

The Home-School Gap: Contextual Factors Impeding Parental Involvement in Education in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

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Educators working in cross cultural and multicultural contexts often find that parents tend to keep their distance from schools. Trying to involve parents can be a frustrating, time-consuming endeavor with few positive results. Despite the school's best efforts to encourage involvement, parents seldom engage in supportive activities. Certainly, there are no easy answers to improve the level of parental involvement. However, examining the possible reasons why parents stay away may yield insights that produce positive and culturally appropriate approaches toward easing the problem.

This article describes a specific problematic educational environment in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, where communities and schools do not interact well. Common barriers to parental involvement are examined, with an investigation into other contextual factors that may exacerbate the situation. A review will be presented of selected U.S. research on barriers to parental involvement, deemed relevant to the situation in Pohnpei based on personal experience, followed by a brief history of education in Micronesia. The American and traditional Pohnpeian practices of education are compared to highlight the differences and to contrast the social interactions that support democratic and traditional Pohnpeian notions of governance.

It is hoped that a review of these factors will contribute to a fuller understanding of why tension exists between the home and school in Pohnpei. Educators working in cross-cultural and multicultural contexts where parents similarly distance themselves from schools are encouraged to look for a set of factors that illuminates their particular situation.

BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: U.S. RESEARCH

Pohnpei, one of four states in the Federated States of Micronesia, operates an American-style education system. To a large extent, the positive role of parental involvement in formal education is intuitive to Pohnpeian parents. The late Cosmas Weilbacher, former president of the Pohnpei State PTA, once noted during a conversation that, "Kids learn better when parents are involved." But are Pohnpeian parents involved in the formal education of their children? Or are there barriers that keep them apart from the American-style school system?

To begin investigating the status of parental involvement in Pohnpei, the most expeditious place to start is with the research published in the United States on barriers to parental involvement in U.S. schools. The situation in Pohnpei, however, does not neatly parallel that of the United States. Thus, other contextual factors should be considered. Since formal education evolved differently in Pohnpei than it did in the United States, examining the history of education in Pohnpei may yield some insight into contemporary parental attitudes. Similarly, looking at the differences between traditional, indigenous education and formal, Western education may also shed some light. Finally, we must recognize the fact that education always carries political implications, so it may be helpful to consider the forms of decision making that are implied in Pohnpei's American-style school system in relation to their traditional notions of consensus building.

In the United States, the notion of barriers became a topic of inquiry with the realization that the benefits of parental involvement cannot accrue when families distance themselves from schools. Most studies assume a cultural gap between home and school. The gap may range in severity from a com-

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plete lack of mutual understanding through a mismatch between home and school teaching and learning styles, to a dissonance between professional educators and lay parents.

Many American parents may have good reasons to be suspicious of the schools' intentions to engage them. Parents who do not get involved are often those whose own education was unsatisfactory or those who have had bad experiences with their children at school. Salend and Taylor (1993) found that prior experiences with discrimination or disrespect often kept parents away. At times, the problem was as much historical as personal. For example, Cockrell (1992) discovered a general distrust among Native Americans who perceived schools as alien institutions—instruments of a culture that had discriminated against them in the past.

Another personal factor to consider is the individual teacher. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) placed teachers they interviewed into two camps. One consisted of those who questioned whether the benefits of parental involvement outweighed the problems involved. The other group comprised teachers who did not believe they had the ability to engage parents more actively, even though as teachers they would have liked to.

Clearly, immigrants who come from a culture with different systems of education may find it intimidating and confusing when they place their children into a new educational environment. Looking at barriers to involvement faced by immigrant Japanese, Shoho (1992) identified a number of inhibiting factors. The parents were embarrassed by their inability to communicate in English and their limited educational background. They were unfamiliar with American schooling and the expectations for parent involvement. Also, as newcomers on the low end of the economic ladder, their priority was survival. It seems reasonable that a similar set of factors relating to involvement with schools may be generalized to other immigrant groups entering the country under similar circumstances. Wong-Fillmore (1990) points out that despite a language barrier, Chinese families tend to promote their children's success in school because home values and ways of learning match those typical of mainstream middle class school systems. These Chinese parents discipline their children toward learning. On the other hand, Fillmore found that children from working class White, African American, and Mexican American families enter school having fewer experiences with adults in terms of interactive literacy and direct instruction. Fillmore argues that there are home values that may promote or inhibit children's classroom success.

Weisner, Gallimore, and Jordan (1988) detail the peer interaction patterns of Hawaiian families to show how a mismatch of home and school cultures can result. Hawaiian children experience what the authors call horizontal socialization, where affectionate, adult-directed child-rearing practices end at an early age. Older siblings become responsible for taking care of their younger brothers and sisters, resulting in a situa-

tion where peers are the dominant socializing influence. Maintaining positive social relationships becomes a primary objective. Interactions with adults tend to be apprehensive—the child does not look at adults as mentoring individuals, but as authoritarian enforcers whose moods must be monitored. On the other hand, mainstream schools expect children to have experienced vertical socialization patterns, where they spend more time with adults, rather than peers, as their mentors or teachers. Children who have experienced vertical socialization enter school predisposed to interact with adults as teachers, rather than as disciplinarians.

In any educational environment, parent alienation from schools—due to their own experiences and teacher hesitation to interact with parents—is a barrier. This should be kept in mind when questioning the lack of involvement in Pohnpei. Although literature on immigrant parents' successful support of their children's education, as well as research into home-school dichotomies, can be informative and useful, both approaches offer limited explanatory power as to why Pohnpeian parents stay aloof from a school system staffed and managed by their own community.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FORMAL EDUCATION IN MICRONESIA

A historical perspective helps understand the purpose Micronesians find for Western-style schooling, as well as why they may feel separated from it. Since public formal education is an alien institution, it is helpful to generally consider Micronesia's historical interactions with outside forms of education. The research by Jesuit Fr. Francis Hezel is particularly valuable. Fr. Hezel has worked as an educator in Micronesia for over 30 years and now heads the Micronesian Seminar, a research organization with headquarters in Pohnpei. Although his work primarily traces the political interactions of foreign powers in Micronesia, he notes where and how outside notions of education became established.

Formal education in Micronesia has its roots in a curious mix of 19th century missionary, commercial, and colonial endeavors. While the missionaries were concerned for people's souls, businesses saw a chance to make money, and colony-hungry countries competed in the quest for control and exclusion of others. Formal education in the region was begun by outsiders largely to promote and support these varying interests. Micronesia's public school systems, as we know them today, are still sorting out the positives and negatives of that historical legacy.

Guam, which is geographically a Micronesian island, has had a more continuous association with the West than the other islands in the region and has remained somewhat apart. The Spanish used Guam for several centuries as a port of resupply for their voyages from the Philippines to Mexico,

continuing overland to the Atlantic to eventually reach Spain. Unlike Guam, the other islands had little continuous interaction with outside cultures after Magellan and other Spaniards established their trade route in the 16th century.

When whale oil became a profitable commodity in the 19th century, American ships began plying the Pacific to hunt whales. Pohnpei turned into a popular provisioning and recreation point, with as many as 50 whalers making stops every year during the 1850s (Hezel, 1983). Life in Pohnpei began to change rapidly. The whalers exchanged guns and metal tools for wood, water, and women, and incidentally introduced smallpox, influenza, and sexually transmitted diseases. With no resistance to Western diseases, the Islanders' population declined drastically. Physically and psychologically, the Islanders had to be wondering what was happening.

On the heels of the carousing whalers came the scolding missionaries with a powerful new spiritual belief system. Fresh from their success in converting the "heathen" Hawaiian, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent three couples to Pohnpei in 1852 (Hezel, 1983). They established their first schools as soon as possible with a Protestant thrust toward literacy to enable Pohnpeians to read the Bible. The missionaries had converted most of Pohnpei within 15 years, and their schools had produced Pohnpeian missionaries to proselytize in Chuuk and the Marshall Islands. By 1885, a network of 40 churches stretched from Chuuk through the Marshalls. Over 4,000 Micronesians had been baptized and taught the fundamentals of reading (Hezel, 1983).

The victory was far from easy, however, and far from complete. The Protestant missionaries were engaged in a complex political sparring match where commercial interests and traditional chiefs feinted and dodged around their work. The chiefs were suspicious of the power that the missionaries held over the people. Traders and whalers were indignant that the do-gooders were spoiling their profits and fun. For the most part, the missionaries gave in to the chiefs. In spite of their tendency to conflate New England style democracy with religion, the missionaries found it prudent to work within the social structures of the islands and win the chiefs over as their allies. The missionaries remained aloof and censorious toward the sailors and traders. Feeling that the Islanders were being cheated in their exchanges, they introduced the Pohnpeians to the rudiments of trade as part of their educational effort (Hezel, 1983). Up until then, all exchanges had been through barter, with the better part of the bargain going to the outsiders. The missionaries taught the utility of currency as a means of setting value, a concept that underlies a monetary economy. Whereas a cask of water might have brought a knife in barter, it would now bring in a dollar, which in turn could buy two or three knives.

The Protestant missionaries didn't have the islands all to themselves for long. The Spanish government soon sent in Catholic friars, but the motivation was more geopolitical than

reverent. In 1885, newly unified Germany annexed the Marshall Islands, flexing its imperialistic muscle by following German trading companies into the Pacific. Germany also threatened to annex the Caroline Islands: Yap, Palau, Chuuk, and Pohnpei. Spain, however, reasserted its centuries-old European-acknowledged rights to the islands. To back up its claim, the Spanish moved to set up a western administrative office in Yap and an eastern headquarters in Pohnpei. Capuchin friars, who accompanied the governors and their few troops, immediately set up their own schools (Hezel, 1995).

While the American Protestant mission schools focused on young adults with the aim of having them become missionaries themselves, the Capuchins opened their schools for children. In a four-hour school day, they taught Spanish, religion, geography, and arithmetic. The Catholic schools were well received in Palau and Yap, but soon became involved in the political morass of Pohnpei. The Capuchins were in a contradictory position. They had to support the Spanish overlords while converting the Pohnpeians who opposed them. At the same time, the Capuchins supported Protestant missionaries' efforts to champion the Pohnpeians while competing with them for converts (Hezel, 1995).

Much of the contention between the Spanish Catholics and the American Protestants subsided at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1899, when Germany paid Spain just over \$4 million for all of Micronesia except Guam (Hezel, 1995). The Germans issued an edict that all religious schools be conducted in German. To comply, the Spanish Capuchins transferred their schools to their German counterparts, and the American missionaries turned their work over to a German Protestant group, the Liebenzell Mission (Hezel, 1995).

The German colonial government did nothing in the way of establishing schools. However, establishing local police forces served as an educational, as well as an administrative function. Local policemen had limited duties, but they received some vocational training and learned German (Hezel, 1995).

With the outbreak of World War I in Europe in August 1914, the Japanese moved quickly in the Pacific and pushed the Germans out of Micronesia by September (Hezel, 1995). Like the Germans, the Japanese imposed their language as the medium of instruction in all schools. Unlike the Germans, however, the Japanese were unwilling to leave formal education to missionaries. They closed mission schools throughout Micronesia and began the first system of public education. By 1918, nearly 1,700 island children were attending 22 public schools that had been established. Eventually, more than half the school age population consisting of children aged 8 to 14, attended six-hour school days. Education was limited to three years, although selected students could attend for another two years at central schools on the larger islands (Hezel, 1995).

Schoolwork included arithmetic and handicraft skills, such as weaving and carving, but class time focused primarily on Japanese language. The Japanese were more concerned with inculcating the Islanders with their culture than the Spanish or Germans had been. Unlike either of the previous colonial powers, the Japanese expected to bring large numbers of their own people to settle in the islands. In 1937, there were approximately 50,000 Micronesians in the Carolines, Marianas, and Marshalls. By that time, however, 62,000 Japanese had moved into the islands, and that number increased to 93,000 just before World War II. Education under the Japanese was directed toward developing an island population that could support and communicate with the immigrants who intended to stay (Hezel, 1995).

The Japanese administration set up separate schools for children of the settlers who moved into Micronesia. Japanese children received six years of education, with the possibility of two more for exceptional students. Micronesian students were prohibited from attending the Japanese schools. The number of schools for Japanese students continued to increase during the 1930s, so that by 1937, the number of Japanese children in schools was twice that of Micronesians (Hezel, 1995).

With the onset of World War II, the impact of global rivalries again reverberated in the islands, this time with devastating repercussions. By 1944, all public schools were closed (Hezel, 1995) as the battles for the islands swept across Micronesia.

In the wake of World War II, the United States Navy assumed administrative control of Micronesia with the responsibility of reestablishing schools. Unlike the Japanese, however, the Americans had no intention of moving significant numbers of people into Micronesia, nor of incorporating the islands into the political and economic life of their country. The United States' primary concern with the region was strategic, so while given the responsibility of reopening schools, the Navy was given very little budget to do so. The educational policy adopted by the Navy was one of minimal support. Any village was welcome to open a school, as long as it built and staffed it. Nevertheless, showing that they had detected value in formal education, Islanders constructed 152 schools by 1947—more than six times the number of schools that had been available to them during the Japanese administration.

While construction and staffing were left up to local communities, the U.S. Navy supplied textbooks, mostly second-hand materials from the continental U.S. Because most of the local teachers spoke or read little to no English, the medium of instruction was the local vernacular, and one can only guess at the content conveyed. Realizing a need for teachers, the Navy began recruiting young people to attend teacher training programs. These became intermediate schools, and the most promising students were sent on to Guam for further training (Hezel, 1995).

Although the Micronesian islands had been designated a trusteeship under the United Nations in 1947, their administration remained under the control of the U.S. Navy until 1951, when responsibility for implementing the trusteeship agreement was transferred to the U.S. Department of the Interior. Most Navy policies concerning education were continued, but the small budgets allocated for overall administration were decreased even further. Within the budgetary constraints, the Trust Territory Department of Education maintained a staff of about 20 Americans who taught at intermediate schools and visited elementary classrooms throughout the islands (Hezel, 1995).

During the 1950s, the Department of the Interior promoted local control of schools, advocating the use and teaching of vernacular languages and the development of locally focused curriculum. The lack of trained teachers remained the most serious obstacle to effective schools. One public high school, the Pacific Islands Central School, was opened in 1952, built on the strategy of using intermediate schools as the source of teachers. It enrolled about 150 students from throughout the Trust Territory. The school first operated in Chuuk and moved to Pohnpei in 1959. Although limited in the number of students it served, the school proved to be a training ground for both educational and political leaders for Micronesia (Hezel, 1995).

By 1961, only three United Nations (UN) trusteeships remained, of which the Pacific Islands was one. While the U.S. Department of the Interior was maintaining policies of slow growth in Micronesia, the international community was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with American administration. Against the backdrop of postwar decolonization and Cold War tension, a UN report that criticized the United States' handling of the Trust Territory contributed to a new U.S. approach to the islands under the Kennedy administration. Education became a priority, and money began to flow, both toward the construction of schools and the hiring of American contract teachers. The construction of more than 500 classrooms began. The intermediate schools were all expanded into 4-year high schools, and 400 American contract teachers were in Micronesian classrooms by 1966. By policy, English became the medium of instruction, and central control of all aspects of education displaced consideration for local control of schools and curriculum (Hezel, 1995).

Next came the Peace Corps. From 1966 to 1968, almost 1,000 Peace Corps volunteers were assigned to Micronesia. Practically every school had some American presence by the late 1960s, and local input declined as American influence became pervasive. Reversing earlier policies of having communities pay for their own teachers, the central Trust Territory government now standardized and paid the salaries. More local teachers were hired as the numbers of schools and enrollments increased, making education one of the Trust Territory's major employers (Hezel, 1995).

The centralized systems of education were incorporated into the new governments that negotiated political arrangements that ended the Trust Territory status of Micronesia. The Northern Mariana Islands opted for commonwealth status, but the others entered compacts of free association. The Marshall Islands became the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Palau became the Republic of Palau, and Pohnpei, Kosrae, Chuuk, and Yap combined and gained political independence as the Federated States of Micronesia. All the Freely Associated States granted the United States exclusive military oversight of their vast ocean area. Though new in name, the governments maintained the bureaucratic frameworks set up under American tutelage. These have remained for the most part intact, and remain the operational model today.

To the extent that they mention education, Hezel's political histories of Micronesia show schooling as an imposed institution, controlled by outsiders and separate from local communities. In spite of the shift to local control, the separation of community and schools continues today. David Hanlon's history of Pohnpei, *Upon a Stone Altar* (1988), points out two purposes that Pohnpeians found for adapting Western institutions, including education. One was to mediate and modify the influence of outside forces. A recent example, although outside of Pohnpei, is the Western-trained Palauan lawyers who led their community in resisting U.S. defense interests by inserting a nuclear-free clause in their Constitution. A second purpose for formal education was to use it for social mobility. Hanlon notes that members of low clans saw a way to increase personal prestige by studying with the missionaries. Although education did not supplant birthright as a determiner of social position, it provided a heretofore unavailable alternative. However, regardless of the purpose they found in formal education, Pohnpeians were content to leave the format and instructional content to outsiders.

Contrasting Forms of Education

The history of education in Micronesia shows us that the Islanders see a purpose for formal education but continue to view it as an outside institution. Even though schooling is a local endeavor, it is still regarded as something foreign. Traditional education (i.e., education indigenous to Pohnpeian culture), is quite different from Western-style education. The dissimilarities contribute to Pohnpeians viewing the latter as alien.

To look at non-Western Pohnpeian education, it is useful to consider Edwin Smith's (1934) three aspects of indigenous education. Smith distinguishes unconscious education (the type of learning that goes on in play among children) from informal education (where children observe and imitate for an adult audience). In indigenous contexts, formal education consists of learning where a child is apprenticed to a master. Each of these aspects of indigenous education is evident in Pohnpei

(Colletta, 1975). Play and peer learning are prominent among Pohnpeian children. The practice of horizontal socialization is the norm, where children spend more time with each other than under adult supervision. The fear of ridicule is an important motivator for young children, to the extent that a child's cohort of peers handles even toilet training. Play often mimics adult behavior, and when a child's interest or curiosity is noticed, mindful adults encourage it. The unconscious education of play typically moves seamlessly into informal education through experiential, side-by-side interactions with adults. Pohnpeian children will observe unquestioningly, try out the observed skill privately, and participate in adult activities when proficient. Formal education takes place when a child is recognized as being capable of taking on more advanced learning in areas such as medicine or navigation. In these cases, the same pattern of observation occurs, but various types of testing will precede practice.

In contrast to one's rank, which is limited by birth in Pohnpeian life, one's area of expertise is open to personal interest and aptitude within social parameters (Coale, 1951). For example, gender has great influence on what one learns. Men generally hunt and fish while women plant and gather. Also, areas of arcane knowledge such as advanced navigation and medicine are guarded and not available to everyone. Nonetheless, indigenous Pohnpeian education is remarkably fluid and responsive to the individual, guided by careful parent and community assessment of skills and abilities.

Considering just a few of the obvious educational differences helps us understand why Pohnpeians might distance themselves from American-style formal education. Education in the traditional community setting is individualized and focused. Parents and other adult family members assess children's predispositions and talents as they encourage them to pursue a specific task-based educational aim. In contrast, Western formal education practiced in Pohnpei's elementary schools is depersonalized and broad. All children receive the same course of study where learning is text-based and covers a wide range of topics. Teachers are authorized to assess students' mastery and progress, but parents are left out of the process. "School" and the skills necessary for success in it are under the charge of adults who may or may not have a family relationship with the child.

Indigenous Pohnpeian education takes place in the context of the family and is conveyed orally and by example. Therefore, listening, memory, and observation are critical learning skills. In contrast, Western knowledge is conveyed through text, which makes reading the crucial skill. Learning occurs in a building apart from the daily routine of life. A Pohnpeian boy reads about fishing with a teacher in class. With his uncle in a canoe, he learns to fish.

Knowledge in indigenous Pohnpeian education is integrated. As a boy learns to fish, he also learns about the habitat and life cycle of the fish, the place of each fish in history, spir-

ity, customs regarding the disposition of the catch, and more. A holistic mode of comprehension is important to becoming well educated. In contrast, text-based Western learning is compartmentalized, and the well-educated person is one who can analyze and synthesize information.

The Western practice of formal education displaces family members from the process. Teachers are outside the family, and the locus of learning is in a building apart from the home. Western literacy demands a different set of learning skills from orality, resulting in a different notion of what marks an educated person. To some extent, then, the differences in educational form and content contribute to Pohnpeian parents staying apart from the Western system of schooling. They feel competent as instructors in traditional matters, but lack confidence in conveying knowledge that is structured so dissimilarly from their experience.

The following personal anecdote reflects how Pohnpeian traditional education is embedded in social custom. The intricacies of a Pohnpeian funeral were observed and experienced when a colleague (and friend) died of cancer early in 2002. Funerals typically last four days. Day 1 is the day of burial; day 2 is set aside for friends and family to gather; day 3 is “fish day,” a special custom where people bring fish to the family in place of the pig, yams, and *sakau* (kava) that were donated on the first two days; day 4 is for cleaning, as all the previous days’ events are held at the home of the deceased. The family, by custom, is prohibited from more than a cursory cleanup after the hundreds of mourners have participated in three days of funerary events.

On the day of the burial, the casket was placed on the floor, as the mourners dressed in black sat on mats in front of it. Because Pohnpeian houses have little use for furniture, this came as no surprise. The women were keening, while church groups took turns singing hymns just outside the window. A crowd grew outside as people gathered around the benches provided for the occasion.

At right angles to the house was a large open-sided building known as the *nahs*. Most Pohnpeian homes have a similar meeting place where people gather for formal and informal socializing. The *nahs* was the focal point of the funerary ceremonies. The highest ranking men in the family sat on a raised platform at the front, each with a retainer, traditionally a bodyguard, seated at right angles in front of them. While the men of rank could stand and change positions as they liked, the retainers had to maintain the same sitting posture for the entire day. One by one, the men of rank gave speeches. The Nahnmwarki of Kitti, the paramount chief, conducted the transfer of titles to the younger brother of the deceased.

While the speeches were in progress, a steady procession of offerings arrived. For any funeral, gifts of a live pig, an uprooted *sakau* plant, or yams are tied to poles and shouldered by young men to the *nahs*. It is the responsibility of a designated “master of ceremonies” to mentally note who brought

how much of what type of gift. Because yams were out of season, they were replaced with breadfruit. By midday, there was a mound of breadfruit 10 feet in diameter and over 6 feet high. The *sakau* plants were also piled in a massive heap. Some were cut down to the roots for pounding into a drink, whereas others were left whole for redistribution. A colleague of the deceased counted forty pigs that were brought in, trussed upside down by their four legs to carrying poles and squealing noisily; then soundlessly slaughtered and expertly butchered out of sight.

As soon as all the gifts had arrived, they were taken away under the direction of the master of ceremonies, evocative of a turning tide. After noting who brought what, it was also his responsibility to determine who would be given what portion. The criteria are complex and depend on a person’s rank, relation to the deceased, previous donations, and other factors too complex for an outsider to comprehend. Even one who had contributed nothing received a five-pound cut of pork (such as myself); some of the other colleagues of the deceased were awarded a large *sakau* plant.

With the removal of one person, the web of reciprocity had to be re-woven, a serious endeavor indeed. The distribution process is critical to the funeral as a mark of social continuity. It is a concrete manifestation of how the death of one member affects the constitution of the whole group. As in the West, the funeral rites mourn the loss of a loved one and support the bereaved during a time of grief. Additionally, however, the Pohnpeian funeral functions to rearrange the social order in response to the loss. The man who oversees the redistribution of funeral gifts is sending multiple messages. Pohnpeian society has an aversion to a social vacuum, and someone (or persons) must be elevated to the status of the deceased. The loss of any person causes a ripple effect, and each ripple must be accounted for at the funeral. While the speeches may celebrate the life of the individual who died, the redistribution rites reaffirm the interdependence of life among the living.

A Pohnpeian teacher enlisted to explain and interpret the meanings of the traditional rites mentioned that the master of ceremonies had not attended high school. Recognizing the phenomenal mental feat required of the important task, I personally noted that perhaps he didn’t have time with so much to learn.

Upon the completion of the distribution of offerings, a priest conducted a brief Catholic ceremony, and our friend was laid to rest. Attending the funeral allowed me to witness how well Pohnpeians know what is expected of them and how competently they carry out their responsibilities. In contrast, their lack of assurance in matters of formal public education is disconcerting. Unclear lines of authority may be a contributing factor.

Competing Authority Systems

It is possible to maintain separate spheres of education, with parents and community supporting both. For example, there are after-public-school Japanese and Hebrew schools supported by parents who also belong to the public school PTA. Historical exclusion and cultural differences can be overcome. However, there are indications that differences between Western and Pohnpeian forms of authority often create tension that keeps parents and schools apart.

Pohnpeians maintain a highly structured political organization, one that is complicated by the overlay of Western democratic institutions and Christian missionary teachings onto a system of traditional chieftainship. In the days before western contact, Pohnpei was not a democracy, but a hierarchical chieftainship where chiefs assumed their position through birth rank. Christianity offered a mechanism for influence and social mobility that did not rely on birth, and in the course of 150 years, the chiefs and the churches made mutual accommodations. Democracy was not an overt message of the missionaries, although 19th century American missionaries in Pohnpei tended to generalize Protestant notions of equality before God to equality among men on Earth.

Democratic governance, introduced in the 19th century, wasn't institutionalized until the American administration of Pohnpei after World War II. For over 50 years since that era, Pohnpeians have been attempting to balance and integrate multiple systems of authority. Based on personal observations, it appears that contemporary Pohnpeian politicians are grappling with how to shift the systems away from "separate but equal" status to something more holistic—much as educators are struggling to define and make a place for both Pohnpeian and Western notions of education.

The synthesis is not easy. Pohnpei has long been divided into five chiefly districts: Madelonimwh, U, Kitti, Net, and Sokehs. In terms of authority, each district is similarly arranged into two lineage sets of parallel chiefs (Murrill, 1948). The highest titles are *Nahnmwarki* and *Nanken*. The *Nahnmwarki* has paramount status, keeping aloof from the people and deriving ultimate authority because of divine lineage (Jimmy, 1972). A Samoan friend has mentioned more than once, "You Westerners believe you were made in the likeness of God, but we Islanders believe we are descended from Him."

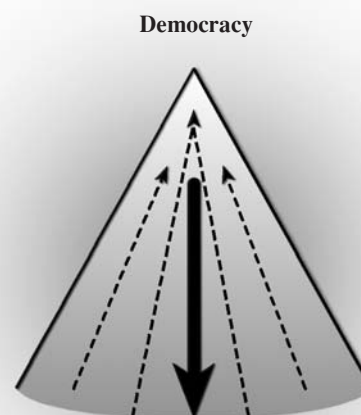
In each of Pohnpei's districts, the *Nanken* serves as spokesperson for the *Nahnmwarki*. Lesser chiefs and commoners have access to the *Nahnmwarki* through the *Nanken*. Lineage is the primary eligibility criteria to advance to higher hereditary titles for the *Nahnmwarki* and *Nanken* chains. When an opening occurs, the *Nahnmwarki* fills the position with the person next in line from the appropriate clan. When the *Nahnmwarki* dies, the *Nanken* determines his successor with similar criteria and protocol.

Until the late 19th century when the Germans took away the authority, the *Nahnmwarki* had the power to impose a death sentence for infractions of protocol and maintained control of all land and its use. Significantly, the *Nahnmwarki* has retained the authority to grant titles and to delegate title granting (Coale, 1951). The *Nahnmwarki* can also bestow titles on the basis of service provided in addition to hereditary titles. Because those of lower chiefly rank function as the *Nahnmwarki* in his absence, granting titles for service occurs throughout the chain of chiefly responsibility. There are multiple titles and routes to attain them, and most Pohnpeians either may have received or have a close relative who received a title of some importance (Petersen, 1983). Competition among Pohnpeians includes vying for these "achieved" titles, ensuring that the system retains considerable social meaning and cohesive power.

The chiefly system of social organization and operation seems diametrically opposed to notions of democracy. In Pohnpeian tradition, the system operates from the top down through the *Nahnmwarki*'s representatives to the people. A Pohnpeian friend often remarks, "When the *Nahnmwarki* says jump, we don't ask how high, we just jump."

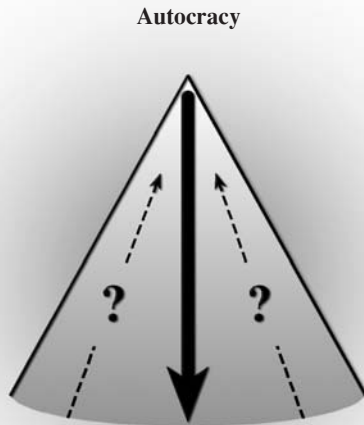
In contrast, the democratic ideal operates from the bottom up. Those placed in power act as representatives of the people. Westerners—Americans in particular—tend to view any system other than democracy as unresponsive to the majority. The Pohnpeian system, however, is highly responsive to input from the community. The following schematic view diagrams (Figures 1, 2, and 3) illustrate the different routes to decision making and community participation in democracy, autocracy, and what I have termed as "Pohnpeian authorized consensus."

FIGURE 1
Schematic View of Democracy



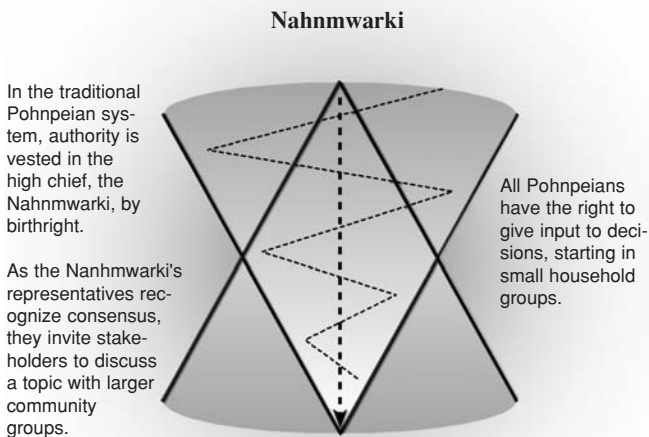
Note. In a democratic system, authority is delegated from the bottom up. Individuals vote for people in whom they invest the authority to make decisions; thereby, individual input to decision making occurs through representation. The slogan, "One man, one vote" reflects the values of individualism and equality integral to American-style democracy. When decisions are handed down, they are the result of a majority vote based on deliberations that, in theory, have considered all input.

FIGURE 2
Schematic View of Autocracy



Note. If a political system is not democratic, it is often assumed to be autocratic where power is concentrated at the top. Decisions are made unilaterally and handed down. Input to decision making is opaque.

FIGURE 3
Schematic View of Pohnpeian Authorized Consensus



Note. Decisions issued by the Nahnmwarki reflect the consensus that has evolved through the increasingly inclusive process.

The following is an example of Pohnpeian authorized consensus—a personal experience encountered while trying to build community backing for a school-based literacy initiative. First, a meeting was arranged with the school principal (to which my Pohnpeian colleague accompanied me). The principal held several titles of respect and standing in the community, besides his position at the school. Upon hearing our proposal, he invited us to meet with his faculty of eight teachers. The faculty meeting led to another invitation to gather at the home of a hamlet headman, where my colleague spoke about the project to an assembled group of perhaps 20 adults.

This presentation resonated enough to result in a fourth invitation—this time to a feast held in honor of a high titleholder in the Nahnmwarki line. Several hundred people attended the feast, where my colleague was once again asked to speak about the school project. Several weeks later, he was invited back to speak to the Nahnmwarki.

This example shows how Pohnpeians build consensus in a formal and cumulative manner. The process begins at the grassroots level by first convincing a small group that your idea merits an invitation to a larger group. As the next group endorses and gives input to your plan, the man with authority to do so will issue an invitation to appear before an even larger gathering. You work your way through the ranks, so that by the time the Nahnmwarki receives you, he is well aware of what you are proposing and knows the extent to which there is agreement or disagreement. Thus, when the Nahnmwarki says to “jump,” people need not ask “how high,” because they already know.

In Pohnpei, the five traditional districts are concurrently designated as municipalities. Elections are held for municipal officials, as well as municipal representatives to a central legislature. Further, as a state within the Federated States of Micronesia, Pohnpeians elect representatives to a national Congress. Pohnpeians are thus supporting their government based on democratic principles at the local, state, and national level, while at the same time recognizing and supporting a traditional system of governance based on the sanctity of chiefly prerogatives. Churches are also hierarchically ordered institutions, and while not overtly political, tend to exercise considerable influence over Pohnpeians' behavior.

Schools fall under the purview of the democratic governance system. The Governor appoints the Director of Education, and the Pohnpei Legislature allocates monies for the operation of the school system. Since the system's centralization during the 1960s, communities have largely abrogated their interest in formal education to the schools. This situation may be changing, however. Pohnpei's current 5-year plan for education has placed parental involvement as a priority for educational improvement, along with vocational education and staff and curriculum development (Pohnpei State Department of Education, 1997). Recently completed standards for language arts and social studies have incorporated elements of Pohnpeian culture into curriculum from grades 1 through 12 (Pohnpei State Department of Education, 1999). The impression remains, however, that schools and communities are not working well together, and a contributing factor may well be the inherent differences in authority patterns at home and at school.

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