

Educating Learners in the Pacific

By Marilyn Low, PhD

Passionately, an elementary teacher from the Pacific shared her experience of using a mandated English reading program that did not meet the needs of her students. The program had earlier been determined to be a “best practice” and was purchased because it was good for all children. The students were diverse learners with unique life experiences and varying but rich linguistic and cultural resources. A one-size-fits-all program did not “fit.” The teacher faced the dilemma of either following a mandated program that did not meet the needs of her learners or altering the program to meet her learners’ needs and going against school expectations.

This story and others like it were shared at the Pacific Educational Conference held recently in Honolulu. In one forum, Pacific educational leaders offered contextualized responses to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) initiatives. At the heart of this discussion is the belief that learning must be meaningful and relevant to those involved in the educational process. As such, state education agency (SEA) responses to NCLB imperatives must address the unique values, ways of learning, languages, knowledge, and skills of the various communities in which Pacific children are educated. Educators spoke eloquently about issues related to “global” educational best practices and redesigns for local systems and schools.

A simple but provocative question resulted from the forum conversation. When posed, the question drew a silent pause and nods of agreement: *How would we describe an educated citizen for each of our Pacific countries?*

It was suggested that this might be a starting point for discussions working toward finding a good fit between global ideals and local imperatives that support sustainable and meaningful learning for all children. When a vision that responds to this question is firmly in place, perhaps teachers will no longer be faced with who comes first, the program or the learner.

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