

INCORPORATING ALL THINGS TRADITIONAL

Traditional Values-Based Curriculum In Micronesia

By Canisius T. Filibert

Students in Micronesia are not different than their American peers. Between the ages of 5 and 17 they spend more time at school than anywhere else. In the time it takes a child to graduate from high school, it is quite possible that his studies and the overall school curriculum have gone through three curricular framework changes. This, of course, goes in tandem with the change of seemingly endless cycles of best practices and results-oriented, research-based, or scientifically proven curriculum. For Pacific Islanders, the pace can be overwhelming as energy and effort are spent trying to squeeze Islanders into a given mold; when in actuality, the mold is not congruent to the region. What is really needed is a traditional values-based curriculum.

The Rethinking Education in Micronesia (REIM) conference was held in the Republic of the Marshall Islands in October 2004. The conference convened a group of Micronesians to address the issues of educational design. This design has to be rethought to fit the framework of Islanders, and not the other way around. Coincidentally, four years earlier in October 2000, the 5th Student Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders (SPICOL) was held in Tarawa, Kiribati. This convention of young Pacific Islanders discussed a number of issues, including making changes in teaching and learning in the Pacific. One of the recommendations in the SPICOL Communiqué (2000, available at www.sidsnet.org/pacific/usp/spicol/SPICOL5_00/Communique.html) spells it out clearly:

SPICOL recognizes the importance of education and sound educational policies in fostering and guaranteeing a peaceful environment for the region. SPICOL recommends that efforts be undertaken to diversify SPICOL school curricula into broader frameworks to prioritise non-formal education . . . SPICOL wishes to sponsor and promote culture and vocational exchange programmes at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) . . . promote understanding and awareness of the various cultures within the region, which ultimately leads to a greater sense of unity within the region.

The REIM conference was not far from SPICOL's con-

cerns and issues. In fact, the REIM conference attendees grounded such discussions of traditions and indigenosity in the context of Micronesia. In their deliberations, the following needs emerged:

- *To do education the Micronesian way*
- *To start from our own values*
- *To understand similarities and differences between indigenous and Western education*
- *To enhance and strengthen the family unit in education*
- *To have a curriculum of tolerance and understanding*
- *To have a curriculum for relevant life and vocational skills*
- *To provide opportunities for all while retaining traditional ways*

There is no question that the concept of learning using traditional lenses and senses is the framework that Pacific Islanders may have been searching for all this time. The REIM conference provided opportunity for Islanders to put their collective minds together and rethink the direction of education for Micronesia. It has provided a springboard for indigenous knowledge to come to the forefront of teaching and learning. There is still much in the local island heritages that can make classroom learning a meaningful experience.

Ironically, both the SPICOL and the REIM are separate bodies of Pacific Islanders, convened at separate times, but both are dedicated to institutional change. However, the REIM makes the impetus for educational improvement in Micronesia much more of a reality. As a grassroots initiative, rethinking education in Micronesia and the Pacific has provided a venue for reassessing with our own hearts and minds the values that meet our needs. The traditional sense of teaching and learning provides the lenses local educators need to teach effectively and for students to learn significantly. Only when local schools address indigenous needs and values of the communities they serve will they become effective institutions of change for student success.

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