

Moving beyond critique: An indigenous response to economic reductionism in education

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on ethnographic research undertaken by the author during 1987 in the 'Atenisi Institute – an indigenous educational institution in Tonga. After outlining 'Atenisi's establishment and development over the past 25 years, I describe the two main divisions of the 'Atenisi Institute - the High School and the University. The major emphasis in the High School discussion is on how the students are taught, while in the University discussion the emphasis is on what is taught. The central and unifying theme of the discussion is that of struggle - educational, political, social, cultural and financial. What I have written is based on information gathered as a participant-observer - as teacher, student, community member; on an archive of writings made available to me and most heavily on the actual words of students and staff.

Introduction

The radical restructuring of New Zealand's education system over the past few years is informed by an instrumental economic rationality in which education is a means to an end. Many of the educational policies underpinning this restructuring reflect a particular set of ideological beliefs which promote a view of education as a site of production for the market economy; and where educational knowledge and the credentials educational institutions have to offer are commodities whose nature should be determined by the market.

This process has not, of course, been confined to New Zealand. The dissemination and acceptance of this ideology is evident in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia - to name but a few. Responses to the entrenchment of market-led educational policies by many educational theorists in these countries as well as New Zealand, have focused on the numbing of critical inquiry and the suppression of the critical tradition of education they imply.

Such responses further point to the need for educators to go beyond critique into the 'sphere of struggle and action'. They maintain that within this sphere educators should be involved in the development of educational alternatives which 'promote the acquisition of a critical attitude and social practices that allow students to view society with an analytical eye' (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986: 205). An empowering and liberating pedagogy which illuminates rather than opaques reality (Shor, 1986: 183), it is suggested, is one which enables subordinate social groups to 'appropriate critically the best features of traditional education' (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986: 10).

The 'Atenisi Institute, founded in Tonga twenty-five years ago, is one indigenous educational institution which, I believe, goes a long way towards achieving what Western educational theorists

are calling for. On the one hand, it provides a critique of instrumentalism - specifically the 'technical-functional' (see Dale, 1982) view of education which has informed educational policy-making in Tonga and other Pacific Islands countries since the 1960s, and assumes a direct link between education and economic development. This view perceives education in overtly vocational-utilitarian terms and reduces it to the function of facilitating economic growth through the production of 'human capital' with the skills and attitudes necessary for 'modernisation'. On the other hand, 'Atenisi offers an alternative model of educational theory and practice by melding indigenous and western educational structures.

The detail that follows is based on ethnographic research undertaken by the author in 1987. After outlining 'Atenisi's establishment and development over the past 25 years, I describe the two main divisions of the 'Atenisi Institute - the High School and the University. The major emphasis in the High School discussion is on *how* the students are taught, while in the University discussion the emphasis is on *what* is taught. The central and unifying theme of the discussion is that of struggle - educational, political, social, cultural and financial. What I have written is based on information gathered as a participant-observer - as teacher, student, community member; on an archive of writings made available to me and most heavily on the actual words of students and staff.

The origins and development of 'Atenisi: An overview

Beginnings

In 1966 'Atenisi was registered at the Premier's Office with the designation 'Institute of the People'. Its establishment, however, pre-dates its registration by three years. Early in 1963 Futa Helu was approached by a group of civil servants who asked him to help them improve their skills in English, maths and bookkeeping, and in March 1963 a night school comprising 12 adult students and Helu as teacher began classes. Soon more aspiring students - seamen and Ministry of Works technicians - sought help from 'Atenisi, so classes in Celestial Navigation and Electrical Circuitry were established, also being taught by Futa Helu.

The original night school members and their teacher had established a governing committee at the time of foundation and within a year were faced with a major decision. The high rate of natural population growth in Tonga had resulted in a population bulge of school-age pupils which by 1964 had led to a demand for secondary schooling that could not be met by the existing schools. Many of the students rejected by government and church schools went to 'Atenisi seeking the education they wanted. After some consideration the committee decided to open a day school - the 'Atenisi High School. Not long after, the night school ceased operating and was replaced by the 'Atenisi Technical Division offering daytime tertiary level classes in Navigation, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, Commerce and Radio Communications.

During this time things were very difficult economically. The first classrooms were small huts built of branches and thatch in the traditional Tongan style. In 1965 the first substantial building was built by committee members, teachers, parents and students who had spent the previous Christmas holiday on the island of 'Eua cutting and milling timber for it. Socially too, things were not easy - the 'Atenisi community experienced a lot of hostility from the Tongan public who saw 'Atenisi as threatening the established political and religious orders.

Expansion

The committee had plans for expansion and development that required a large area of land, and in 1967 took up a government lease on 17 acres on the western outskirts of Nuku'alofa which is where 'Atenisi is located today. The land itself provides a rather inhospitable environment being largely undrained swamp, but the 'Atenisi community has been untiring in its efforts to improve the physical environment and develop the infrastructure necessary for their Institute's expansion.

In 1971 experimental university level classes were begun in Tongan Culture, English Literature, Mathematics and Philosophy. These continued until the formal founding of 'Atenisi University in 1975, followed by the official enrolment of eight students in a two-year Diploma programme in February, 1976 a "revolutionary event because it was the first time in the history of Tonga that university level courses were given internally, on Tongan soil" (Helu, 1980: 16). Six of the eight students were presented with their diplomas by the King at a graduation ceremony in November, 1977. This recognition by the King gave 'Atenisi a new status in the community - albeit a still precarious one.

The next significant milestone in 'Atenisi's development was the establishment of a four-year Bachelor of Arts programme - the two-year Diploma programme followed by a further two years of higher and more specialised study. In 1984 the graduation of the first four B.A. students was reported in a Pacific-wide magazine:

Education in Tonga witnessed a quantum leap in 1984 when 'Atenisi University, an independent autonomous institution awarded B.A. degrees to its first group of four Tongan graduates. The four-year B.A. programme ... offers the most accessible opportunity to Tongans for a university education (Fonua, 1985: 81).

A further development was the establishment in 1985 of the Agricultural Division which is working towards the development of small-scale agricultural methods and is utilising 'Atenisi land to grow plant crops and fast-growth timber as a continuing source of revenue. The most recent addition to the campus has been AFP A - the 'Atenisi Foundation for the Performing Arts - which offers courses in Tongan and western performance arts.

Material resourcing

Because 'Atenisi's philosophy precludes financial dependence on the State, its story has been one of continuing economic struggle. Set fees are less than those charged by other educational institutions in Tonga and are supplemented by a variety of fund-raising activities.

Each term the High School has one major event. In Term One of 1987 for example a concert was held for which pupils divided into groups according to the island group they came from - Vava'u, Ha'apai or Tongatapu - and performed song and dance items while their supporters in the audience came forward and placed donations on the oiled bodies of the performers they favoured. The occasion was very competitive with each group aiming to raise the most money - the 1987 concert raised about \$NZ10,000. The Term Two event was a social held at a Nuku'alofa nightclub and a similar function was held in Term Three.

Throughout the year money is made on a more regular basis from the 'Atenisi shop at Kalamahu Market (the main market in Nuku'alofa). Goods such as foodstuffs and magazines are bought wholesale and sold for a small profit. A more profitable money-spinner is the sale of Tongan medicines and oils made by members of the 'Atenisi community. A further two sources of much-needed finance are the sale of seedlings grown by the Agricultural Division, and the 'Atenisi's own concert party, the Kauhiva Afokoula, which raises money while touring and performing overseas.

Because of the efforts of the past 20 years things are much better now, in terms of resources, than they were in the early days. I saw photos taken a few years back of classrooms where pupils all sat on the floor during lessons because there were no desks, but even today the school struggles to provide such basic equipment. Teachers and students continue to make desks and build and maintain classrooms after school hours and during weekends and holidays.

By New Zealand standards the High School buildings are very basic and are often over-crowded (1987 classes numbered up to 58 pupils) with inadequate seating despite the building programme. Teaching aids consist of blackboard and chalk and set texts. The University resources are also very limited according to Western expectations. But the science laboratory and equipment - most of

which is donated from Japan - compares well with anything else in Tonga. The library too provides as good a service as anything else available locally. The original 'Atenisi library was destroyed by Cyclone Isaac in 1982 so staff and students constructed a new building and the book collection has been gradually built up to about 10,000 titles including a good Pacific section. Many of the books come from overseas donors - individuals and organisations. In 1986 the Crown Prince made a grant of 10,000 *pa'anga* (\$NZ12,000 approx.) for the purchase of computer equipment which has proved invaluable as a teaching resource and for administrative use. Despite these donations and grants 'Atenisi's material existence remains very much one of hand-to-mouth.

Founding philosophy

That 'Atenisi exists at all, and in the form it does, is largely due to the continuing efforts and inspiration of its Founder and Director, Professor Futa Helu. Fonua's description of Futa Helu captures his many-sided character:

a Tongan scholar and a professor of Tongan culture who in his spare time sings in operatic style (including a solo in Italian at the royal wedding of Lavaka-Ata), prescribes Tongan medicine, writes prose, composes traditional Tongan Lakalaka ... , is honorary Spanish consul in Tonga and, if that is not enough, at times he is found in Kava circles in the villages philosophising (Fonau, 1985: 52).

All aspects of 'Atenisi reflect this remarkable man's influence: his consistent philosophy; his deep and wonderfully diversified knowledge; his well-balanced and good-humoured attitude to life; his respect for all people whatever their status in society; and his love for his own culture. But most significantly it reflects his realisation that Tonga's future well-being and integrity depend on all its citizens having the opportunity and understanding that would enable them to participate in informed decision-making about their society's development.

Accordingly, 'Atenisi's founding objectives are to both promote a critical appreciation of traditional educational knowledge and an analysis of the social context in which 'Atenisi exists; and to oppose and critique the instrumentalism of the educational policies and practices prevalent throughout the Pacific region. Futa Helu describes instrumentalism as "a blatant injection of foreign ideology" (1981: 42). He maintains that an education system in which economic needs (as defined by those in power) are the determinants of curriculum content and pedagogical processes, is education at its most exploitative (ibid).

It is Helu's contention that only an education that immerses students in the critical tradition will enable them to develop a critical understanding of their own society. He sees this as necessary for the development of an educated and active populace able to resist the manipulations of powerful forces both within Tonga and externally (Helu 1987: ii). That 'Atenisi exists in the only remaining Polynesian kingdom - often described as the most socially stratified and politically undemocratic Pacific Islands country (Crocombe et al., 1992) - which like other Pacific states operates within a 'dependent' relationship with the powerful metropolitan states in the region, points to the political significance of its educational project.

'Atenisi offers a traditional-classical curriculum giving students a broad knowledge of the major fields of study through subjects such as philosophy, literature, languages (classical and modern), history, maths and sciences, with a particular application to Tongan culture and society and incorporating indigenous forms of knowledge. The pedagogical environment of 'Atenisi is one that encourages free-thinking, debate and inquiry. The dialectics between both *what* is taught, and *how* it is taught; and between educational themes which are accepted as universal and the particular socio-historical context of Tonga, are seen to contribute to the overall educational objective of criticism.

'Atenisi High School

The pupils

In 1987 'Atenisi High School enrolment was 310-330 which included twelve ni-Vanuatu pupils and one palangi (my son). About 75% of the pupils were male. 'Atenisi admission criteria are different from other secondary schools as no reference is made to *sivi hu* (the examination sat at the end of primary school) results. Other schools use these as a means of selecting pupils, but at 'Atenisi what is required from prospective pupils is that they and their parents attend an interview with Professor Helu so he can explain the principles by which the school operates and encourage their commitment to its philosophy. The same procedure is applied to those who enter 'Atenisi after having begun their secondary schooling elsewhere and no pupil, regardless of the reason for the change of school, is turned away. 'Atenisi is also the only school in Tonga to offer 'second-chance' education to those who have left school but wish to return.

This policy of open entry is based on the belief that every person has the right to an education to the level desired. Being mindful of 'Atenisi's marginal status in the wider Tongan community, I was interested in Futa's comments on where his pupils come from and why they come to 'Atenisi. He told me:

Our pupils come from the lower commoner classes, the *tu'a*, though there are one or two cases from the upper classes, and they come from every part of Tonga - most villages have representatives at 'Atenisi. When we first started our student body was made up of rejects from other schools who had been expelled or failed exams, or those who couldn't even get into other schools because they had scored so poorly in the entrance exam. It is still like that but to a lesser extent now. Families who are on the fringes, who are not very active in mainstream Tongan activities ... who are disaffected in some way send their children to 'Atenisi. Even those who sent their children here originally because it was the only school that would accept their children have now adduced that there are reasons to be dissatisfied with the established system. And by now we have built up a strong core of 'Atenisi families some of whom have sent two generations of their young people here.

The teachers

The High School teachers were a varied lot in terms of experience and background. At the time I was teaching there the teaching staff numbered fifteen: ten Tongans, three New Zealanders, and two Japanese. The foreign teachers were all working as volunteers, two were trained teachers with many years' classroom experience and the others were university graduates. The Tongan teachers included Professor Helu, another trained in Auckland, three 'Atenisi B.A. graduates and five 'Atenisi B.A. students.

Like teaching bodies in schools throughout Tonga, many of the 'Atenisi High School teachers were not formally trained, but, unlike most Tongan teachers, all had undertaken tertiary studies including subjects in educational theory and practice. Furthermore, the coherent and well-disseminated philosophical principles which guide 'Atenisi provide a framework for classroom practice which many trained teachers lack. Futa described his recruitment of teachers:

I like to take the best graduates from the Diploma course - in that way we tend to continue our tradition and get people with similar ideas on education so our philosophy is maintained. Of course there is the danger of inbreeding, but that is offset by the fact that we have an international staff; people from other countries . . . injecting different educational views. But we like to have a solid base of our own.

The curriculum

What distinguishes the curriculum of 'Atenisi High School from other Tongan secondary schools is primarily the type of subjects offered. The mainstream schools concentrate on vocational and 'relevant'. The 'Atenisi curriculum is more traditional and academically oriented, offering subjects like art history, foreign languages, ecology and putting a greater emphasis on world history and English literature.

Like other schools in Tonga, 'Atenisi is bilingual but endeavours not to be self-consciously so. The main medium of instruction is English because of the requirements of the examination system and the need for pupils to work from English language resources, and also in the interests of further academic progress. But, according to Futa, there is "no effort to artificially create an English speaking environment".

The pedagogy

Futa attributes the success of his school to the informal relations between teachers and pupils, the lack of indoctrination (religious and otherwise) and the fundamental expectation the teachers have of pupils that they will think critically and question that which they do not understand or wish to challenge.

'Atenisi teachers are encouraged to avoid "spoonfeeding" information to their classes. At 'Atenisi the teacher's task is defined as twofold. First is to enable the students to systematically acquire a body of knowledge through the structured and orderly presentation of that knowledge. Second is to develop in pupils the ability to analyse that knowledge in a critical way. Thus both instruction (especially in the early secondary years) and "dialectical" teaching (where the teacher leads the pupils to develop and test their own hypothesis) are aspects of the teacher's role.

However, for teachers to carry out their role successfully certain things are required. For teachers to be able to develop critical thinking in pupils they must be critical thinkers themselves, and for this to be the case teachers need to be also learners. The teacher is not considered to be an absolute authority in the learning situation or in any way inherently superior to the pupils - just a better informed learner whose own learning can be advanced through the teaching process.

One of my first impressions of school life at 'Atenisi seemed at the time to be contradictory. I wrote in my journal 'the pupils have a wonderfully free and relaxed attitude to the learning process, yet they take learning most seriously'. I was thinking in terms of the schools I was used to where it often seemed that serious students were far from relaxed about their learning, and a "free" classroom was one in which the teacher had often abrogated responsibility for what went on while pupils "expressed" themselves in an unhampered and apparently purposeless way. Freedom in the 'Atenisi context not only eschews unnecessary rules and regulations (for example, there is no uniform, chewing gum in classes is allowed if the teacher agrees, formal language when addressing teachers is not required unlike other Tongan schools) but has a positive and creative character. Free activity is that marked by initiative, responsibility and productivity.

The uniqueness of 'Atenisi's teaching and learning style in the Tongan educational context is highlighted in the following comments from two ex-'Atenisi High School students. The first account came from a young woman then in her third year at 'Atenisi University. She talked about the difference between 'Atenisi and the high status girls' church school she attended:

I left [my previous school] at the end of Form 4. The teaching there was very poor and the pupils there had no opportunity to express themselves or ask for help if they didn't understand. My aunt who is also my guardian didn't want me to go to 'Atenisi because she was a pupil of [my previous school) herself and she approved of their style of teaching. When I went to 'Atenisi I found it much better because the atmosphere was much freer - I didn't have to use respect language to teachers and could even disagree with them. At [my previous school) if a teacher made a mistake on the

blackboard you wouldn't say anything because of having to put so much effort into the formal way of speaking and even if you were not too afraid to ask a question the effort was too much.

The second account comes from an 'Atenisi graduate who had recently been awarded a Ph.D. from Australia National University:

I tried to get into Tonga High School or Tupou College but wasn't considered good enough for either. I had never heard of 'Atenisi but my father met this cousin of ours and he told my father of this other school which could offer me the same level of education ... My first three weeks there were very difficult and I wanted to run away because I couldn't really understand their lessons - I had never been expected to *think* before - but after the third week I found it enlightening. I began to be awakened to a totally different world in terms of learning and there was this totally different atmosphere of independence and freedom to ask questions, challenge teachers, express thoughts ... Futa was my English literature teacher and the emphasis he put on human and social issues was completely new to me. He would discuss themes and things in English novels and drama in terms of *Tongan* society. I found myself thinking about the meaning of everyday experiences, things in Tongan society I had merely accepted before . . . And because of this enlightenment and enthusiasm - a kind of intellectual awakening - I very much wanted to go on to the university even though at the time it was still experimental, and there I did Tongan Culture, Art History, English Literature and pre-Socratic Philosophy.

1987 pupils' comments

Bearing in mind Futa's comments about why pupils enrol at 'Atenisi (which were reinforced by the teachers) - that most 'Atenisi pupils enrolled because of low *sivi hu* results or expulsion from other schools - I was interested to hear what the pupils themselves had to say about why they were there rather than at some other school. Very few gave negative reasons for being at 'Atenisi and none admitted to being there because of expulsion from other schools. One boy now in Form 5 admitted that he had entered 'Atenisi because he had failed the entrance examinations elsewhere:

My uncle persuaded my parents to let me enter 'Atenisi because 'Atenisi has no examination for entering. I failed my exam to enter Tonga College and now I'm pleased because the education at 'Atenisi is best.

Fees were mentioned by one Form 3 boy:

At the school I was at first the fees were too hard for my parents to pay so they came to see Futa Helu about me and I like 'Atenisi better than my other school because they learn about other countries and interesting things and they don't wear uniform.

Futa's comments about a group of committed 'Atenisi families is borne out by the following:

The main reason I am studying at 'Atenisi even though I could have gone to another school is because of the primary interest of my parents and myself. 'Atenisi is different from other high schools and colleges in its process of education (Form 6 boy).

I came to 'Atenisi because my big brother and sister study here. I passed the Tonga High School exam but I came here because it's a free school (Form 3 girl).

An overwhelming number of students gave positive reasons for leaving other schools and coming to 'Atenisi. What is significant is the obvious belief that 'Atenisi is a superior school - in what it teaches and how. Many mention the combination of 'freedom' and good teaching:

The reason I am at 'Atenisi is because I know for sure I can develop my studies here. I've been in other schools but can study more here - more than at Tonga High even. Athens has lots of bright teachers who have degrees so their education is of high rank Not only that but I like it here because of not wearing uniform. I can learn more and I feel free (Form 5 girl).

In 1984 I left the Government school and entered 'Atenisi because one of my brothers had been schooling here for three years and he gave me some advice - 'Atenisi is the best for education'. I

found many interesting things at 'Atenisi and the 'Atenisi way of education is still 100% for me (Form 6 boy).

Many students consider the curriculum offered at 'Atenisi to be better than in other schools because it is broader:

I am studying at 'Atenisi because their syllabus offers more and the teachers are very good. I like the 'Atenisi style and the education is terrific (Form 5 girl).

I study at 'Atenisi because it provides a great variety of subjects like languages and students are free to make choices - not like the school I was at before (Form 5 girl).

The following response from a Form 5 boy summarises the varied reasons pupils gave for being at 'Atenisi:

There are many good reasons for attending 'Atenisi. First 'Atenisi is more comfortable. I like its surroundings, teachers, students and also the syllabus. Also uniforms are not required and school starts not so early. 'Atenisi gives me free choices for my mind which gives me the desire to try harder in education and go further than before. This is because at 'Atenisi I can express my opinions and feelings.

While these certainly are positive features of 'Atenisi, most of them could not have been realised prior to these students' actual experiences as pupils there. Whatever the initial reasons for enrolling at 'Atenisi (and I accept what Futa and the teachers say about them being largely negative), it is obvious that once there the ethos and spirit of the place becomes the justification for being an 'Atenisi pupil. This sense of identity and commitment is engendered from within the 'Atenisi community as part of the daily experience, and results in a distinction being drawn between an 'Atenisi education and that available elsewhere in Tonga. In this way the pupils themselves reaffirm the 'Atenisi philosophy and practice.

'Atenisi University

The students

A total of seventy students were enrolled in 'Atenisi University courses in 1987. Of these sixty-six were Tongan, three were ni-Vanuatu and one was from the U.S.A. Fifty-four students were doing Diploma courses and sixteen the B.A. As well as the seventy students enrolled in diploma or degree courses there were ten audit students who attended lectures without completing course requirements because of personal or vocational interest in the subject matter. They included civil servants, 'Atenisi High School teachers and teachers from other schools, and 'Atenisi graduates in the Nuku'alofa workforce. Three-quarters of 'Atenisi University students were men, while 40% of the students had been to 'Atenisi High School with Tonga High and Tupou College contributing most other students.

A significant number of students were people who had been in the workforce for a number of years and had become dissatisfied with their achieved level of education, or had not been able to afford to further their studies before. Most 'Atenisi University students, like those in the High School, are from the lower commoner classes, although there are more exceptions to this in the University than in the High School. Many come from families with very little money so the sacrifice made for the students' education is great. For most students 'Atenisi is the only way they can experience university life, and, importantly, it provides the opportunity for further study overseas that they would not otherwise have.

The faculty

The University faculty has always been very cosmopolitan. Over the years it has included German, Dutch, French, Austrian, British, Indian, Japanese, United States, New Zealand and Australian, as well

as Tongan, citizens. In 1987 there were twelve lecturers whose home countries were Tonga, U.S.A., India, England, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Some were full-time and permanent, others part-time and temporary. Many of the part-timers were in Tonga carrying out academic research and taught 'Atenisi courses as a voluntary contribution to the host country, or on a paid basis to help finance their research. The major difficulty in recruiting and retaining lecturing staff is the limited financial resources with which to pay them. Fortunately, a number of 'Atenisi students furthering their studies overseas are almost at the stage of completing post-graduate degrees and returning to 'Atenisi. This will reduce 'Atenisi's dependence on overseas staff and solve many of the current staffing problems. The 'Atenisi position is, however, that the overseas input must continue to some extent as the role of overseas staff is a positive one. As one of the 'Fongan lecturers suggested:

We don't cling to insider status the way some Pacific institutions do. Education is an international movement and if we want 'Atenisi to be seen in a global context we must have overseas input.

Course prescriptions

The aim of the university programme is to give a broad and general coverage of the major fields of knowledge, leading into more intensive and specialised knowledge of a particular field in the humanities or social sciences.

To complete a diploma, students need to have passed twenty-four courses. Each course lasts a term and consists of 4 hours of lectures a week. Of the twenty-four courses, nineteen must come from the following subject areas: Tongan Culture, English Language, History, Mathematics, Philosophy, Natural Sciences, Humanities (art history, architecture, religion, foreign languages), and Social Sciences (anthropology, education, economics, geography, political studies, psychology, sociology). The number of courses required in each subject area depends on whether the student is doing arts or sciences. The five remaining courses must come from maths/science for a science student and humanities/social science for an arts student.

To graduate Bachelor of Arts, a student who has already graduated from the diploma programme must complete another twenty-one courses. At least seven of these courses must be in either humanities or social science subjects with at least three being from one of the following subject areas: Anthropology, Art/Architecture, Linguistics/European/Asian/Pacific Languages, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Political Studies, Psychology, Religion, Sociology, Tongan Culture and Language.

The development of critical thinkers

Literally 'clever man/woman', the traditional cultural ideal of *tangata/fevina potu* is a very strong force in Tongan society. It has been reformulated through western contact to include proficiency with western skills and knowledge as well as those of Tonga. Futa defines a *tangata/fevina potu* in two ways. First, one who has not only gained knowledge from his/her western schooling but also has developed a critical attitude to it. Second, one whose knowledge and understanding encompasses all aspects of Tongan history, culture and society. The following account of work going on at 'Atenisi University concentrates on those areas seen as fundamental to the formation of a *tangata/fevina potu*, a critical thinker.

The realisation of *potu*, is considered to require initially the critical outlook that can only be acquired through the study of philosophy. The aim is not a narrow theoreticism but a broad classical approach that will provide an objective and critical attitude to knowledge. Philosophy, especially the study of the Greek classical philosophers but also more modern thinkers such as Nietzsche, Hegel, Kant and Marx, is valued as a field of study because it provides the fundamental apparatus of understanding and criticism necessary for the illumination of all other fields of study.

Facility with language, primarily Tongan and English, is another requirement of *poto*. Each diploma student does a sequence of six English courses which are designed to provide skills in academic English. Literature courses are also available and very popular especially when taught by Futa. One project undertaken by 'Atenisi students and staff which indicates the importance placed on language was the production of a Tongan-English dictionary. The aim was to identify the most commonly used Tongan words for translation into English. It involved the collection of about a million words, 35% from written sources and 65% recorded orally on tape from hundreds of people throughout Tonga. The words from both sources were then sorted according to frequency, and the 2000 most commonly used were included in the dictionary with English translations. Language courses are taught in 'Formal and Rhetorical Tongan' at introductory, intermediate and advanced levels, and there is also a course entitled 'Pacific Oral and Written Literature'.

The study of history is seen as important in the development of a critical attitude and as a source of knowledge. 'Atenisi offers many courses in world history, ancient through to modern, and Pacific and Tongan history are also part of the history curriculum. Courses on Pacific history cover prehistory, European exploration and post-contact developments with an emphasis on a critical evaluation of past and present. 'Atenisi also has a strong interest in the study of oral history with students involved in the systematic gathering and recording of oral narratives - genealogies, myths and legends - from throughout Tonga. The data collected is being analysed according to a theory of oral tradition based on the work of Vico, to develop hypotheses about Tongan prehistory. An 'Atenisi graduate doing a Ph.D. in prehistory who is involved in the project, described this work as follows:

I think 'Atenisi is going to build up a strong school of oral tradition and will make a valuable contribution to current controversies and debate on the issue of Polynesian migration and settlement and how oral traditions relate to prehistory. I will attempt to deal in terms of theory and practice with oral traditions as a way of adding impetus to the present debate by proving that mythology is as realistic as linguistics and archaeology in the reconstruction of prehistoric society. I hope to contribute something original in the field of oral traditions, notably mythology, as history.

Besides contributing to historical and cultural theory in general, this work also has political implications within the Tongan context. According to Marcus (1980: 71), "knowledge of oral traditions and genealogical knowledge of a person's own heritage, as well as of royal lineages, are considered a chiefly like attribution or pretension". In other words commoners are not expected to know about Tonga's oral traditions and history; they are considered the preserve of the *'eiki*. Futa believes that the prevailing version of Tongan prehistory is defective because it was written by Wesleyan missionaries and is therefore imbued with their social and religious assumptions, and because it was written to serve the interests of the neo-traditional hegemony. 'Atenisi has an important role, he believes, in demystifying Tonga's past. Futa also considers an important task for historians to be the chronicling of the social and political changes brought about by the "economic development" of recent decades, especially the expansion of capitalism and the formation of a Tongan middle class.

Although an integral part of all subject areas, Tongan Culture is also an important field of study in itself for the *tangata/fefine poto*. 'Atenisi offers courses in Tongan music, poetry and dance; in traditional agriculture and fishing; in traditional medicine; in mythology and folklore; and in many aspects of material culture (for example the social content of *tapa* cloth design). Futa describes the Tongan Culture programme as 'trying to discover what pre-European culture - common experience - was like. We are not saying that culture was something that stood still but we would like to know its various forms in the past'. The following comments, from two ex-'Atenisi students furthering their studies overseas, demonstrate the value of this in promoting the appreciation and perpetuation of Tongan culture:

From 'Atenisi I learnt what was best about Tongan culture and I learnt to appreciate my background. I learnt history I didn't know, myths and rituals I had never heard of, formal kava ritual - all things commoners no longer have the chance to learn ... it is very important that commoners

learn these things and through critical examination of this knowledge learn to understand the underlying principles of our society.

Futa introduced us to so many things about Tongan culture we were not aware of and it really opened my eyes as to its significance and to the nature of my culture, so much of it is so beautiful - the poetry, the traditional music and sense of coherence - that I really learnt to appreciate it. But I also became aware of how conflicts are concealed in our society - quite a dilemma: the sense of beauty and coherence from one angle and from this other angle you see exploitation and conflicting interests - which I couldn't recognise until I had developed a critical stance.

These comments indicate not only that the double requirement of poto - understanding of one's own society and a critical outlook - are met, but also point to the resultant political implications.

Conclusion

The educative value of a curriculum which combines traditional Tongan and Western knowledges is well demonstrated by the above examples of 'Atenisi students' critical appreciation of their socio-cultural context. This account of the 'Atenisi philosophy and practice also clearly illustrates how pedagogical form and curriculum content can inform and shape each other, and how an educational context in which this occurs can contribute to the development of a critical analysis of society and the empowerment of subordinate social groups.

'Atenisi's educational practice is strengthened by the social, political and educational theory which shapes it. In rejecting the view that society is no more than the aggregate of individuals within it,' Atenisi asserts the view that social institutions and movements are prior to, and form, the individuals who participate in them. 'Atenisi also denies the existence of a unified society in which all members have a common set of interests - it asserts a view of society as a complexity of opposing forces. Education, according to the 'Atenisi philosophy, is necessarily political in that it prepares students for struggle and criticism by developing a thorough understanding and analysis of their own society and enabling them to challenge State power. 'Atenisi's educational aim of critical thinking means that education cannot shape itself to society - its essential attitude to society will be that of criticism and protection against non-educational interests which may distort and undermine the critical tradition of education. Economic reductionism in education is seen by 'Atenisi as denying education as a social, historical and cultural movement with its own characteristics and interests.

'Atenisi provides a broad and challenging education within a pedagogical environment which stimulates the social, historical and cultural imagination crucial for the development of critical thought - that which will promote the 'struggle and action' necessary to challenge and oppose oppressive social forces. As such, 'Atenisi provides a useful model for Western educationists concerned to develop alternatives to current market-driven educational policies.

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