In 1995 Christine Jourdan (1995b) identified education as one of three ‘stepping-stones to national consciousness’ for Solomon Islands (along with Pijin and popular culture). She noted that curriculum reform after independence in 1978 had shifted the history curriculum from one focused on Britain to one with local ‘heroes’ and specific Solomon Islands content. Moreover, she observed that the new curriculum was received enthusiastically by students at the time. She also saw the potential of extra-curricular activities to foster national consciousness. However, given it was only 15 years after independence, Jourdan concluded that it was still too early to evaluate the unifying role of schooling in Solomon Islands (ibid.:135–39).

Two decades after Jourdan’s initial assessment, and notwithstanding the achievements of the few relatively elite schools, we contend that the formal curricular and pedagogical elements of schooling in Solomon Islands have as yet largely failed to fulfil their potential as a ‘stepping-stone to national consciousness’. Indeed, more generally, there is little evidence that strong nationalist sentiment has arisen over the three and half decades since independence. The violent civil conflict between people from the neighbouring islands of Malaita and Guadalcanal (known as Guales) from 1998 to 2003, generally known as the ‘Tension’, was a dramatic example of this. Consistent with a growing body of theory and empirical evidence (for example Bush and Saltarelli 2000; King 2014; Lange 2012) we further suggest that inequalities in access to education and the inability of curricular materials to promote unity among ethnic groups may have inadvertently contributed to the outbreak of the Tension.

One important framework from which to begin our analysis is Foster’s (1995) distinction between nation-building and nation-making. Nation-building is pursued by political elites, who use state instruments such as education systems, but also public ceremonies and the media, to transmit their particular national narrative to an acquiescing population (Foster 1995:3). Nation-making, by contrast, sees the state’s narrative as only one of a range of narratives held by different groups in society. Nation-making is a process of ongoing, organic dialogue between rival constructions of the nation that takes place in many forums, and over time makes the nation an important frame of reference for its citizens. Agency in national identity formation is therefore assigned to a multiplicity of actors, including ordinary citizens who engage critically with the state’s narrative (ibid.:5). Neither concept implies that national identity should replace alternative, sub-national affiliations, and, as will be demonstrated in the case of education, in many respects their alternative explanations of how national identities are formed are not mutually exclusive. While the two concepts do indeed assign different roles to schooling, particularly in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, there is in fact significant complementarity between them. Pre-Tension curricula and pedagogy in Solomon Islands reflected a nation-building approach to schooling, but reforms in these areas post-Tension are creating more space for nation-making in the classroom.

We make our argument through a critical assessment of both the structure and content of schooling in pre- and post-conflict Solomon Islands. In regard to the structural issues, we find that the education system has done little to this point to assist the state in nation-building. Inequalities in the education system played into the identity divisions and ethnically based grievances that contributed to the Tension. In particular, we note problems arising from the general paucity of
places in formal schooling and the concentration of the educational opportunities that did exist in and around Honiara. This failure of the state to provide sufficient opportunities was compounded by the ever-growing demand for schooling among Solomon Islanders. On the content of education, we argue that because the Solomon Islands state has historically lacked the capacity to supply curricular materials, the curriculum has had little chance to counteract the ethnic divisions among those students fortunate enough to progress through the system. We show that the curriculum itself did little to foster national identity in any case. Compounding the issue has been a pedagogical approach characterised by teacher-centred, rote learning that has neither resonated with elements of indigenous educational practices nor facilitated the critical engagement with the state’s national narrative that would constitute nation-making.

Nevertheless, owing to sweeping education sector reform in the wake of the Tension, we share Jourdan’s optimism for the potential contribution of formal schooling to national identity formation in Solomon Islands. In the last decade significant progress has been made in expanding and equalising access to basic education (the first ten years of schooling). Additionally, new curricular materials now bring the government’s official narrative to the classroom in a way that may accord better with both indigenous approaches to knowing and learning as well as participatory nation-making. Pedagogical reform to accompany the new curricular materials is also noteworthy for its consonance with the extra-curricular peace- and nation-making activities at elite integrated (multi-ethnic) schools.

For the formal education system to play its role, however, considerable challenges must be overcome, principally in the system-wide provision of the new curricular materials and appropriately trained teachers. This would enable the state to more effectively disseminate the national narrative that it desires its citizens to adopt whilst also facilitating open debate and critical engagement with that narrative.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, we provide an analysis of the historical failure of state driven nation-building in Solomon Islands. In the next section we focus more specifically on the contribution of education’s structure and content to the Tension. Finally, using interview data collected by the lead author in June 2013, we assess the status of the post-conflict education reforms, covering their structural, curricular and pedagogical dimensions.

**Pre-Tension Failures of Nation-Building in Solomon Islands**

National identity formation in Solomon Islands has been complicated by the considerable ethnic and cultural diversity within the country. The Solomon Islands state has since independence had little choice but to adopt a ‘unity in diversity’ narrative, which invokes a primordial unity overlaid by ‘centuries of cultural and linguistic differentiation’ (LiPuma 1997:225). Compounding the challenge has been the state’s poor capacity to disseminate its narrative to the population.

The predominantly rural population of Solomon Islands (85 per cent of its roughly 500,000 people) is culturally and linguistically fragmented. Around 80 languages are spoken and there is a plethora of distinct culture groups. Local level affiliations based on kinship ties, shared language and church membership are the dominant frame of reference for most Solomon Islanders, although cross-cutting ties associated with inter-marriage and regional-scale social movements are becoming increasingly important (Allen 2013:65–68; Brigg 2009; Dureau 1998). Geographic variation in kastom also presents a challenge for the formation of national unity (Douglas 2000:5). Attempts have been made to use shared elements of kastom in the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative to foster a sense of national identity among ordinary citizens. For example, LiPuma and Melzoff (1990:86) note how the cultural diversity on display at the tenth Independence Day celebrations was presented by the state as an ‘exemplar of Solomon Islands as a totality’. However, scholars of Melanesian nationalism have generally been sceptical about the utility of such selective representations of its cultural diversity (see, for a review, Douglas 2000:3). Christianity would appear better suited to national identity construction; it offers shared rituals in the form of
mass and prayer, there are far fewer denominational differences than there are variations in kastom (ibid.:5) and 98 per cent of Solomon Islanders identify as Christian (McDougall and Kere 2011:141).

No strong sense of national unity emerged in Solomon Islands prior to the outbreak of the Tension (Dinnen 2012:64). The boundaries of the state were drawn up by Britain as the colonial power according to its own geostrategic interests (LiPuma and Meltzoff 1990:82). For Solomon Islanders, the 'other' against whom group identities were defined were generally neighbouring kin or clan groups within the boundaries of the colonial state with whom they exchanged goods and occasionally fought (ibid.; Dureau 1998:205; Jourdan 1995b:130). In some instances, as we will see below, the 'others' were 'ethnic' groups from other islands (Dureau 1998:206). Affiliations did not extend to the national level; Solomon Islanders made no demand for independence before it was granted in 1978, despite significant pockets of resistance to colonial rule. In fact, the colonial administration put down attempts at inter-island collaboration (Akin 2013).

Additionally, newly independent Solomon Islands was poorly equipped to spread its 'unity in diversity' narrative. The small national elite was left the task of transforming a colonial apparatus designed to prioritise British interests over those of Solomon Islanders into a modern state that acted for the good of its citizens (LiPuma 1995:46). As described below, the colonial government had put little effort into educating Solomon Islanders, such that by independence only around 300 had received education sufficient for participation in government (LiPuma 1997:220) and as few as a dozen held university degrees (Bennett 2002:7).

Compounding these problems were the high expectations of ordinary citizens who, even as early as the 1980s, used the state's provision of education and health services to measure the government's success (Feinburg 1990:25). They were to be disappointed, as the service delivery capacity of the state failed to keep pace with population growth. Moreover, service delivery was uneven across the country, with perceived and actual inequalities in service provision being key drivers of the Tension (Allen 2013; Kabutaulaka 2001). Service delivery declined further during the conflict, to the point where Solomon Islands was widely seen as a 'failed state' (Fraenkel 2004:162–64).

The failed state interpretation viewed the persistence of 'traditional' Melanesian institutions in the instruments of the state as having led to weak government institutions, widespread corruption and increasing instability (Hameiri 2007:411–12). The Solomon Islands state has indeed been a mixture of 'traditional' and Western institutions, with party loyalty and public policy often subordinate to obligations to patronage networks, typically at the level of kin and clan (Fraenkel 2004:38–43). However, the state is increasingly being understood in terms of an alternative, 'political settlement' frame, which suggests that government will function most effectively, in a normative sense, when the political and economic interests of elites are best served by ensuring that formal state institutions and political structures function properly (Craig and Porter 2013:4). According to this perspective, investment in service delivery has not been a high priority for political elites in the postcolonial political economy of Solomon Islands.

In any event, the inability of the Solomon Islands state to deliver effective services had two impacts on its nation-building potential. It limited the prospects for any significant sense of civic national identity to emerge, and the state’s capacity to disseminate its ‘unity in diversity’ narrative was undermined.

**Pre-Tension Education: A Failed Stepping-Stone**

**Structural Inequalities**

The history of formal education in Solomon Islands brings the poor capacity of the state to foster national consciousness into stark relief. In fact, structural dimensions of the Solomon Islands education system were important contributing factors to the Tension, as they have been in several other countries riven by civil conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). The denial of access to educational opportunities and resources to different social groups, or simply the segregation of their schooling, can be a source of tension in divided societies. Such discrimination helps the dominant groups
perpetuate their privileged position in society (ibid.:9). Further, Lange (2012:3) argues that when educational opportunities are scarce violence may be a way for communities to maximise their access to education. He adds that because education gives people the capacity to identify and seek to redress their grievances it can encourage violence when those grievances are not resolved.

The causes of the Tension have now been well rehearsed in the literature and, while a dearth of national sentiment played its part (Kabutaulaka 2001), scholars also highlight the interactions between a range of other historical, social, economic, political and identity drivers (Allen 2013; Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004). We do not consider the political drivers further here, because it is the other drivers that we suggest interacted most strongly with schooling prior to the Tension.

Economic opportunities and government services in Solomon Islands have gradually consolidated on north Guadalcanal since the colonial period. Over time, this led to the migration of significant numbers of non-Guales — Malaitans mostly — to north Guadalcanal (Allen 2012:167–68). The social pressures resulting eventually led to Guales and Malaitans viewing the situation on Guadalcanal in terms of ethnic narratives. A Guale identity, felt particularly strongly on Guadalcanal’s Weather Coast, crystallised around a sense of relative deprivation in access to jobs and services, customary landownership and indigeneity (Allen 2012:171–72), while many Malaitans saw themselves as ‘the productive, active people who did everything on Guadalcanal’ (Kwa’ioloa and Burt 2007:114–15; see also Allen 2013).

A ‘youth bulge’, which has increased the risk of political violence elsewhere (Urdal 2006), became another social pressure in Honiara, where it manifests as the Masta Liu phenomenon that refers to a concentration of young, poorly educated men ‘[d]rifting in and out of jobs, in and out of hope … very often on the verge of delinquency’ (Jourdan 1995a:202). Malaitan and Guale youths did indeed become the ‘foot soldiers’ of the militants when the Tension began in 1998 (Fraenkel 2004).

Inequalities in the education system that began in the colonial era fed into the grievances militants on both sides of the conflict felt about their entitlements to jobs, land and services. During the colonial period, formal schooling was initially left to the Christian churches, which had spread unevenly through Solomon Islands (Dureau 1998:209) and varied in their commitment to education (Bennett 1987:258). The colonial administration took no interest in education until after the Second World War, and it was not until the mid-1970s that it was in control of the bulk of the Protectorate’s schools (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992:15–16). And while educational opportunities were generally sparse, those that did exist were concentrated on Guadalcanal. For instance, places in secondary education at independence were limited to the eight elite National Secondary Schools (NSSs; Pollard 2005:159), of which five were located in or around Honiara with none on Malaita (Potter 2005:7). There were thus more opportunities and better educational resources in Honiara (Jourdan 2013:274). Such inequalities in access drove the movement of Malaitan students to Guadalcanal after independence (Pollard 2005:174).

Rapid population growth and increased demand for formal schooling after independence placed the already inadequate education sector under considerable strain. Not only did the population double in a period of 20 years (Ware 2005:449), but Solomon Islanders increasingly saw education as a means to gain formal employment and as ‘a pathway from rural village life to urban life’ (Pollard 2005:159). The education sector therefore expanded rapidly. Provincial Secondary Schools (PSSs) and Community High Schools (CHSs) proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively (Maebuta 2008:95). Both PSSs and CHSs were originally intended to provide vocational education, which it was believed was more suitable for the predominantly rural population (Bugotu 1986:47–48). However, Maebuta (2008:96) and Pollard (2005:159) point out that parents objected to their children’s lost opportunity to continue their formal academic education. Thus these schools adopted the academic curriculum and PSSs even expanded to include Forms 4–6 (Years 10–12; Maebuta 2008:95). There were still only nine NSSs in 2007, but there were 16 PSSs and 153 CHSs (MEHRD 2010:33).
Despite the proliferation of secondary schools, the provision of education was unable to meet demand in the pre-Tension period. In 1992, for example, 8,000 students completed primary school but there were only places for around a quarter of them in secondary school (Jourdan 1995a:221). Similarly, only about a quarter of those who had been admitted to secondary school could subsequently be accommodated in Form 4 (Year 10). The students more likely to progress through the system were urban children, primarily from Honiara. Through popular culture they had greater exposure to English, the language of instruction, and their parents have had more scope to raise funds for school fees (Jourdan 2013:274).

Many students who had been pushed out of the system after primary school (Standard 1–6; Years 1–6) or junior secondary school (Forms 1–3; Years 7–9), and even some who progressed further, joined the Masta Liu. They were less interested in, even alienated from, village life but also unable to find formal employment (Ware 2005:447; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992:20). In the 1980s almost all graduates from NSSs could successfully find formal employment (Pollard 2005:162) but by the mid-1990s only about half of them could (Fraenkel 2004:184). Sustained economic decline in the 1990s compounded the problem as the government lost its capacity to fund its rapidly expanding system. Literacy and numeracy among primary school students actually declined in the 1990s (Whalan 2010:1–2).

Thus the structure of Solomon Islands’ education system, including both its orientation and resourcing, exacerbated some of the drivers of the Tension. Education was far from a ‘stepping-stone to national consciousness’ in this regard. Instead, it exacerbated the inequalities, and hence the ethnic narratives that characterised the early stages of the conflict.

The Content of Education
Just as structural issues in education systems can contribute to the outbreak of violence, so too can their content, both in terms of curricula and pedagogy. This is often the result of the state’s use of schooling for nation-building. Indeed, some of the pre-eminent scholars of nations and nationalism, such as Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1992) and Anderson (2006), have identified schooling as a key tool in the socialisation of young people into the ideology of the state.

Elites harness education for nation-building by deploying a pedagogical approach that we describe as the social cohesion approach. This approach denies the presence of alternative narratives and prohibits open debate in classrooms. Learning is seen as the transmission of knowledge, so a teacher-centred, rote learning pedagogical style is required of teachers (Cole and Murphy 2011:343; McCully 2012:147; Weinstein et al. 2007:65).

Language classes spread the national language, geography lessons define the nation’s boundaries, and even seemingly value-free subjects such as mathematics can be used to disseminate ideological messages (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:10–12). Likewise extra-curricular activities such as flag raisings and national celebrations are opportunities for the state to foster nationalist sentiment.

Above all, however, it is through the history curriculum that ‘nations seek to store, transmit and disseminate narratives that define conceptions of nationhood and national culture’ (Foster and Crawford 2006:5). Such curricula celebrate national events and heroes, which define the collective identity of the nation and its relationship to other nations, whilst avoiding controversial and politically divisive topics. The goal is to instil the desired cultural values in the next generation of citizens (ibid.:1–2). History curricula, then, can contribute to the construction of ethnic or other divisive identities and ultimately the onset of violence by presenting prejudicial narratives of historical events in textbooks. They can even exclude certain groups from the state’s official national narrative by ignoring marginalised groups completely (Bush and Saltarelli 2000:11–13; King 2014).

Whilst not suggesting an explicit and deliberate attempt by the postcolonial state to favour one group over others, it has in fact been argued that the pre-Tension curriculum content has contributed to the formation of ethnic stereotypes in Solomon Islands. In particular, Kabutaulaka (2001) argued that the curriculum may have played a part in perpetuating a widely held myth in Solomon Islands of Malaitan aggressiveness. He noted that the 1927
’Bell Massacre’ of a colonial administrator and his party of tax collectors by some Kwaio men on Malaita became part of the secondary school curriculum, while similar events elsewhere have not. He suggested this state-approved version of history, along with academic writing about the incident, sanctioned the stereotype of Malaitan aggressiveness prevailing in the pre-Tension public discourse. Similarly, former politician and Guale elder Billy Gatu (2009:23) blamed formal schooling in part for the emergence of regional identities.

The responses of research participants with longstanding involvement in the education system interviewed by the lead author also suggest that the pre-Tension curriculum has been deficient in several respects. One former social studies teacher, now involved in education sector reform, agreed that the curriculum may have perpetuated a myth of Malaitan aggressiveness. Then Director of the Curriculum Development Division (CDD) of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), Patrick Daudau, also acknowledged that it may have, but put greater emphasis on the failure of the curriculum to promote inter-cultural harmony. He said that the curriculum of the time lacked ‘the idea of having to incorporate … other cultures and identities or other people or other ethnic groups’. Likewise, a Solomon Islander academic and education expert argued that the curriculum paid insufficient attention to the Solomon Islands context, while another member of civil society involved in education thought that minority groups in Solomon Islands, Polynesians specifically, had been under-represented in the curriculum. Only one participant in government or civil society, Franco Rodie, now Permanent Secretary in MEHRD, thought that the curriculum of the time had fostered some sense of national identity.

Several factors appear to have limited the potential of the pre-Tension curriculum to assist the state in nation-building, one being that the Solomon Islander elites had only partial control of the content of social studies curricula. When the churches controlled education, each denomination had used its own curriculum and textbooks (Jourdan 1995b:136). Then, in the late colonial period when the British first instituted a single curriculum for Solomon Islanders, it was much the same as the curriculum used throughout Britain’s colonies. It taught British history and values (ibid.).

Considerable steps towards a curriculum more relevant for Solomon Islanders were taken in 1973 with the report of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Educational Policy Review Committee. In its report Education for What?, the committee foregrounded the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative to come, concluding that schooling should ‘enable each Solomon Islander to understand his own customs and the customs of others’ as well as ‘promote racial harmony and unity in the country’ (cited in Jourdan 1995b:137). Curriculum development followed and, by independence, history education in Solomon Islands schools included some coverage of Solomon Islands’ history (Jourdan 1995b:137). These curricula, and others developed following the 1985 Secondary Curriculum Workshops, were still used in schools when the Tension began.

However, Solomon Islander educators in the pre-Tension period never had complete control over the production of social studies curricular materials. Although one Form 3 social studies textbook, Government and Politics in Solomon Islands, was written by a panel of Solomon Islanders (CDD 1985), another history textbook, Aspects of Solomon Islands History: Origins and First Contact, was edited by Solomon Islander social studies teachers but written by a foreign academic. Although their involvement in generating the new materials was limited to a degree, the nation-building intentions of Solomon Islander educators were clear, however, as the CDD hoped that the textbook would ‘give Solomon Islanders a greater awareness and pride in their past … [and] strengthen their identity as citizens of this nation’ (Bennett n.d.:i).

A further limitation on the curriculum’s nation-building potential concerned the difficulties that successive education ministries experienced (and still do) in providing curricular materials to schools (Pollard 2005:163). Perhaps recognising the ministry’s limitations in this respect, when the first major resupply of textbooks in a decade took place in 2007, the then Minister of Education warned teachers and students at one school that ‘[i]f you do not take good care of these materials, you may have to
wait another ten years for replenishment, if you are lucky’ (cited in Maebuta 2008:102).

The value of curricular materials used in Solomon Islands before the Tension was diminished further by their often poor fit with indigenous modes of education. Anthropologists point to the scant consideration the prevailing formal Western schooling system gives to local cultures and knowledge systems (Keessing 1989:31; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992:15–16). According to this perspective, colonial era education was intended to socialise the indigenous populations to Western values, and this continued in the postcolonial era because the system remained largely unchanged (Keessing 1989:24–31). Indeed Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1992:18) observed that the values promoted in a primary school English reading lesson in rural Malaita post-independence were markedly different from local values around ‘family interdependence and adult-like work behaviour’ for young children.

In a similar vein, former CDD director Patrick Daudau said the short shrift given to Solomon Islands’ cultural beliefs and values was found to be one of the deficiencies in the pre-conflict curriculum when CDD, having resumed its operations after the Tension, conducted a systematic review of the curriculum. According to Daudau, the review also found that the curriculum had paid insufficient attention to Christian beliefs and values and left Solomon Islander students poorly equipped to apply curriculum knowledge outside of school.

Pre-Tension pedagogy in Solomon Islands was teacher-centred (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992:16–17). Under the Christian missions, students were taught European values through rote memorisation and recitation of lessons. Open debate was discouraged, often prohibited. As the education system expanded after independence new teachers were often poorly trained in English, which had become the language of instruction after the Second World War. It has been estimated that around 50 per cent of primary teachers in 1978, for example, were either untrained or only partially trained, although both trained and untrained teachers relied extensively on delivering textbook content through delivery of lectures, discouraging the type of interaction necessary for nation-making.

Just as the prevailing pedagogical approach has been incongruent with the requirements of nation-making, it has also been a poor fit with forms of education that take place outside the classroom in Solomon Islands and elsewhere. Anthropologists have shown that children, from a range of cultures around the world, participate in their social environments from early stages of their development (LeVine 2007:254). Even their play, in which children replicate adult activities, is an important part of informal education (Little 2011). However, the level of guidance from other members of the group varies from context to context (LeVine 2007:247), as it does in Solomon Islands.

Given the country’s cultural diversity, it is perhaps unsurprising that various approaches to knowing and learning have been observed in Solomon Islands. Hogbin (1964:38–40) found that the children of the Kaoka speakers on north-east Guadalcanal have historically received considerable instruction from adults. Similarly Ninnes (1995:24) found that in Solomon Islands’ Western Province the understanding of knowledge as an object that can be transferred was consistent with teacher-centred schooling. In fact, children are barely permitted to speak in the presence of their elders (ibid.:23). On the other hand, however, Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1992:14) found that the Kwara’ae of Malaita assume their children’s ‘minds need to be guided and persuaded rather than forced into the right thinking’. Thus, their indigenous teaching practices involve the active participation of children. While it remains difficult to generalise, the importance of direct participation in adult activities, to varying degrees, and even the replication of those activities as children play, would appear to accord well with the process of nation-making because it sees extra-curricular activities as opportunities for forming national consciousness.

**Nation-Making at School**

The difficulties the Solomon Islands state experienced in using its education system to build national sentiment has left fostering national identity to informal nation-making outside the classroom. Jourdan was in fact an early witness to the effect of such intergroup contact post-independence in her observations...
of children using curriculum content about the Second World War in their games outside of school; in the evenings, I witnessed the children in my Honiara neighbourhood play “war”, with the Solomon Islands Labour Corps, temporarily redefined as an army, playing a glorious role alongside the American GIs and the Japanese (Jourdan 1995b:138).

Similarly, participants in the present research who completed their education around the time of independence reflected positively about a range of extra-curricular nation-making activities in which they took part during their schooling. Two participants, one an academic, the other an experienced education sector consultant, Johnson Fangalasuu, spoke fondly about the organised cultural exchanges between students from different provinces that they remembered as commonplace during their schooling. The singing of the national anthem was also prominent in the schools of that era (Jourdan 1995b:138). Another participant with a long-term involvement in the administration of education likewise recalled fondly the extra-curricular cultural exchanges that took place during his schooling. He remarked:

I grew up when we have … you were at boarding schools [in secondary] where the school takes [sic] students from Renbel [Rennell and Bellona], Makira, Guadalcanal, Malaita and at one stage the school took students from Western Province. And we see each other now as colleagues … we understand each other … [and] we have very close relationships.4

Notably, however, inter-group contact in integrated schools did not have this effect on everyone. Guale and Malaitan school friends did indeed join their respective militant groups during the Tension (Tanis and Gray 2002).

Post-Conflict Renewal of Education

The Tension wreaked havoc on Solomon Islands’ education system across the country. Economic decline and corruption reduced the funds available to the entire sector (Pollard 2005:169; Whalan 2010:4). Malaitan schools struggled to cope with the influx of new students following the mass displacement of Malaitans from Guadalcanal. It has been estimated that by the end of 1999, approximately 29 per cent of the 35,000 (mostly Malaitan) people displaced from Guadalcanal were of primary school age, and that of the 41 per cent of children on Malaita not in school, 60 per cent had been attending school prior to displacement (Whalan 2010:3). Malaita also experienced numerous school closures, as did Guadalcanal, where looting and destruction of school property were common. Some schools were even destroyed (SITRC 2012:680–81).

However, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) created a stable environment for education reform in the aftermath of the Tension. The security it provided allowed schools to reopen and by helping stabilise government finances it ensured revenue was available for the sector. These factors in turn facilitated donor re-engagement with education (Whalan 2010:1), which enabled education infrastructure to be restored, and, in several cases, expanded (MEHRD 2010:31; MEHRD 2013a:40). RAMSI officials have highlighted the need for structural reform of education. RAMSI special coordinator from 2011 to 2013, Nicholas Coppel (2012:14) specifically identified universal access to basic education as a key requirement for alleviating the inequalities underpinning the Tension. Such education reform may yet see formal schooling meet its potential as a ‘stepping-stone to national consciousness’.

Structural Reform

Education reform began in 2004 with the aims of equalising access, improving quality and ensuring proper management of the system (MEHRD 2007:12). Reform in the areas of access and quality are the focus here, owing to the contributions they made to the outbreak of conflict.

One of the major components of MEHRD’s reform agenda has been the provision of universal basic education (MEHRD 2007:12), which, impressively, has been largely achieved at the primary level. There are now enough places in primary school to accommodate the country’s entire 6–12 year age group (MEHRD 2013a:23).
Considerable progress has also been made in access to junior and senior secondary education (ibid.:26). For example, the gross enrolment ratio, a measure of the number of students enrolled in a given period of schooling as a percentage of the number of children of the appropriate age for that level of schooling, increased in both the junior and senior secondary levels from 2006 to 2013, by 60 and 51 per cent respectively (ibid.).

However, some geographic inequalities in access to secondary education persist despite the overall improvements in enrolment rates. The elite NSs remain concentrated around Honiara, and although there is now one on Malaita there are none on Guadalcanal’s Weather Coast (where, as noted, the Guale narrative has been strongest). Furthermore, in 2009 there was still significant geographic variation in secondary enrolment rates. For example, in proportion to the respective numbers of 10–19 year olds (notionally from the final two years of primary, to one year beyond the end of secondary school — the available figures were provided in five year increments), the numbers of children attending secondary school were considerably higher in Honiara (55 per cent) than either the rest of Guadalcanal (36 per cent) or Malaita (25 per cent).5

Notably, these inequalities in access are also mirrored by geographic disparities in education funding. In 2009, Honiara, the rest of Guadalcanal and Malaita accounted for 10, 18 and 28 per cent of total student enrolments respectively, but received 38, 8 and 11 per cent respectively of the national budget distributed to schools (UNICEF 2012:23). Government funding of Honiara’s schools is thus considerably higher in proportion to student numbers than it is in the rest of Guadalcanal or Malaita.

Although improving the quality of education is undoubtedly a long-term aspiration, significant progress is still to be made. The literacy rate, which is low, but also uneven across the country, is a notable example. Two sets of studies support the claims of a ‘literacy crisis’ (ASPBAE 2007:11). Firstly, individual self-assessments of literacy in national censuses yielded estimates of overall literacy rates of 64 per cent in 1999 and 69 per cent in 2009, with the rates in Malaita (51 and 56 per cent respectively) 10 per cent lower than those in Guadalcanal (including Honiara; SITRC 2012:685–86). Secondly, more stringent independent assessments conducted by the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) in 2007 categorised only 7 per cent of people on Malaita and 28 per cent of people from Honiara as literate (ASPBAE 2007:11). While such studies were of all age groups, Bob Pollard, a former education consultant with a longstanding involvement in the system, noted that primary school graduates in the 1980s were fluent English speakers but many secondary school graduates in 2013 had barely primary level English. MEHRD’s own statistics add weight to Pollard’s comments. In 2010, almost half of Standard 4 (Year 4) students who sat standardisation examinations fell into the ‘critical underachievement’ level (MEHRD 2013a:32). Likewise 41 per cent of Standard 6 (Year 6) students fell into the same category (ibid.:35).

A good sign for improving education quality in the future, however, can be seen in teacher training, which has been an important part of post-conflict education reform (MEHRD 2007:13). Significant progress has been made: compared to 2007, total teacher numbers in 2012 had increased at both the primary and secondary levels (by 19 and 30 per cent respectively), as had the number of teachers with qualifications appropriate to their teaching level (by 19 and 30 per cent respectively), had the number of teachers with qualifications appropriate to their teaching level (by 25 and 52 per cent respectively; MEHRD 2013a:59). Nevertheless, there is still scope for further improvement. In 2012, 24 per cent of secondary teachers and 44 per cent of primary teachers remained unqualified (ibid.). And, of the 21 per cent of respondents to the RAMSI People’s Survey in 2013 who said that they were dissatisfied with their children’s primary schooling, almost 60 per cent cited problems with teachers as their major concern (ANU Enterprise 2013:36).

Supplying sufficient trained teachers is challenging for several reasons. Ever more teachers are required as the secondary school system expands, and current teachers need to be retrained to implement the new pedagogical reforms (discussed below). MEHRD’s strategy for the retraining involves a ‘cascade’ of training from the Ministry’s Curriculum Development Officers via provincial trainers to a select group of teachers, who then transfer their new skills to the other teachers in
their schools (Coxon 2008:29). Little is yet known about the efficacy of MEHRD’s teacher training initiatives but the effectiveness of the training does drop away the further it progresses through this cascade (ibid.). Former CDD director Patrick Daudau said that CDD simply does not have the funding for comprehensive in-service training. Other issues facing the quality component of MEHRD’s reform objectives include persistently high levels of teacher absenteeism in many schools and, as noted, chronic shortages of teaching materials (Maebuta 2008:100–104). According to Pollard, the effect of these system-wide limitations, and the inability of some recent graduates to find employment, have discouraged many parents from sending their children to secondary school, although some recent findings in the RAMSI People’s Survey (see below) might indicate otherwise.

Given that the provision of education is a key measure that Solomon Islanders use to assess state performance, improvements made in access and quality could improve public perceptions of the state. Focus group discussions for the 2013 RAMSI People’s Survey revealed ‘high levels of interest and concern about education’ among participants (ANU Enterprise 2013:34), while a third of the 190 tertiary student respondents of Leach et al. (2013:74) ranked improving education as the most important factor for building the nation of Solomon Islands. And some evidence is emerging that Solomon Islanders are noticing the improvements to the education sector. The 2013 RAMSI People’s Survey found 71 per cent of respondents thought secondary schools had improved in the last five years and 80 per cent thought that primary schools had improved in that time frame. Worryingly in light of the historical and socio-economic drivers of the Tension, Malaitans were most likely to respond that primary schools had not improved, while residents in Honiara and its surrounds were most likely to say they had (ANU Enterprise 2013:32–34).

The Content of Schooling
Curricular and pedagogical reform following the Tension has introduced changes consistent with Foster’s (1995) concept of nation-making. In fact, while the social cohesion approach of the past was limited to nation-building, the process of nation-making accords well with what can be called an open enquiry approach to teaching and learning (McCully 2012:147; Foster 2014). Although this approach facilitates open debate and critical thinking in all subject areas, it sees history curricula as presenting the multiple, competing perspectives that can be brought to bear on the past, even those that contradict the official national narrative. Moreover, learner-centred teaching styles allow students to freely engage with alternative perspectives, including those they bring to the classroom themselves. As is the case in nation-making, learner-centred pedagogy grants students and teachers the agency to successfully negotiate alternative perspectives without re-igniting conflicts in the classroom.

The open enquiry approach also appears to complement a ‘contact hypothesis’ (Nieli 2008) proposed for formal schooling in post-conflict settings. It posits that the negative stereotypes which students from different communities may hold about each other will be broken down through integrated schooling. In such circumstances, extra-curricular activities take place in a secure environment where no group of students is advantaged over others, and the shared tasks that come with communal living also require cooperative action and teamwork from students (ibid.:414).

The open enquiry approach has been favoured by the developed world for post-conflict settings since the 1990s, with Northern Ireland viewed as an example of best practice in history education reform in this respect (Kitson 2007; McCully 2012). The donor community also generally favours the open enquiry approach when it engages in education sector reform in developing countries (Tabulawa 2003:8; see also Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Cole and Barsalou 2006; McCully 2012; Pingel 2010). However, post-conflict developing states have resisted the open enquiry approach for fear that open debate in the classroom could re-ignite conflict (Weinstein et al. 2007).

The first full review of the curricula for all junior secondary subjects since independence began in 2004 (Potter 2005:15) and by 2013 the development of new curricular materials was either completed or well advanced for all grades in basic education,
including social studies. Moreover, similar curricular reforms have begun for senior secondary education. Although two years behind their original timeline, Daudau said that materials for several subjects had been distributed to early adopting schools. The extensive reform process has required curriculum writers to critically assess the content and delivery of the national narrative they want the next generation of Solomon Islanders to adopt. As detailed below, the new materials are intended to disseminate the state’s ‘unity in diversity’ national narrative but with an open enquiry pedagogical approach that complements it, thus adopting elements of both the social cohesion and open enquiry approaches described above.

Importantly, Daudau said that CDD had acted essentially autonomously in developing the social studies syllabus in which the national narrative is presented. This was confirmed by representatives of Australia’s and New Zealand’s aid programs. In relation to the foreign technical advisors (TAs) paid by donors to assist CDD, Daudau said that in one case when ‘the subject working groups … [had a] dispute, or conflict with the TA … we just push[ed] aside the TA’.

Four senior MEHRD officials, including National Examinations and Standards Unit (NESU) Director Linda Wate, Patrick Daudau and former undersecretary for Tertiary Education Franco Rodie, all confirmed during interviews that the reforms needed to address the government’s ‘unity in diversity’ narrative. Linda Wate said ‘our vision is [to create] an individual who can live in harmony with others. And I guess that is coming from, is a direct link to the Tension.’ Franco Rodie commented further; ‘education can play a vital role in changing the mindset of Solomon Islanders. To [help them] think about, seriously, that we all belong to one nation and we should be all working together to build that nation.’

Indeed, the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative features prominently in three of eight Key Learning Outcomes, which the new syllabus aims for all students to achieve by the end of basic education. It is the explicit goal of the first: ‘the National Curriculum shall integrate awareness of the Solomon Islands culture: in particular, the promotion of the concept of unity in diversity’ (MEHRD 2011:9). It is also implicit in the third, concerned with the values of good citizenship, and the fourth, which deals with values that promote peace and reconciliation among ethnic groups (ibid.).

The ‘unity in diversity’ narrative is particularly visible in the history strand of the revised social studies curriculum for junior secondary school, although the extent to which it will be pursued in reforms to the social studies curriculum for senior secondary school remains to be seen. Social studies is a compulsory subject in junior secondary school and history is the first strand of it that students are taught. Twenty-two classes are devoted to the sub-strands ‘people and migration’ and ‘local ethnic groups and languages’ (MEHRD 2013b:29–32). These sub-strands correspond to the first two chapters of the reformed Form 1 social studies textbook.

The first chapter of the textbook teaches students about the three ‘waves’ of human settlement of Solomon Islands; the third wave, the Austronesians, being the ‘ancestors of today’s Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian peoples’ (CDD 2012a:15). The text summarises scientific evidence about the early migrations to Melanesia, giving support to the idea of primordial ties among Melanesians, including Solomon Islanders, which underpin the national narrative (ibid.:8–9). The accompanying Teachers Guide notes that this topic is intended to help students understand the importance of their own communities’ oral traditions and cultures (CDD 2012b:15), but this would remain within the broader context of longstanding primordial unity established in the textbook.

The unity of all Solomon Islanders is developed further in the second chapter, dealing explicitly with ethnicity. Students are taught that Solomon Islanders belong to multiple ethnic groups, but the four major ones are the Melanesian, Polynesian, Micronesian and Chinese citizens (CDD 2012a:31–32). The distinctive cultures and languages within island groups are nested within the first three broader categories (ibid.:27). A significant portion of the text is devoted to the linguistic diversity of Solomon Islands, and it leads students to the conclusion that ‘we can say that nearly all of Solomon Islands languages, including Polynesian languages and even Gilbertese, are similar to each other’ (ibid.:37).
Importantly, students are also taught about the dangers of ethnic stereotypes. The section on prejudice requires students to complete two activities designed to identify prejudices that students may hold about other groups, and it uses the Tension to show the terrible consequences of prejudice. In order to avoid prejudicial stereotyping, students are told to ‘think of everyone as an individual, to meet them personally and then judge them’ (CDD 2012a:34). The Teacher’s Guide encourages the teacher to play an active role in guiding students through a discussion of how ethnic prejudices may have contributed to the Tension (CDD 2012b:24).

The second chapter of the text, which concludes Form 1 history education, culminates in a section entitled ‘unity in diversity’. Students learn that the … common characteristics, shared by us all, give us ‘unity in diversity’. This means that, although we are diverse (we have many different languages, cultures and customs) we are also united because there are many things we all have in common. The things we share give us our national identity … having many different groups can make a country stronger and more interesting than if all the people were the same … We should not expect people to be the same as us … (CDD 2012a:41; original emphasis)

Then, in their final activity, students are asked to ‘[s]uggest ways you can celebrate our diversity in your school by encouraging different groups to mix together and learn from each other’s cultures’ (CDD 2012a:41).

History education in Form 2 covers the period from colonisation until independence. Students learn about the positive and negative impacts of colonisation as well as the Fallows and Moro Movements and Maasina Rule, which are cast as local political movements towards the country’s political independence (MEHRD 2013b:48–50). In Form 3 students study post-independence Solomon Islands, learning to explain terms like ‘national unity’, ‘nationhood’ and ‘nation-building’ and discuss the achievements and challenges faced since independence (ibid.:66–67).

Also, critically, several parts of the social studies syllabus are reinforced in another compulsory subject, Christian education. For instance, the Christian education syllabus in Forms 2 and 3 draws explicit links to the ‘Social issues and resolution in Solomon Islands’ strand and the ‘Local ethnic groups and languages’ sub-strand of social studies (MEHRD 2013b:14). This is a salient connection given the importance of Christianity to any nationalist sentiment in Solomon Islands.

The successful dissemination of the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative depends in part on its delivery through a compatible teaching style. The CDD is attempting to replace the historical teacher-centred pedagogy with a learner-centred approach to teaching. Specifically, MEHRD has chosen a form of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), an approach that encourages the application of curriculum knowledge in all subjects to life outside school (MEHRD 2012:19). It also involves assessing students based on their performance of skills and thus requires teachers to encourage students to think critically about the content of the curriculum and their own ideas and experiences (ibid.). In respect of social studies specifically, the OBE approach would seem to complement the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative insomuch as by promoting critical thinking it recognises the validity of multiple perspectives. OBE also requires teachers to create classroom environments that model acceptance of, and respect for, competing perspectives. Against this, however, Daudau also stated that competing perspectives should not be allowed in the history classroom when the Tension is being taught because those perspectives might be misinterpreted by students. In the particular case of the Tension, then, it appears that the course content remains too sensitive for open enquiry/OBE teaching methods.

This latter qualification aside, some within MEHRD believe that the new pedagogical approach may also help foster national identity on the basis that it may be more attuned to the type of education practices in Solomon Islands that take place outside formal schooling. Notwithstanding the considerable variation across Solomon Islands in this regard — it was noted above how informal educa-
tion practices can accord well with both teacher- and student-centred learning — Daudau commented that OBE in Solomon Islands is being adapted to reflect a ‘Melanesian way of doing things, [which] means learning by doing and assessment by demonstration’. He expanded on this point in a later interview, arguing that the new curricular materials actively encourage student participation and that formal education is thus an extension of informal modes of learning. In the two chapters of the Form 1 social studies textbook discussed above, for example, roughly 68 per cent of activities require group work, although it remains to be seen if teachers are actually making use of such opportunities. It is also unclear if an OBE teaching style can contribute to national identity formation in Solomon Islands.

OBE was attempted in Papua New Guinea from 2003 but insufficient teacher training resulted in poor implementation, which ultimately saw government begin to abandon it by 2011 (Howes et al. 2014:8; Islands Business 2013).

Given the capacity constraints on teacher retraining in Solomon Islands discussed above, there must clearly be doubts about the ability of many of the country’s teachers to implement open enquiry pedagogy in the short to medium term. Interviews with teachers at St Joseph’s Catholic Secondary School, located just east of Honiara, bore out these concerns. While 11 of 15 who discussed OBE supported it in principal, eight of them expressed concern about the government’s capacity to retrain them. They were also concerned about MEHRD’s capacity to provide any additional resources required to implement the new teaching style. MEHRD’s limitations in teacher retraining combined with the interactive nature of many indigenous learning systems (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1992:20) means that the organic nation-making process through extra-curricular activities remains crucial if schooling is to be a ‘stepping-stone to national consciousness’.

Nation-Making at St Joseph’s

There is considerable potential for integrated boarding schools such as St Joseph’s to complement the new curriculum and pedagogy with participatory nation-making activities. The school’s head-master, Abraham Hihiru, actively seeks to create these nation-making opportunities, and the lead author witnessed several such activities among both teachers and students in June 2013. In regards to the teachers, three shared feasts prompted discussion around their customary practices, some of which they subsequently showcased at a Guadalcanal Catholic Teachers Union meeting where they performed a cultural dance from the home community of one of their members.

For the students, the most notable opportunity for nation-making was the school’s Champagnat Day celebrations to commemorate the life of the school’s founder, St Marcellin Champagnat. Classes were replaced with festivities that included Mass, a variety of games, a feast and a fashion show. Other such nation-making events include the ‘cultural day’ that the school holds at the beginning of each school year as well as sports carnivals and school fetes. Weekly masses, choir practices, and various other organised social activities also work to build inter-community harmony among the various cultural groups comprising the school population, as do the everyday interactions among students. St Joseph’s also deepens cross-cultural linkages among students by integrating communities in normal school arrangements such as dormitory and classroom allocations and by organising several student functions with specific cross-cultural themes. Particularly significant are the whole-school attendances at mass throughout the week, their shared religious devotions helping to create a common sense of identity.

These activities, and everyday life at the school, has Abraham Hihiru convinced that ‘we are creating Solomon Islands within St Joseph’s’. He further argued that ‘the teacher plays an important role in bringing students from different places together’. Impressively, one education system official in Solomon Islands with close historical knowledge of the school remarked that many St Joseph’s teachers even felt this way in 2002 immediately after the school reopened following 12 months of forced closure during the Tension.

One measure of St Joseph’s success in these endeavours is provided by several students’ comments about why they enjoy school. Reminiscent
of the skill Solomon Islanders have historically shown in mediating across cultural differences (McDougall and Kere 2011:142–43), several students were explicit that they enjoy school because of the opportunities it affords them to share their cultures and learn about others: One Malaitan student described his relationship with his Guale peers in these terms:

We don't see each other as we used to. Sometimes we sit together and we just recall those moments when we were like enemies and now I can see that we are more than friends. We are treating each other as brothers and sisters now. We just work together.14

Another student likewise described his classmates affectionately as his ‘brothers and sisters’.15 Teacher S also commented that in schools students forget their differences and ‘all you notice is the kids learning together … trying to succeed education wise’.16 The students’ success in this regard is all the more impressive given that several, including the student quoted above, had direct personal experience of the Tension.

However, there were also some indications of inter-group discomfort at St Joseph’s in June 2013. Three teachers interviewed reported some uneasiness under the surface between certain Malaitan and Guadalcanal students. In 2011, one had observed some Guale students refusing to work with their Malaitan peers and he also reported ethnically biased perspectives in some students’ written assignments. Although not reporting problems among the students at the school, another teacher had observed that some of her 2013 students thought that the Tension was good because it forced settlers out of overcrowded Guadalcanal. Notably, the most alienated of the cohort interviewed said:

Even though RAMSI came to our country it still seems that … some people are trying to bring up the Tension again. So [my people] usually remind me that to be a Malaitan … we can say that we are enemy to Guadalcanal people. So they usually tell me that I must watch out [and] stay alert to hear when or what will happen next … I usually feel afraid.17

Interestingly, there were few national symbols on display at St Joseph’s. Unlike the pre-Tension schooling of the informants mentioned earlier, no flag raising or singing of the national anthem was observed.

Conclusion

A paucity of unifying ethnic, linguistic or historical ties meant pre-independence Solomon Islanders had little sense of belonging to the nation-state. The colonial government even suppressed attempts at inter-island collaboration (Akin 2013). The state had also largely failed to consolidate itself in the 20 years after independence, so little sense of national identity had developed prior to the outbreak of the Tension (Dinnen 2012:64). The colonial administration also left the new country with very little educational infrastructure, but the system ultimately expanded in response to growing demand from a population eager for formal schooling. However, the expansion of education and other services was uneven geographically and Malaitans and Weather Coast Guales in particular felt disadvantaged, accentuating grievances that became key drivers of violence in 1998. The Tension then further diminished any sense of national identity because it intensified sub-national, especially island-wide, affiliations.

Nor did the pre-Tension education system contribute significantly to national identity construction. Many children were pushed out of the system before completing primary school, and the curriculum did little to transmit the ‘unity in diversity’ narrative anyway. Perhaps there is even some evidence that it helped construct the identity divides that characterised the Tension. At the very least it lacked relevance to the lives of ordinary citizens, as did the teacher-centred pedagogy. The potential of the content of schooling to function as a ‘stepping-stone to national consciousness’, through either nation-building or nation-making, was thus left essentially unfulfilled.

Post-conflict, however, there are several indications that education may yet fulfil its potential as such a stepping-stone. The state has actively reinvigorated the pre-conflict ‘unity in diversity’ narrative, which has involved, as shown herein, reforms to formal education.
Primary school enrolments and retentions into secondary school have increased considerably over the last two decades, increasing the scope for the reformed curriculum to contribute to the formation of national identity. Furthermore, the equalisation of access to basic education redresses the role its uneven availability played in the divisions leading to the conflict. Some important structural inequalities remain; there is only one National Secondary School on Malaita, and as late as 2009 children in Malaita and rural Guadalcanal were still significantly less likely to attend secondary school than those in Honiara.

Nevertheless, the new social studies materials bring ‘unity in diversity’ to the classroom explicitly and are complemented by the attention given to conflict resolution and reconciliation in the revised religious education syllabus. The materials are potentially complemented further by the OBE approach, which may have greater congruence with indigenous forms of learning based on play among children and their direct participation in adult activities. While the impact of OBE will not be known for some time, in the case of St Joseph’s at least, the benefits of the new curriculum and pedagogy are complemented by the success the teachers achieve in cultivating familiarity and respect among students from different backgrounds. Also, critically, St Joseph’s students enjoy the opportunity to share their cultures, and learn about those of their fellow students. Thus, at least at this school, nation-building and nation-making appear interlinked and complementary processes, which also exploit the shared Christian faith of its diverse communities.

However, this may not be the case in other places. Many of the new Provincial Secondary Schools and Community High Schools are located in rural areas with less ethnically heterogeneous populations than Honiara. In these circumstances the revisions to the curriculum and pedagogy will be even more important. Schooling may be the only place where students are exposed to the official government narrative and their only chance to engage with it critically. Moreover, their teachers may be the only representatives of the state with whom they have substantial contact. The remoteness of many non-elite schools may also make it more difficult for them to access the new curricular materials and teacher (re)training opportunities, leaving them with less scope to become sites for either nation-building or nation-making.

Further research into the efficacy of teacher training initiatives will be required to gauge the capacity of teachers to use the new curricular materials. However, given that providing resources and (re)training teachers remain challenging for MEHRD and CDD, the findings presented here suggest that there may be much to gain from increased support to these facets of education reform.

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References


Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Richard Hellyer, Education Sector Advisor in MEHRD, and two anonymous reviewers for their informative and critical commentary on an earlier draft of this paper. Moreover, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the teachers and students at St Joseph’s, for their openness and thoughtfulness during the lead author’s interviews with them. Equally, we appreciate the willingness of all the government and civil society representatives to discuss their country’s education system. David Oakeshott acknowledges the generous assistance from Professor Margaret Jolly’s Australian Research Council Laureate project and Matthew Allen acknowledges support provided under Australian Research Council fellowship DE140101206.

Endnotes

1. The research reported here is based on four weeks fieldwork conducted in June 2013 by the lead author, who lived at St Joseph’s Catholic Secondary School at Tenaru during this period. In addition to ethnographic observations of St Joseph’s, interviews were conducted with 24 students and 19 teachers at the school. A further 19 interviews were conducted with senior personnel in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and various Civil Society actors engaged with the education sector. Secondary source materials and critical analysis of new textbooks for secondary social studies also inform the analysis.

2. The Solomons Pijin word kastom is derived from the English word ‘custom’, and local usage often approximates the meaning of ‘custom’. However, the term does not refer to an unchanging pre-European
way of life. It emphasises change and adaptation, as well as continuity with the past, and has been engaged by Solomon Islanders as a symbol of island-wide unity.

3 Interview with Patrick Daudau, former CDD director, Honiara, 13/6/2013.

4 Confidential interview with Participant E, Education administrator, Honiara, 19/6/2013.

5 In 2009 the total number of secondary school students in Honiara, the rest of Guadalcanal and Malaita were estimated at 7,418, 7,389 and 7,959, respectively (MEHRD 2010:20). However, the population of 10–19 year olds in the three geographies were 13,408, 20,403 and 31,906, respectively (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office 2009:265, 257, 259).


7 Interview with Patrick Daudau, 13/6/2013.

8 Interview with Linda Wate, NESU Director, Honiara, 26/6/2013; interview with Patrick Daudau 13/6/2013; interview with Franco Rodie, now MEHRD Permanent Secretary, Honiara, 12/6/2013; confidential interview with Participant D, senior MEHRD official, Honiara, 5/6/2013.

9 Interview with Linda Wate, 26/6/2013.

10 Interview with Franco Rodie, 12/6/2013.

11 Interview with Patrick Daudau, 13/6/2013.

12 Interview with Abraham Hihiru, Headmaster, St Joseph's Catholic Secondary School, Tenaru, 18/6/2013.

13 Interview with Abraham Hihiru, 29/6/2013.

14 Confidential interview with Student E, Tenaru, 3/6/2013.

15 Confidential interview with Student P, Tenaru, 5/6/2013.

16 Confidential interview with Teacher S, Tenaru, 25/6/2013.

17 Confidential interview with Student B, Tenaru, 2/6/2013.
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The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program acknowledges the generous support from the Australian Government for the production of this Discussion Paper.

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