	39	48	87	8
28	Social Studies	26	56	82	9
29	CE/NTS	29	65	94	3
30	Business Studies	35	62	97	1
31	Home Economics	29	62	91	5
32	Agricultural Science	35	62	97	1
33	Industrial Arts	47	44	91	5

TEACHERS

QUESTION	SUBJECT	AGREE %	STRONGLY AGREE %	TOTAL %	RANK BY TOTAL
School A					
25	English	47	42	89	6
26	Maths	65	25	90	3
27	Science	60	20	80	9
28	Social Studies	63	26	89	6
29	CE/NTS	37	53	90	3
30	Business Studies	50	40	90	3
31	Home Economics	42	47	89	6
32	Agricultural Science	55	40	95	1
33	Industrial Arts	63	32	95	1
School B					
25	English	50	36	86	5
26	Maths	50	36	86	5
27	Science	40	40	80	8
28	Social Studies	53	33	86	5
29	CE/NTS	53	40	93	4
30	Business Studies	33	40	73	9
31	Home Economics	40	60	100	1
32	Agricultural Science	20	80	100	1
33	Industrial Arts	20	80	100	1
School C					
25	English	50	31	81	8
26	Maths	88	6	94	1
27	Science	69	13	82	6
28	Social Studies	69	13	82	6
29	CE/NTS	75	6	81	8
30	Business Studies	63	25	88	4
31	Home Economics	56	31	87	5
32	Agricultural Science	75	19	94	1
33	Industrial Arts	81	13	94	1
School D					
25	English	44	39	83	5
26	Maths	50	28	78	7
27	Science	33	22	55	8
28	Social Studies	33	22	55	8
29	CE/NTS	50	33	83	5
30	Business Studies	71	29	100	1
31	Home Economics	72	28	100	1
32	Agricultural Science	33	56	89	4
33	Industrial Arts	28	72	100	1

APPENDIX G

Interview questions

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS SECONDARY CURRICULUM

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. HOW MANY CURRICULA?

1. Most teachers and students believe that Solomon Islands should have just one National Curriculum.
 - a) Do you agree with them?
 - b) Why?
2. There is little interest in either schools or provinces being allowed to write their own curriculum.
 - a) Why do you think there was little interest?
 - b) Do you agree?
 - c) Why?
3. Most teachers think that the old system of having different curricula for National and Provincial Secondary Schools was a bad thing.
 - a) What do you think?
 - b) Why?

B. WHO SHOULD CONSTRUCT THE CURRICULUM?

4. Most teachers and students are strongly in favour of government education officials and teachers helping to write the curriculum.
 - a) Do you agree with them?
 - b) Why?
5. In the past, expatriate education consultants from overseas have been used to help construct the curriculum.
 - a) Do you think they should still be used today?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Why do you think that students are a lot more in favour of involving expatriate consultants from overseas than teachers?
6. There is some interest in involving *parents, students and business people* in writing the curriculum.
 - a) Would you support each of these groups being involved?
 - b) Why?
 - c) How interested do you think each group would be in getting involved?
 - d) Why?
 - e) Do you think they would all understand enough about the curriculum to be able to make good contributions to its construction?

C. THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM AND SUBJECT SYLLABI

7. Most experts agree that a curriculum should provide a *holistic* education. This means it should help develop the intellectual, aesthetic, physical, social and spiritual aspects of students.
 - a) Do you agree?
 - b) Why?
8. The curriculum is thought to be very academic with a heavy emphasis on knowledge and learning facts.
 - a) Is this how you see the curriculum?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Do you agree with this emphasis?
 - d) Why?
9. At the moment neither Music nor Art are taught, though there is some demand for them, especially Music.
 - a) Do you think they should be taught?
 - b) Why?
10. There is a lot of feeling that the curriculum should teach more practical skills.
 - a) Do you agree?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Do you think students want to learn lots of practical skills?
 - d) Why?
11. Most students and teachers believe that the content of curriculum subjects is helpful to life in Solomon Islands, but they rated elective subjects – Business Studies, Agricultural Science, Home Economics and Industrial Arts – more helpful than the academic subjects.
 - a) Do you agree with their opinion?
 - b) Why?
12. Physical Education is on the secondary curriculum but is often ignored, particularly in Forms 4 and 5.
 - a) Why do you think this is?
 - b) Do you agree with these reasons?
 - c) Why?
13. Values and moral and spiritual development are becoming very important in education.
 - a) Do you think the secondary curriculum should encourage students to develop values?
 - b) Why?
 - c) Do you think it does?
 - d) What evidence do you see for this?
 - e) Do you think that the Christian Education and New Testament Studies taught in secondary schools helps students become more spiritual?
 - f) Why?
14. Many people now believe that students need special skills for modern life. These skills include *communication, problem-solving, and how to negotiate and make decisions*.
 - a) Are these skills needed in the Solomon Islands?
 - b) Why/what for?
 - c) Should the curriculum help develop these skills?

- d) Do you think that it is?
- e) Why?

15. Do you think that the curriculum equips students with the knowledge and skills they need for Form 6?

16. Teachers and students are very interested to add Computer Studies to the curriculum.

- a) Is this a good idea?
- b) Why?
- c) Would you like to see any other subjects added to the curriculum?
- d) Why?
- e) Would you like to see any subjects dropped from the curriculum?
- f) Why?

D. THE EMPHASIS PLACED ON DIFFERENT SUBJECTS

17. At the moment there are four core compulsory subjects (all academic), and five elective subjects (mostly practical) of which students can do only two. It has recently been suggested that only English and Maths should be core compulsory subjects for Forms 4 and 5 so that students can take more than two elective subjects if they wish to.

- a) Do you think this is a good suggestion?
- b) Why?

18. Should there be any compulsory core subjects at all?
Why?

19. Should selection exams include all subjects – core and electives?
Why?

E. THE CURRICULUM AND SOLOMON ISLANDS' CULTURE

20. More than 90% of students and teachers believe that the curriculum should teach students about their culture.

- a) Do you agree?
- b) Why?
- c) Does the secondary curriculum teach students about their culture?
- d) What evidence do you see of this?

21. Teachers and students think that the curriculum should teach students about Solomon Islands' history and geography.

- a) Do you agree?
- b) Do you think that it does?
- c) What evidence do you see of this?

22. There was not so much interest in learning about other Pacific Islands and other cultures around the world.

- a) Do you think the curriculum should teach about these things?
- b) Why?

F. ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM

23. Most teachers and students think that Solomon Islands' children do not all have access to secondary school.
- a) Do you agree?
 - b) Would you like to see this situation improved?
 - c) What difficulties do you foresee in improving it?
24. Most teachers and students want to drop the Standard 6 selection exams, but fewer want to drop the Form 3 selection exams.
- a) What is your opinion?
 - b) Why?
25. Do you think the following all have the same chance of:
- getting a secondary education?
 - going to National Secondary Schools?
- a) Girls (compared to boys)?
 - b) Children of poor parents (compared to children of rich parents)?
 - c) Slow Learners (compared to fast learners)?
26. Are resources and qualified teachers evenly distributed among
- a) Urban and rural schools?
 - b) Why?
 - c) National Secondary Schools, Provincial Secondary Schools and Community High Schools?
 - d) Why?

G. CONCLUSION

27. What do you think are the most important needs of Solomon Islands' society today?
28. To what extent do you think the secondary curriculum is fulfilling cultural and societal needs?
29. What do you think are the main/most important changes that should be made to the secondary curriculum so that it can better fulfil the needs of the people of Solomon Islands?

APPENDIX H

Sample interview transcript

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT - PRIVATE ED. ADMINISTRATOR 2

DATE Wednesday August 11, 2004
TIME..... 8:15 – 9.45 a.m.
LOCATION..... An office in The Church of Melanesia Headquarters, Honiara.
SPECIAL..... One interruption. Problems with faulty play-back
CIRCUMSTANCES machinery made a few little “holes” in the transcription.
KEY..... Researcher

Interviewee
(??) = Could not be understood

OK. Well thank you for, for looking through this and getting a few thoughts together. So, if we start thinking about how many curricula. What would you recommend there for Solomon Islands? One National Curriculum, or..?

Yeah, no I personally I, we, we have, I think it's good, good idea to have one national curriculum for, for the schools and it is for certification purposes, ah, especially at the higher level, Form 5, Form 6, Form 7. Probably that's the best thing. There, um, should be 1 curriculum for everybody, but, ah, maybe there should be alternatives as well.

Um... What do you mean by alternatives?

Um, probably we are not big enough, but at the moment in Form 7 we have to, ah...

Now, Form 7 is actually outsider of this, because I'm thinking specifically of the Solomon Island Curriculum, which is Forms 1 – 5.

Yeah, ok. Ah... But I'm just giving you an example. There is a, ah.... up to Form 7, I know that its outside but we can choose from two, two are available. – OK - Ah, so probably if we have a similar thing ah, at the lower forms ah, that might be a, an idea, ah... I, quite acceptable for that students or parents, may be able to choose whatever they, ah, they feel more appropriate to their, ah, own needs, um, I, I think if you look at (??) are going on at the moment. There are some schools, well, is only one school at the moment, Woodford, which is doing something different. Ah, but they were for dipping into, ah, Solomon Island, ah, curriculum as well, ah, in the lower forms, so that's kind of a (??).

Do you think that, ah, one national curriculum caters for the needs of all students?

Um... Not really. Ah, I think, it caters for the main needs in the country that we would like to ah, ah, to promote or to have to develop. But it's always my belief that ah, there should be ah, a opportunities within, even within the school to vary their ah, curriculum, so that they put it, introduce or incorporate in some specific areas where they think are more appropriate for the school, or if they get (??) authority or even the region with, for example we have different provinces. There maybe some, um, provinces that they would like emphasis certain ah... skills. For example, in the west, there a lots of opportunities for tourism now, lot of tourism development we get. There's no tourism courses at the moment, in our curriculum at all, except for a bit in Geography and Social Studies. Now, that's where I see differences in the regional, ah, setups, where some province or some individual schools might like to think of doing something different.

OK. So you would like to see some room for...?

Different, Different programs to come in. That is what some, Church of Melanesia we have been thinking about at the higher level, ah, introducing history of the church. It appears that, that's a subject, this subject and ah, students who would like to take it, take it along side, um, the main, ah, national curriculum and we are asses it separately and you get certificate for that, something like that is appropriate for, for that particular setup.

OK. Now I actually ah, ran a questionnaire in schools, asking students and teachers about these kinds of things. Ah.... Most people said, Oh, they weren't interested in schools or provinces of doing anything like this (nothing on tape for about 40 seconds)

(??) only the best that we can, we can have. There, as I have had the opportunity to, go around the Pacific in my years with SPBEA and I see where they put in a lot of variations and I think were, now we are trying to do more practical ah, skills in, in our ah, secondary schools. There are new thinking now to making more

emphasis, or emphasis on that one. And this is where I think, ah, that should be room for variation, so that the schools, like what you are doing at Betikama, it's great, in, ah, in the ah, copper. Copper (??) because you had room but you, make sure it works (??) some standard in agriculture as well. I think, ah, what you are doing there is much, much better than what we are trying to do but we just couldn't be able to.....

Now, thinking with the idea of practical, remember there used to be these two different curriculums, one for the provincial secondary school, one for national and it never really worked. What were your feelings about that system?

Well, I think that, ah, I think the time was not right that time. I think the timing it was a bit premature, that's the first feeling I had. The second one would be, yes, we put students there but the teachers are just hopeless and, they didn't have any skills to offer anything, ah, interesting for students. So students who went there and they don't have anything interesting. I think we, if we look at Don Bosco now, I think a lot of students who go there have tried, ah, have desire to, to do something there because ah, they got skilled artisans ah, who, who motivates students and they can put them on right place. So the schools are right, the ideas is right but we were not ready for it because we did not have any trained teachers, they just put teachers in their room (??) carpenters who... don't know much about what to do. So, ah, yes, they go to their work but to teach and motivate students to, to, ah, to, ah, to do that, I think they, we didn't have that (??) so (????) it failed.

Yea, cos there was some criticism from certain people, saying "Oh, it's not fair, everybody should do the same thing." How do you feel about that?

Yea, well, I think that's what ah, ah, that one, that's true, but ah, ah, it maybe, it come from another point that we have not really ah, the students who went there were not, they didn't really make a choice for, to do something practical, they just been put there if they could get into the other stream. So, ah.....

So you think, maybe the problem was the lack of choice?

The lack of choice, yes, ah, one of the, I think now, the new developments that are taking place, we might find that, um, the environment is different now and that ah, students who go there might have the real desire to go there. Ah, now I think at the present time we see more evidence of usefulness of having a practical skill. Because we see things happening now, and ah, ah, people come up with ah, some practical skill, go back to the village, they ah, start to show us that yes, they have better houses, they can make money from certain things and I think this is some of things that ah, need to support any new developments.

OK. Now, coming down to Section B, Who should construct the curriculum? We are going through the curriculum with you, right now (again problem on tape for about 20 seconds)

(??) who, who have the expertise are the.... and because they determine policies, what is acceptable, what is not ah, I, I think, I would go along with that ah, support that they continue to, to be the ah, main people who are, who should involve in curriculum construction.

OK. What about using expatriate consultants because there have been in the past? And when I asked students and teachers about this, students said "Yes, we want them." Teachers, not so keen. Why do you think that was?

Ah, ah, well, I, well, I am puzzled as well. How would the students ah, ah, appreciate more expatriates because they don't really have any contacts with them. How would they come up with that idea?

I don't know, I'm asking you why! (Laughter)

Because ah, here, ah, personally I, I think there's room for expatriates, well qualified, ah, people who ah, who should lead. Where we have local teachers who have the expertise in that area, I think ah, ah, we should make use of them as well. Ah, because ah, if the ah, ah, ah, because I, with me, well I, I don't know why, what, why, why the students came up with that idea, because I, all the students come in contact with, would be materials, ah, ah and if the materials produced by expatriates are better presented, are better focused than ah, maybe (??) how they can tell as well. But ah, yea, I would ah, go along with ah, idea of using expatriates where, we don't have the skills, ah, I think maybe the students, why the students are saying that is, we, last few years, we really ran out of materials. An, er, it takes so long for local officers to go through all these ah, ah, prepare them, so maybe faster, to get things faster when we have the ah, the expatriates involve in construction work.

OK. What about ah, involving parents and students and business people. What do you think about those groups?

I think their cons....., their contribution is useful. There's ah, at classroom level we should consult with everybody who are stakeholders, in the ah, ah, what is expected outcome of the any curriculum. So they should ah, ah, come in with some idea, what they ah, they think in their own particular areas, what they think that ah, students should learn when they come out, because they're coming out into their world as well, so they

should be equipped, should be equipped with those skills ah, when they come out. So they should involve, ah, but the , ah, at the philosophical ah, ah, level, where the ideas are being thrown together and then when we come down to construction and to the ah, deciding and putting the ideas into format and all these, I think ah maybe the education people to do this.

OK. Ah, Do you think all these groups will be interested in being involved?

I think so, ah, not as a, not as individuals but we should have, um, a, a representative, for example when we talk about business, talk about business, we, I think, the best group of people that we should ah, ah, consult are the Chamber of Commerce, ah, they might have a representative to come in and ah, sit down and ah, hear what is ah, ah, we plan to do. Parents have, how we are going to convene ah, ah, get them as a group but maybe when we come to um, ah (??) then ah, education authorities maybe, that's where their (??) might come in. So they should be, for example, Titus Rore, might be the right person to voice some of the feelings of SDA parents now, as an education authority. So maybe that's one way of doing/getting the parents involved.

Yea, what, what about students?

Students, yes, ah, I think they, they should have a contribution, they, they should decide on ah, what to learn, but I'm not quite sure about that.

Do you think they're interested?

They might be interested. But some of these, as I have said, they be interested in, we might not be able to, to ah, yea, to provide, that's one of the things might happen.

I, I have seen such students asked for martial arts (laughter) on the curriculum. You wouldn't support martial arts?

I, I won't ah, I think that should be something for ah, outside or they want it, then that's ok, pick it up outside.

OK. Now that leads into the content of the curriculum. Now first of all this idea, and we are on questions 7 now, ah holistic education. Do you think that the secondary curriculum should be holistic and look after all those different aspects?

Ah, I think the idea is excellent. This is what we really, because ah, we believe in ourselves being, ah, physical, spiritual and social beings, so we, we need to really ah, address those three areas. Ah, I don't think the curriculum ah, will adequately deal with those ah, areas, ah, I think as we see in the present one. So, ah, ah, this is where I feel the individual schools and the individual education authorities might be able to put in something to, to compliment what is being offered. Ah, where there is not enough, then they put in something more to ah, to contribute towards areas where ah, we feel that they, they're not well addressed.

OK. So you, very in favor of that? Ah, if we pick up some of those thoughts, following down through, at the moment, people feel that the curriculum is very academic and there is a heavy emphasis on knowledge and learning facts. Do you feel that?

I think this is very true, yes, I suppo.... I, I believe and I agree with it. It is happening and it is really ah, pretty bad in the community high school, where they just ah, people forget about the, all the other subjects and concentrate on Maths and English and maybe the other, two other subjects are Social Science and ah, Science, which are all academic in ah, nature. So ah, I think that's what is happening at the moment and ah, I don't, I want to see change as well.

OK. I was going to say, do you agree with this emphasis?

Well, I agree that there is an emphasis but I don't, I, I don't agree with the way its going.

OK. OK. So you, maybe you think it's the emphasis is too heavy or what?

To heavy, yes. I feel that ah, ah, we need, we need to ah, ah, to make things more balanced and I think in the last few weeks ah, the TEVED group, the vocational, technical, education review committee, were really addressing that, and we hope that ah, ah, that will happen. But the way they looking at it, ah, is not a lot different from what we, we have at the moment because they want to see two technical ah, two streams, one technical, one academic. Say at Betikama, now, ah, that's ok but ah, how its going to work, I don't know because they just want more emphasis ah, balance across the board rather than making things loose at the moment, at the moment.

OK. So ah, picking out some of those ideas too, No. 9 says at the moment neither music nor art are taught but there is a demand for music. Do you think either of those or both of these should be taught in the secondary curriculum?

Yea, I, I, I'm surprised that, er, we never do anything about it, but, but, both, art and art and craft, music even physical education, all of them, very, um, er, important areas, our curriculum never really develop anything or address them at all and they just let loose at the moment and many young people, ah, they have the talents in those areas, they see, um, the importance of those areas. Ah, if you read the papers, ah, see what ah, have been happening with music now at the commercial level. Some people are making money on that, and I think ah, it's just a pity that we have not done anything in these areas.

Yea. So do you think the kids miss out because they are not there, they are not taught?

Ah, I think that they miss out, some of them who have not ah, there are many students who still don't, although they don't, they have not taught anything, they still continue and, er, they still come out of school and they're still artists, musicians and so on, but there are those who might ah, talents laying hidden there in their ah, lives never really ignited, they're just dormant all the time and they just sleeping those ah, talents, yeah, because they never wake them up. Yeah.

You've mentioned physical education, now physical education is on the curriculum but it is often ignored and particularly in Form 4 and 5. Why do you think that is?

Ah, I don't know. Um, I think one, one other thing we don't have instructors of ah, of ah, physical education of, ah, instructors is one thing. If we never trained them. Um, they don't have equipment as well, ah, range of equipments so that rather than kicking around a ball all the time, and basketball all the time, there is a variety activities to do, ah, it's not just games and, er, but if they are like, (????????????????????) so, ah, and because we do not have the right people in our schools. They just let them go.

What value do you see in physical education?

Yeah, there's a lot. I think this is, ah, that's where, um, it's worth a lot of money now. I mean look at a good sportsman. That's where ah, a lot of young people can even earn good money from it and they, in the Solomons, where we don't have a lot of jobs. I think that will, will make good opening overseas for our young people and we see some of these dropouts who ah, who do well in soccer especially, ah, that is now (??) young people going overseas and playing overseas, ah, I see a lot of, ah, potential in that area, is very useful, I would support it, ah, and because of these absence of ah, of ah, proper physical education in our schools. When I came here, I started ah, ah last year, we had a sports carnival where everybody, all the school's coming, we run a week of ah, just activities and games, so ah. The other one, well one main reason is just to bring back, try to help in the peace process, ah, last year, but the same thing is just to encourage young people to participate in sports and ah, fitness as well, because ah, so I think as a important thing. One other thing I think, um, ah, one of the contributing factors that ah, affecting decline in sports. These things are routine exercises and it's, ah, a routine thing that ah, needs somebody to go out and ah, run around and do things. I don't know whether you noticed this, when, a lot of Solomon Islanders routine activities ah, they do well for the first few weeks or few years, then things start to weak down and so on ah, I think culture is another contributing factor.

OK. Now moving on slightly here, I asked students and teachers about each subject on the curriculum, saying does this subject help (you live life?) in Solomon Islands? They said yes, for all subjects but they were more strongly yes when it came to the electives, like business studies and home science especially. Does this surprise you that they rated those higher than the academic subjects?

Yeah, that's ah, that's ah, it surprises me, er, because ah, if you look at the ah, normal um, selection of subjects in the secondary school, a normal secondary school, you would find that those subjects are the last, the last one to be chosen. Um, I think business studies is um, ah, has a higher status than agriculture. Ah, more students might go for business studies than agriculture. Um, I think, one of the things too that contribute to these ah, ah, lower status being held against such, some other subjects is the teachers themselves, don't really ah, not, um.. make things interesting for students. So students are, don't get anything interesting ah, the students lazy too to, to take part in those. They would be the last one to be chosen when it comes to the selection of subjects.

If students acknowledge that things like agricultural science are so good, but then they choose academic subjects instead, can you think of any other reason why they might do this, other than interest?

I think the way our, probably, I'm not sure but probably the way our curriculum is, ah, structured at the moment, at senior levels, where we have four core subjects where everybody have to do, and the others ah, ah, electives maybe that's ah, one of the answers, but I'm not sure.

Um. Do you agree with their opinion that these things are maybe more useful than those four core subjects?

Well, I think they are really, ah. Ah, if somebody's going to live his life as ah, an academic, a person who might work with ideas, and ah, make a lot of assertions about ah, interpreting what is happening around the place and

so on, commentators, then ah, probably they will ah, deny the usefulness of those practical subjects. Even I, myself, I didn't like those subjects when I started off. Now, come to fixing water taps and all this, I, I can't do those because everything is easy, everything is done, all I have to do is to put them into place. But when it came to furniture where you have to decide something and build, ah, I, I wish I had learnt something that, in that area. Ah, the same with building a house. I, even if whole er, constructed building, I'm not very good. If I, I'd learned a bit of woodwork and all these before, it might help to, to know where and how to start up, and so. So I think they are life skills, they are the important.

OK. Now this links with ah, people now feeling that the curriculum should teach more practical skills. Do you agree with this thought now?

I would like to see a balance. Ah, more, yes increase it from what we are doing at the moment, ah, for those who inclined to go that way, and ah, those who incline to go into academic stream, continue to get ah, ah, emphasis in that area too. Ah, but I have, I have something that ah, I like to see but I don't know how it going to practical. Ah, when I was in Fiji, my son, went to ah, Grammar school in Auckland and he, ah, he's not very academic but I still want him to, to go into ah, academic and, ah, go to university and work there. Ah, well, get a qualification. And he went, and he find things bit difficult but the school he went to provide whole opportunities across the board. You can do some academic work, ah, subjects, practical subjects, ah, ah, all sorts of opportunities in that school. But for him, he did Science, an academic ah, subject but same time he did languages and also did ah, art and craft, where art and craft today is in fact, one is, ah, computer generated and some is just painting and ah, drawing. So, ah, you got ah, quite a balance across the board in terms of curriculum ah, and he came out, he was, ah, able to ah, get a place, accepted in university with his Science and other subjects, but he preferred to go into this art area. Ah, so he came back to Solomons, but everybody looking around for work and no jobs at that time, but he went, ah, DJ Graphic knew about him, took him and he is, he's enjoying it. And, ah, so I would like ah, rather than just emphasis in one area, ah, I think secondary schools should have something similar, where young people are given opportunities to go through the school system ah, experience in different areas, and of course would they have ah, strongly ah, inclined to practical, then they can go that way. Academic you can go that way too. Ah, those in city areas where they, they could ah, also have opportunities in those areas. I don't know how practical that can be, but ah,.....

You mentioned jobs there, and there's very high unemployment at the moment. Do you think that, that is any way linked to what we're teaching them in secondary schools?

I think so. I think so.

In what way?

Ah, you look at the university students now, coming back, they, "O government is not giving us any jobs. Where are the jobs?" I think, I was very happy with somebody spoke out last time, in the paper saying that "Well, you got the knowledge, can you look at using that knowledge, and because, ah, **(tape problem??)** because, ah, they don't have practical skills. (??) There are many things they can do, even though they might ah, not income generating straight off but there are some things they can do. But I'm amazed to see ah, round Honiara **(tape problem????)** with some of them, in a little business area or ah, setting up something that ah, help them to get income. So ah, ...

Do you think that secondary curriculum gives them all the skills and the knowledge they need to be able to set themselves up in business?

No, I don't think so. Ah, ah, I think that ah, no, I don't think that we, we don't have that ah, ... but I'm not sure how we're going to tackle that one. Ah, we hope that this TEVED program when they come out, they should be able to ah, to encourage people to do more, to be more enterprising.

Um, down the bottom, No. 14 there, talking about enterprises, people today see, say students need communication, problem solving and how to negotiate and making decisions skills. Do you think these skills are needed in Solomon Islands?

I think so. I think they're very much needed. Ah, ah, yeah, I think they, that they, they're important skills that ah, ah, they should be encouraged and ah, students should have them. Communication, for example, I think you notice yourself in there, your computers and internet and all these things ah, when people are looking for informations and they know how to, ah, find information and (??) they get some useful information that is available. And these days, um, (tape problem ??????) and get some assistance (???) to negotiate to present your case in a way that its convincing to be able to get something and I somehow think (??) and I mean the con man, they have all those skills, and they are doing a lot of work and at the same time damage too.

Do you think that the secondary curriculum gives students these skills?

Um, I haven't really ah, seen a lot myself ah, ah, (???) familiar, quite familiar with what is being taught in the senior secondary schools but I think they do, they give some but ah, ah, not enough.

Sorry. Do you think it should?

It should. Yes, I don't know how we're going to do it but um, ah, it is appealing ah, idea and something that should be encouraged.

OK. Now the one other aspect of the holistic education is, values of moral and spiritual development. Now do you think the secondary curriculum should be encouraging those in students?

Ah, yes, I think we, we, we say something about that one. Ah, ah that, ah, again, that we should but I don't see it ah, it would be able to adequately address those. (So maybe??) that's where individual schools should have something to, to come in with it and ah, they have to balance things up.

So you would like individual schools to put some input into that. (Phone rings.)

Ah, yes, I would like ah, ah, schools or education authorities to, to have something to ah, ah, to come in with it on that area.

Do you think this is an important area?

U think it's very important. Um, it is very important because ah, we're dealing with a human being who is a, ah, spirit and physical, has a soul and all these ah, mental, mentality as well so it's an important area.

Um. Do you see any evidence around that maybe students haven't develop values or?

I, I don't know what you, you have at Betikama but ah, I heard things are running pretty good there. Ah, I think it's in the church schools, ah, because, ah, we're being strict. We've been trying to, ah, make students, ah, **(tape problem ??)**, we're also involving spiritual side of, student's life. Ah, we, we're taking things under control a little bit. We have problems, but, ah, we have things under control. We are starting on time, finishing on time, we are giving students, ah, trying to get the best in students. Um, where those areas are not emphasised, our system is corrupted. Discipline, um, (??) I think it's into every province. I think some schools haven't even started. **(???tape problem makes last sentence impossible???)**

Alright. Now you're a good person to ask question 15, so I'm going over the page now. Do you think that the curriculum equips students with the knowledge and skills that they need for Form 6, and now Form 7?

Well, if I can go by what er, what we see, er, they seem to be coping very well. Er, we, um (knock on the door interrupts and interview is briefly suspended).

Continuing. We were talking about Form 6.

Yeah, um, so I, I think the students are adequately prepared for Form 6. I'm just going by the results. You wouldn't (?????????) I knew because you teach in one school (????????) and in one subject (????????????????????).

I picked up one interesting fact from one school in my survey. I found the Diploma teachers there said, "Yes, it does a good job", and the Degree teachers, said, "No, it doesn't give them what they need for Form 6".

OK. Alright, um, yeah, I, I don't, um, really, er, um, know much about er, the quality of er, students coming up. I only (??) when they call me in, and we have good results. So I don't know whether their preparation is adequate.

OK. Well lets move on to other subjects coming into the curriculum. Teachers and students are very interested to add Computer Studies. Is this a good idea?

I, I, think, I don't know why we are so late with the idea. (High pitched squeal obscures the rest of this answer.)

Yeah. So you would be in favour?

Yeah. I, er, I think the money is a big thing. But, um, but I think probably, you know, we should go into it. Because, a lot of little businesses in town, in computer training, and er, we have er, getting a lot of money too, and er it's good for them. Yeah, it's an area where it is very important these days.

Yeah, why is it so important?

(END OF SIDE 1 OF TAPE)

Ah, (??) communicate when we have a, ah, email er, **(tape problem??)** making work easier, ah, computer skills (???) making life more easy. Er, skills that they can take in any work they want to do. Er, my own children, um, because they went to school in Fiji, they did that in primary, so ah, they really (?????) we found it a skill that ah, ah, very useful.

Would you like to see any other subjects added to the curriculum?

Um, I think tourism is another one that I'd like to see. Because ah, we are trying to, ah, to (??), um, (???????). Um, in fact, I think there are some outside place (????), hospitality, that's a responsibility to tourism. That's another think that I think, um, should be part of the um, curriculum if we can look at it. Then languages, maybe Japanese can come in, maybe Chinese if they, because ah, we, we need to know little bit about ah, because we, I think we'll be trading with them few, few years time, they will be our strong partners trade so, (??) know about something, something about them.

OK. Would like to see any subjects dropped from the curriculum?

That's the problem, because once we have something, get used to it, and it's difficult to drop. Ah, this is where I think, I, I don't want to see anything dropped. I, I think, have another alternative, but to increase ah, just let the people ah, schools teach what they, is popular, what is needed and ah, ah things will just go out themselves.

OK. So perhaps choices?

Widen choices and ah, we will see any areas where they can't survive, they will just have a natural death and that's it.

Have you ever picked out any thoughts about things that we might teach them in subjects that are not relevant in Solomon Islands?

I don't think, ah, I have seen anything in particular, ah, so I can't really say because I'm a strong believer that ah, anything we learn is really useful, in a way that we um, belong to the world which is ah, being thrown together all the times, coming closer and closer all the time with this new communication ah, ah, ah facilities, so ah, I, I think ah, I don't see anything that ah, could give us an example that is not ah, relevant to, to knowledge or to, to Solomon Islands.

Now, on thing that a number of students and teachers picked up on, and this is not a big group, this is one thing that kept – the smart ones (laugh) – well, it was the Cold War, the conflict cold war section in the Form 4 and 5 Social Studies syllabus.

Yeah, they think that's um, it's not relevant. But, I, I think, its history is a, it's a part of history, and ah, it's an important part of history where it, has led up to the present time and ah, but it has its place, and if we want to learn history um, I think ah, I think being made compulsory is the, er, maybe the ah, that's the, why the teachers and students are not ah, supporting it. The other thing is ah, because it is international and not many do have um, ah a real grasp of the, content and the events of something that they can't appreciate because it's all political and all ah, high level ah, ah, material and that is um, part of history and it has its place and um, just like any other history.

OK. Now you used the word 'compulsory' and this brings us to question 17. Now, Julian Treadaway expressed this idea, at our teacher's curriculum workshop recently, that maybe only English and Maths should be compulsory, and everything else a free choice. Do you think this is a good idea?

Ah, I think (??) should come back to where (???????). *This is at Form 4 and 5 level.* Yes, OK, I would um, I would support that idea for Form 5. Um, but I might go to the extent of saying, Maths in Form 4, those who can't cope ah, might like to hop out of it as well. Ah, its good to, to have some basic Maths, well, have Maths up to Form 5 before people can drop it, even some before or if they take it up to Form 5, they forget all about it, ah, so yeah, I agree with that. I think that's ah, that's something that ah, need to look into and I think it's already, the Ministry is thinking about it too. Don't know when this is going to come.

What would be the benefits of that?

The first, ah, I, I think, one of the ways where the Ministries is looking at that is to, help, ah, the electives, the other subjects, practical subjects to be given more time in the timetable, so more emphasis should go to all other subjects. So ah, I think, that's the ah, the idea of, of a, ah, why that I (??)

So you think it might help balance the curriculum?

Um. I think what they were thinking at that time is to introduce a new ah, examination at Form 3, at the end of Form 3 for Form 4, and that examination should cover all subjects. Should cover every subjects ah, but the students can't do all the subjects (**tape problem??**). So er, they should only do English and Maths (?????????). ... have English and Maths, you have ah, the other ones may be, er, Social Science, Science, and Business Studies and maybe the others at Form 3. And the students have to get 2 subjects from each, or 2, 1, and , ah 3 or something like that, um, to introduce a balance. Those were the ideas that were thrown around at that time, um, but I'm not sure how it's going to work out.

Um. Do you think that's should be any compulsory core subjects?

Yeah, I think, English should.

Why English?

Ah, well, ah, because it's going to be an important subject, ah, even up to university so those who are going to university, and even those going to drop out, they still have a good grasp on English because they're going to be required to fill in forms, to write proposals if they want a project, or write reports, so at least they could master in line with that.

OK. Good. Now you mentioned exams. Do you think these selection exams at Form 3 and Form 5 should examine all the subjects? Cos at the moment, electives are not included at all.

Yeah, um, I think it, they should, but we cannot expect everybody to, to take all those subjects, especially in Form 3. So we have to put subjects in some categories.

Are there any dangers in not examining everything? Any problems?

Ah, of course, I, ah, I think there are problems because ah, some students will be only taking some subjects and not ah, taking everyone, especially in areas of Social Science and Science further up. If we ah, students are not, um, taught or given a chance to sit an examination in those areas, they might not be able to um, to cope when they go into Form 5 at a higher level, so that might bring some of the pitfalls.

Um. Do you think it affects the status of the subjects, if students know its not going to be part of the selection exam?

Yeah, it, it, it does, so, like at the moment, I think that's what exactly, is happening at the moment. The Form 3, even Science and Social Sciences ah, are not taught properly, but if we ah, force students, to say, force them into choosing from different categories, number of subjects from a category, then that might be useful in ah, ah, ensuring that ah, this ah, poor status of a subject if not ah, examined is this ah, diminished.

Um. OK. Oh there's are some very good thoughts there. Ah, now, ah, the last but one section here, Curriculum and Culture. Now number 20 there it says, "more than 90% is teachers and students, we the group should teach them about their culture." Do you agree with them?

When I try to think about what culture to teach, I, I, I couldn't think of any, anything. Can you, what I'll

Well, their own culture, cultural traditions. You know, Melanesians, Polynesians, what people have done in the past and what seems to carry through today or, or what?

Yeah, no, I, I think, we, we are really alright in this area and I, I don't see how it could improve on it because we, lot of it in primary school, lot of it in junior forms, I suppose, um, so ah, cause every time we compare something, we relate to those areas when we study, case studies somewhere else, any other culture you wish make a, kind of ah, ah, ah, a reference point where we always mixed that comparisons, ah, ah

So you think that secondary curriculum already does that?

I think they have, they have enough there. Primary, they have, ah, they have bit of practice in their too.

Yeah, OK. So, ah, do you think, this is important that it is there?

It is, it is important. Ah, because it gives us the basis of ah, ah, making judgments on other, other cultures as well.

OK. Now, that's culture, what about history and geography and that's the history and geography of Solomon Islands?

I think we, we, it's a pity that we don't have books to really help us with er, Solomon Island geography because that's interesting but we don't really have a nice text books to, to help us. Form 5, I think, it's done very little

too, I am not sure, but um, especially geography, I think, more of it is in cultural history ah, yeah, a lot of um, what I could see is in Form 5, we have a, I think more emphasis is in cultural geography rather than physical.

Culture and history.

Yeah, but um, at Form 6, I think we, we do quite a bit on it, so, I think that's adequate because of those few (??) students who (??)

Again, I'm thinking about Form 1 to 5.

Yeah, ah, yeah, um, I don't think there is ah, is enough.

Enough geography particularly or enough geography and history?

Not enough, both of them are not enough.

OK. So you would like to see some more?

Well, let me say, ah, I've been thinking of what I have seen in syllabus, history, I think is adequate. Ah, geography is not.

So do students know enough about their own geography?

They know where the islands are, but ah, the ah, not the um, features and the landforms, ah not the skills part of it. I think of the skills part of it, the, ah, of geography ah, are not taught, and er don't see any good text books that ah, could help those students to do it.

OK. Now following through on that, ah, I asked teachers and students, if they were interested in learning about the cultures and so on, on other pacific islands, and cultures around the world and some interest but not so much. Do you think the curriculum should be teaching students about the rest of the Pacific and other things in the world?

Yeah, ah, I think that's part um, of a learning process. Um, um, the course should be um, structured in a way that ah, we should know something about our neighbors, their culture, even their geography and then even further, further afield as well.

Why should we know something about our neighbours?

They impact on us. They influence ah, a lot of ah, decisions that ah, sometime affect us as well. Ah, lately we have ah, a crisis, currently in Nauru, where our Prime Minister is ah, according to papers, is hoping to send economists from a failed state to another failed state. (Lots of laughter!) So, yeah, its reported in the paper, but, yeah, er, everywhere. I think it's something useful, ah, to know about, ah, people around us, because they impact on us, ah, what some of these they do, ah, impact on our lives and our social structures and our economy and all these. So, ah, I think they, it's a useful knowledge. Even ah, now as I said earlier, increasingly we're getting things from Asia. Link there, is every year we, something, I think, getting firmer and firmer all the time so I think those country we should ah, know something about them too.

OK. Alright, maybe we can go on to the last page here. It talks about access to the curriculum. Now, most teachers and students think that Solomon Island children do not all have access to the secondary, to secondary schools. Do you agree with that?

That's getting into secondary?

Yeah, getting into secondary.

Oh yes. I think ah, if we still get a, there's still a third of our students not getting through to Form 1.

Would you like to see this situation improve?

Yeah, well, I, I think everybody is trying at the moment to ah, to see that improved. Ah, I think community high school needs a lot of work, whether in quality, that's ah, something else but everybody feels now that they're getting sick of it. Ah, so we, we have ah, achieved that, but that's not enough yet.

What do you think students can learn in secondary that they can't get from primary?

Um. I think, well, one of the things that ah, probably affect the learning is ah, because of the way we structure the courses. So ah, ah, a programs, for example, in social studies, may be a little bit wider in the secondary school than what it is taught in the primary. The same with science, I think ah, they go little bit on ah, further

afraid, more in ah, in the concepts and ah, things that they do in science. So it's really influence by the way the programs are, or the courses are structured.

What difficulties would you see in trying to improve the situation?

Um, most of the difficulties that we have ah, for secondary schools spaces, continue to ah, to grow, but we cannot really um, ah, get everybody in because of the high birth rate as well that we have in the country. Ah, so we really, what we are doing is not really, ah, addressing ah, making a lot of ah, improvement to the situation. Ah, when you get more, more schools, you add more schools to the system, and of course you need teachers. We have are not training, enough teachers, ah, fast enough to ah, to fill all the places and one of the biggest problems is of course, resources. We don't have enough resources to ah, to provide good ah, learning environment for many students.

Would like to see this standard six exams dropped?

I think everybody is really waiting for, to see that one go. So it's ah, ah, we'd like to see, I support that. The problem is, supposed to be ah, 2006, yet I haven't seen any additional classrooms yet being built.

Yeah. What about the Form 3 selection exams?

If that one could go too, ah,, as soon as possible, I, I would be happy to see that one go too. It has, ah, only been used because we do not have enough places for everybody to go through.

So, you would like to see students going on till when?

Oh, as far as possible.

Now, what about ah, access to secondary school for different types of groups here, like, girls compared to boys. Do girls have the same chance as boys?

I think they should have a same chance, I think we have ah, historical accidents with buildings. Ah, we had in the past, only a quarter of those provided for girls and, ah, the rest for boys, so they would have tend to maintain that up until now. I think new schools should provide facilities equal to, for both sexes. So, ah, I think we should attempt to do that. The problem is, we have done some studies, at SPBEA, and with girls at a higher level. Although fewer girls go to, in Solomons, fewer girls to ah, secondary school, we would expect them to be achieving um, better or even at a, ah, same level as the boys, but ah, they were not. So ah, that's another thing, so we, that why in some selection criteria we have different cut-off points for girls and boys, just to enable the girls to, to get a little bit more ah, some more yet.

Um. OK. So it sounds like there is actually positive discrimination at the top level?

(Laugh). Yes, it could be called that.

What about children of poor parents compared to children of rich parents?

I think its happening all the time, Pauline, but um, it is always the, well educated parents that their children tend to do well and go on, on to high school, who, are parents ah, if they drop out ah, I think there is a tendency for them not to, to do well, so that's what happened.

Do you think lack of money keeps some students out of secondary school?

Yeah, some, ah, some of them, yes.

What about slow learners in the system, slow learners compares to fast learners? Do they have the same chance?

Ah, slow learners does ah, they, in our present ah, overcrowded classrooms, they just don't have any show at all. Talking about St. Nicholas, um, we have about over 40 students there, in Form 1 or Form 3, or Form 4 and, er, of course because of the crowd, size of the class, the pressure on the teacher, those students who're really behind, they just left behind. I think, this is something

Do you think this will get worse now, the Ministry have said "you must increase your class sizes in schools"?

I think that will get worse, yes. I think schools have to do something else to make sure that they have got the uh,, ah, I think we have to stream too. Because the Ministry tend to ah, (??) and support (??) students' abilities and that's, well it has ah, ah, a stigma to it as well, but ah, if we have to provide for slow learners, they got to, to be in the position where they can achieve. Everybody wants to be successful and if you ah, a failure from the start then you ah, it's difficult to ah, to catch up, so I think that's the way it stands.

OK. Do you think schools would try and stream, or the stigma would be too much, too much?.....

I would like to ah, go into streaming because I see good, positive sides to it.

OK. Ah, what about equal excess to national secondary schools, they are the ones with the status? So, girls, children of poor parents, slow learners, do they have equal access to this, national schools?

Ah, I don't know, I, I think, usually from what records can tell us, usually the um, the educated, the um, civil servant persons, the persons who are working, politicians, their children are the ones who always get to national secondary schools. Um, so, I think the poor and the girls still miss out from those school.

Why do you think that is?

First of all, they don't make the grades, some of them, because they stay in the schools where, primary schools, where the standard is quite, might be, pretty low. So competition, they drop out of competition even before ah, they come to this selection, because they their scores, won't be able to make them eligible for selection. So, I think that is the main reason.

Now, this sort of brings up an idea of a contrast between urban and rural schools. Ah, there is some feeling that maybe resources and qualified teachers are not evenly spread between urban secondary schools and rural schools? What do you think?

It is true. Many of the best teachers are in Honiara, ah

Why?

I think because ah, teachers are attracted to, to um, better conditions, ah, yeah, better life, an easier life. I think that's the main reason why they, they come to Honiara. Honiara schools are overcrowded with teachers. Whereas Malaita schools, are understaffed. Makira, West, Central Islands, Guadalcanal, all the provinces are, some schools, secondary schools, community high functioning with two teachers, three teachers.

OK. What, what about the contrast then between the national high schools and say community high schools, is that the same that the good teachers are concentrated in one and not in the other?

Ah, yes, I think that's ah, happened as well, because in a national secondary school, ah, provincial secondary, national secondary you have examination classes, so whoever is responsible for ah, posting teachers ensures that good teachers are given opportunity at those schools, not only to, to make sure the students pass, but are also teachers like to go there themselves because conditions are little better than those in a community high school.

What about resources between these groups, do you think all schools have the same resources

No, no not really. I think the best resourced schools are the nationals, provincial secondary schools have some, community high schools, some of them have none.

What about town schools compared to rural?

The town schools are better off ah, in some ways. They, although they don't have them, they go to ah, other school and borrow and photocopy and, yeah, ah ...

Easy access to other schools to other schools can be helpful.

Yeah.

Yeah. OK. Well, I think we've come to the last section now, in conclusion where we can round off everything. Ah, question 27 there says "What do you think are the most important needs of Solomon Island Society today?" What would be your number one priority needs to try and meet?

Sometimes we, we are influenced by where we work and where we ah, our occupations or I would say education is priority. Ah,

What, ah, you know, what kind of education, education just for itself or what?

Well, generally, education ah, ah, because of the fact that everybody hasn't got that opportunity to a general education is, ah, important. Ah, I would say that ah, secondary education is important too that, but I will say that ah, ah, technical, practical education is important.

Why would you make education your number one priority?

Cos I believe, that ah, ah, education, educated person would be able to make useful decisions that would affect their lives, ah, even if they don't get a job, I, I don't, I, I can't, I'm not worrying about ah, educated people not employed. I think ones who are educated, ah, have a good education, you can be able to, to make yourself useful in a lot of ways. So that's why, this is why I think that ah, education is important.

OK. So that's your number one priority. What other needs do you see?

Ah, the other needs I see is, is to um, I think this leads to improve education as well, is ah, to improve rural development, because I think that's ah, um, an important ah, area where it can draw people back to the villages and... Ah, there are a lot of potential these areas have, but because they, they are not developed. Ah, no opportunities and everybody tend to come to Honiara instead of

OK. So there's, there's two big needs that you see, any others or, are you happy with those two?

Yeah, I'm happy with those two.

OK. Question 28. To what extent do you think the secondary curriculum is fulfilling (tape problem???????????? And a long pause) If you link that with your question 27 there, secondary schools are providing an education, are they providing something that would help with rural development?

I think they, they're doing it, ah, I guess, it's hard to measure, (???) definite ah, I think they're providing that ah, support to society, development ah, generally, ah, but the whole thing needs to ah, improved, I suppose by adding more subjects to the curriculum where more appropriate to rural area, ah, needs. Like for example, ah, we just raised ah, I mentioned, ah, tourism, that something that can filter down to rural areas and ah, people should have skills to ah, to come up with um, something that can be ah, low cost but cost effective and ah, useful, rather than going into something that's expensive, we cannot manage because we don't have the capital, the finances to do it.

So, if we can summarise then, what do you think would be the most important changes that should be made in the secondary curriculum to help fulfil these needs?

Yeah, I think we would, I would say that um, ah, put in more choices of subjects to, ah, yeah to increase the choices and something, some things that are more relevant to ah, rural area development.

OK. So that's your one thing, just why

Yeah, why did, why did they, that's what I think ah, it should happen and ah, to, you have to give more choices to ah, the students. At the same time ah, something to add to that, the end to open up even, say, Form 5 School Certificate, so that student can sit, ah, those who dropped out from Form 3 because they couldn't get on. Probably they can't be provided with materials to do home study and be able to sit the exam and come back, or even get a certificate and get a job or ah, at least ah, ah. Because at the moment, ah, everybody's asking for certificates, asking for where our, certification from our school or something. So, I think um, um, giving the opportunities to everybody, er, we should extend that as well to those who drop out early so that, um... Ah, that will give jobs to, for university student who have no jobs to set up small tutoring groups to take students and ah, I think (??) some fees.

OK. Interesting idea. Well, you've freely given of your thoughts here, is there anything that we haven't covered about the secondary curriculum, you feel you haven't said?

Yeah, I think the, ah, well (tape problem??) (????). ... because nothing is really happening fast these days (???) . They need (??) ah, more staff in the curriculum office so the can develop more opportunities . So I don't really think I have anything else.

So maybe I should add a number three here and say, get the curriculum development office functioning properly again.

Yeah, get it working and that's where I think (tape problem??) ah, they (???????)

(Laughter!) *So why do we need that office running properly again?*

Well, er, to develop these areas, ah, when going into new subjects, that's something that many of us here ah, don't have that experience. So even creating a new course is something that ah, might be difficult too, so, we might have to borrow from some other places and put in our bit and, er, get things going.

OK. Well, that, that's great.

I hope that you find something useful. Throw away what is ah....,

END OF INTERVIEW.

EXTRA QUESTION ASKED BY PHONE to PA 2

Should teachers help write/construct the secondary curriculum?

Yes they should. They are doing this at the moment and this has been the system. It is good because it gives them ownership of the material. If they help to develop it they therefore know something about it, and thus they be able to implement it more effectively. So it is a good idea.

APPENDIX I

Chapter 4 codings

THESIS CODINGS

a) The number of curricula

- (i) One national curriculum
- (ii) Provincial and/or school-based curricula
- (iii) Other alternatives –
 - 1. The old 2-tier system
 - 2. Modern academic and technical/vocational strands/streams
 - 3. Choices within the curriculum

b) Curriculum stakeholders

- (i) Government educators
- (ii) Teachers
- (iii) Expatriate consultants
- (iv) Students
- (v) Parents
- (vi) Business people

c) The content of the current curriculum

- (i) The range of subjects –
 - 1. The need for it to be holistic.
 - 2. Music and Art
 - 3. P.E.
 - 4. Computer Studies
 - 5. Other additions and deletions
- (ii) Subjects' contents –
 - 1. The perceived helpfulness of core vs. elective subjects.
 - 2. Knowledge vs. practical skills –
 - Attitudes to knowledge and practical skills
 - Consequences
 - Changing the attitudes
 - 3. Knowledge and skills for Form 6
 - 4. Competency skills –
 - Communication
 - Problem-solving, negotiating and decision-making
 - 5. Values –
 - The need
 - The relationship with the teaching of Bible subjects
 - 6. Sol. Is. information –
 - Sol. Is. culture
 - Sol. Is. History
 - Sol. Is. Geography
 - 7. Pacific and other cultures/countries
 - 8. Irrelevancies
 - 9. Related to societal needs –
 - Knowledge related
 - Skills related
 - Values related
- (iii) Emphasis on subjects –
 - 1. What should be core subjects?
 - 2. Should electives be examined?

4. Access to the secondary curriculum

- (i) The current situation
- (ii) Obstacles to access –
 - 1. Standard 6 selection
 - 2. Form 3 selection
 - 3. Gender
 - 4. Poverty
 - 5. Slow learners
- (iii) Obstacles to increasing access
- (vi) Rural vs. urban –
 - 1. Trained teachers
 - 2. Resources
- (v) Societal needs

APPENDIX J

Societal needs as perceived by interviewees

CATEGORY	SOCIETAL NEEDS	INTERVIEWEES	INTERVIEWEES TOTAL (Max. 12)
Values	Honesty rather than corruption	BA2, GA1, GA2, P1, S2, T1.	6
	Quality leadership	BP2, GA1, GA2, P1, S1, S2.	5
	Christian living	PA1, T1, T2.	3
	Law and order	GA1, S2, T2.	3
	Racial harmony	PA1, T1, T2.	3
	Fidelity in marriage	T1, T2.	2
	Sharing	BP2.	1
	Raising the status of women	BP2.	1
	Total =		24
Skills	More practical education	BP1, GA2, P1, PA1, S1, S2, T1.	7
	Better communication and other competency skills	BP1, GA1, GA2, S1, S2.	5
	Development skills	BP2, P1, PA1, S1.	4
	Total =		16
Access	More secondary schools	P2, PA2, S1.	3
	More even distribution of good teachers	BP2, S2.	2
	Free education	PA1, S1.	2
	Total =		7
Knowledge	Health education	BP1, GA1, PA1.	3
	Culture	P1.	1
	Sex education	P1.	1
	Total =		5