



## TE TŪAO TĀWĀHI VOLUNTEER SERVICE ABROAD

Peter Swain and Adele Broadbent

# LIGHTING A FIRE

VSA's role in promoting education leadership  
in the Solomon Islands

March 2001 – March 2010



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**Peter Swain and Adele Broadbent<sup>1</sup>**

**“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”** William Butler Yeats

**“The future of our country depends on the education of our greatest resource: our people.”**

Hon. Dr Derek Sikua, Minister of Education<sup>2</sup>

# Introduction

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This study examines Volunteer Service Abroad's (VSA) contribution to in-service teacher training in the Solomon Islands, and the role of New Zealand volunteers in strengthening educational leadership.

VSA has been involved in education in the Pacific for nearly 50 years and for most of that time it has been providing New Zealand volunteers to schools as teachers and educationalists. However there has been a shift in development thinking which has seen this approach questioned, and more emphasis placed on in-service teacher training and promoting professional leadership of schools.

This case study, based on VSA's recent experience in the Solomon Islands, discusses a new approach to strengthening school leadership in the many remote, isolated and under-resourced schools of the Solomon Islands.

There has been considerable discussion, effort, time and resources put into teacher training in the Solomon Island over the last forty years. So why is it that so many children are still taught by untrained teachers? Is it just the result of a large population increase? Have teachers left the profession? Was the recent 'civil war' a factor? What has been done to improve the situation? How can better outcomes for these children be achieved? These, and other, questions have been exercising local education officials, and other agencies (including VSA) currently working in the education sector in the Solomon Islands.

## Methodology

The case study is a well-established research method (Yin 1994). This case study used a range of research methods to gather data from a variety of sources to provide evidence to base findings and to draw conclusions. Quantitative and qualitative research methods have been employed to examine the complex and inter-related factors that are at play in international development. Archival research and interviews were the main methods employed.

Archival research was undertaken to examine VSA's files which contain substantial information on individual assignments and correspondence between VSA staff and the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), the Makira Ulawa Provincial Education Authority, and school principals in areas where volunteers were assigned. A search was also undertaken for books and other documents on education in the Solomon Islands. Volunteer assignment reports, debriefing reports and programme staff

field trip reports also contain a wealth of information. Relevant extracts from books, articles and documents are cited throughout this paper. A list of key sources is included in the bibliography and an archive of key documents is stored at VSA in Wellington.

Interviews were conducted by the researchers with key people in the Solomon Islands and with returned volunteers in New Zealand. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Quotes from interviewees are referenced. The writing, experience and views of Andrew Sorensen, an educator and former volunteer with many years service in rural communities in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Zealand, and recent volunteers, Bruce and Gwen Levick, form an important part of the research record.

This case study, unlike previous VSA case studies, focuses on the work of a very small sample of volunteers working in a particular location. Whilst this approach does raise some issues of research methodology, and limits the potential to generalise, the study does provide unique insights into education in remote communities. Because of the small number of ‘informants’ in this study, and the fact that their work is already well publicised, it would be disingenuous to attempt to keep their identities confidential. Consequently, Andrew Sorensen, Bruce Levick, and Gwen Levick are referred to and quoted directly. They each have been consulted in the preparation of this report and have consented to the use of material.

There are a number of technical terms used throughout this study defined as follows:

‘Qualified teacher’ refers to those practicing teachers who have completed, and graduated from, a formal teacher training programme from an accredited institution (eg: the Solomon Islands College for Higher Education).

‘In-service training’ refers to short teacher training programmes that are designed to improve specific skills and increase the knowledge of practicing teachers (qualified or unqualified) and are conducted in or close to the trainee’s workplace.

The terms ‘untrained teachers’ and ‘teachers in training’ (unfortunately referred to by the acronym TITs) are used as euphemisms in Makira Ulawa Education Authority documents to refer to people working as ‘teachers’ but with no formal training or teaching qualifications, in contrast to the smaller number of trained and qualified teachers in the Province. Frequently untrained teachers are also unpaid.

‘Principal’ is the term used for the head of a secondary, community, or provincial high school in the Solomon Islands, a ‘Headmaster’ is the head of a primary school. As secondary and primary schools are often co-located, a Headmaster is often also the de facto Deputy Principal.

‘Educational leadership’ is exercised by Principals and Headmasters when they provide direction and inspiration to their teaching staff with the aim of improving their professional skills and knowledge, the quality of teaching practice, and student achievement.

Prior to publication the report was ‘peer reviewed’ and some minor emendations were made.<sup>3</sup>

## Scope of the Study

This study, covering the period from March 2001 to March 2010, is one of a series undertaken in the Pacific to monitor and evaluate the work of VSA’s international development programmes. Each study aims to provide evidence-based findings on the impact of the contribution of volunteers on the quality of life of individuals, families and communities. Previous studies have focussed on work in post-conflict Bougainville (VSA 2006), and in early childhood education in Vanuatu (VSA 2008). These studies produced useful lessons that have informed VSA’s development practice, and have been applied in other programmes with the aim of improving the quality of VSA’s development practice.

The discussion on the following pages aims to answer five key research questions, and a number of subsidiary questions.

- Why was the VSA volunteer programme with the Makira Ulawa Provincial Education Authority (M-UPEA) established, and what were its objectives?
- What Volunteer Assignments have been undertaken, and where?
- What have been the results and impact of the programme in Makira Ulawa?
- What are the lessons that have been learnt from this research project?
- What overarching conclusions can be drawn after nine years of VSA volunteers working with the M-UPEA?

This case study sets out to tell the story of a partnership between the Makira Ulawa Provincial Educational Authority and VSA, and to highlight the work of a small number of remarkable volunteers.

The information gathered in this case study has been refined to a number of findings and a set of ‘lessons’ learnt from VSA’s decade-long engagement in the education sector in the Makira Ulawa Province of the Solomon Islands.

# Chapter 1

## Why was the Volunteer Programme with the Makira Ulawa Education Authority established and what were its objectives?

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### Introduction

Our narrative starts by setting the context. The Solomon Islands was in crisis in 2000 and, in June of that year, all international volunteers were evacuated. The ‘crisis’<sup>4</sup>, and the subsequent RAMSI intervention<sup>5</sup>, had, and continues to have a significant impact on schools and educational opportunities throughout the Solomon Islands. We will discuss the crisis and its impacts on education by way of providing background and setting this study in a Melanesian country that has come through a challenging time.

We will briefly discuss VSA’s history and wider work in the Solomon Islands and the work in the education sector in particular, to provide a wider view. Then the focus shifts from the ‘big picture’ to the particulars of the Makira Ulawa Province and the work of a small number of volunteers working in schools, and with education officials.

### The Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is a widespread archipelago of 992 islands covering 80,000 sq/km of sea and stretching roughly 1,800 km west to east and 900 km from south to north across the Pacific Ocean on a northwest southeast axis from 5°S to 12°S and 155°E to 170°E. The 29,785 sq/km. of land ranges from large forested mountainous islands to tiny coral atolls. Home to 400,000 (est.) people (SPC 1999), the Solomon Islands are ethnically and culturally classified as Melanesian (Campbell 1992:18-23, Crocombe 1983:14). The people of the Solomon Islands however are very diverse. Some outlying islands have Polynesian communities (Rennell, Bellona and Tikopia), there are Micronesian (Gilbertese) communities on Guadalcanal and also small populations of European and Asian origin. Eighty-seven distinct languages (100 dialects) are spoken in the Solomon Islands and whilst English is the official language, *tok pisin* or Neo-Melanesian is more widely used.

The Solomon Islands may have been inhabited for over 20,000 years and settlements have been dated to 1,300 BC from remains in Fotoruma Cave on Guadalcanal. Expatriate anthropologists, linguists and historians have studied the people, customs, languages and history of the Solomon Islands, however their writing has been largely confined to academic publications. Indigenous scholars are now examining their society from within.

After the initial Spanish discovery, and failed attempts to find the fabled King Solomon's mines in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Solomon Islands suffered from British colonial neglect (Crocombe and Tuza 1992) and had little mention in global history until they were the site of major land, sea and air battles marking a turning point of the Second World War in the Pacific. Since independence in 1978, there has been a growing interest in the recent history of the Solomon Islands which is now written by indigenous Solomon Islanders and widely published.<sup>6</sup>

The communal social organisation of the Solomon Islands is referred to as the *wantok* system. Extended family groupings or clans that share the same language, customs and geographical location are commonly referred to as *wantoks* (one talk, one language). *Wantoks* have reciprocal obligations to each other including the responsibility to feed, shelter and financially support their *wantoks* when they visit. Urban dwellers, who have migrated to Honiara the capital for employment and joined the cash economy, find it particularly burdensome when large numbers of *wantoks* arrive and they are obliged to provide for them and share their hard-earned resources. A tension exists between individual wants and communal obligations as the economy makes the transition from subsistence gardening and fishing to a cash economy.

The economy of the Solomon Islands is comprised of two parts. Seventy-five to eighty percent of the population are involved in the village-household economy or subsistence economy. Trade and wage workers make up the cash economy which is dominated by the export of lightly processed primary commodities and the public service. Primary commodities include: tropical hardwoods, palm oil, coconuts, cocoa, fish and gold.

The Solomon Island political structure is based on the parliamentary system inherited from the former British colonial administration, but politics in the Solomon Islands is based on the *wantok* system. Most people vote for individuals on the basis of their performance in community projects rather than on the basis of affiliation to a political party. A candidate must be well versed in local affairs and knowledgeable about custom and tradition. A local 'big man' is often promoted to national political office. Party politics is new to the Solomon Islands and loyalty to *wantoks* takes precedence to political party loyalty. Traditional forms of governance gave way to a parliamentary democracy at independence but thirty years later politics is still dominated by 'big men'.

Administratively the country is divided into nine provinces which each elect a premier and regional assembly. Whilst some powers have been transferred from the national to provincial governments in recent years, financial resources and control remain largely with the centre. The provincial governments have been supported by a head tax, one effect of which is to force people into the cash economy. Within each province are various local area councils which deal with local and village matters.

The heterogeneous nature and diversity of the Solomon Islands population has led to some inter-group conflict. In 1999 a group of land owners on Guadalcanal took up arms and evicted settlers from Malaita and other provinces who had taken up residence near Honiara to work in the capital. This incident was a precursor to the civil conflict that engulfed the Solomon Islands from 2000 to 2003.

### VSA in the Solomon Islands

VSA first sent teachers to pre-independence Solomon Islands in 1965. The British Solomon Islands had few trained educators and looked for help from the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand to fill the gaps. Between 1965 and 1993 VSA assigned 120 New Zealand teachers to the Solomon Islands. It was expected that there would come a time when sufficient local teachers would be recruited and trained to staff schools.

A generation on, it is reasonable to assume support from overseas teachers would no longer be required for the development of Solomon Islands schools, and the training of local teachers. However this is not the case.

### Education in Makira Ulawa Province

To get a picture of the educational experience of most Solomon Island children today; leave the capital, Honiara, fly by small plane to provincial centre, travel by canoe for several hours down the coast, land on a beach, follow a track through the bush to a village, and there you will find a village school. The buildings are well built bush houses, humble but perfectly designed for the hot and humid climate, the children are bright-eyed and keen to learn, but most of their teachers are untrained.

This is what the researchers found in Makira Ulawa Province, the location of this case study. In May 2009 there were 565 teachers in the province covering 79 scattered schools<sup>7</sup>. Three hundred and six of these were ‘teachers in training’<sup>8</sup> who had no formal teaching qualification or training. Most of those ‘teachers’ were young people (aged 17 to 19 years) from the local community who had completed their schooling and had been co-opted by the village school principal to teach younger students.

The situation in the Makira Ulawa has not changed markedly a year on and is replicated throughout the Solomon Islands, “Currently half of the estimated 5,480 teachers in the Solomon Islands are not trained.” (NZAID 2009a:30). Furthermore, the recent NZAID Review of the Solomon Islands Sector Wide Approach Arrangement noted that: “A very high proportion of untrained and under-trained teachers, gender imbalances in the teaching service, high teacher absenteeism, are all very real challenges to improvements in this crucial area.” (NZAID 2009)

Outside of Honiara, being taught by an untrained teacher is a common educational experience for the majority of Solomon Islands students.

Long time VSA volunteer in Melanesia and experienced teacher Andrew Sorensen noted what he saw as the key problems facing Solomon Island education:

Geography, which has long influenced Solomon’s culture, remains a major determining factor why most of our schools continue to function in an isolated environment. It is a logistic headache and a significant financial cost to bring teachers into the provincial centre. This leaves provinces, like Makira, with more than 90% of their schools with no real communication links with the Education Office. Schools, therefore, remain disconnected from any invigorating flow of new ideas, new information, and new methods. (Sorensen 2005)

Since 2001, VSA has been sending New Zealand volunteers to work in the education sector in Makira Ulawa Province. The aim has been to improve the quality of educational opportunity available to children in remote village communities. The focus of recent volunteer assignments has been developing in-service teacher training for untrained teachers and building professional development opportunities for school principals and their senior staff.

Other development agencies have been working with the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) to strengthen the education sector. In 2003 SIG, in concert with New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and the European Community (EC), with the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) taking the lead, adopted an *Education Sector Investment and Reform Programme* and the donors funded a ‘sector wide approach’ (SWAp) to education.<sup>9</sup> This has resulted in a more planned, systematic, coordinated approach to addressing the wide range of concerns facing the education sector.

VSA’s work on in-service teacher training predated the Education SWAp but is now linked into this wider programme.<sup>10</sup>

# Chapter 2

## What assignments have been undertaken and where?

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### Introduction

In 2002 two VSA teaching assignments in the Solomon Islands were filled. The volunteers were continuing the 37-year history of putting New Zealand teachers into Solomon Island schools. The frustrations the volunteers experienced in their assignments, due partially to the hangover from political unrest, but mostly due to the large number of untrained, non-performing teachers, set VSA staff to question their approach to education assignments in the Solomon Islands. During the third assignment in 2003 there was to be the beginning of a shift in understanding how volunteers could be better utilised to help create a more effective education system for those in isolated in rural areas.

### Background

There were two secondary school teachers assigned at Kirakira to Campbell Community High School in 2002 starting their assignments in March and July. The objectives of the assignments were: “To assist HODs and Principals to increase the effectiveness of teaching in the school, [and] to improve academic standards and increase the number of students continuing to Form V and VI.” (VSA, A.D. 1018)

During the first six months of the first assignment, there was an extended eight week teachers’ strike over failure to pay salaries, which impacted on the ability of the volunteer teacher to make progress at the school. The first volunteer found the lack of resources and reluctance of students to participate in classroom activity added to a low exam pass rate, and very few students from the school proceeding to the fifth form. By the second half (i.e. the second year) of the assignment this teacher was involved with teaching English, drama and running the school library. The volunteer found the students more forthcoming but felt there were few skills being exchanged with the other teachers. “In some ways I’m filling an English teacher ‘slot here,” (V1.)<sup>11</sup> she said.

The second school teacher volunteer came at the end of the teachers’ strike and found the going a little easier. She felt skills exchange happened frequently, with local teachers interested in new strategies. However nearing the end of the assignment the volunteer

was frustrated at being in a “gap-filling” role and at times feeling she was “the only one working” (V2).

A VSA field representative’s report describes the situation in the province at the time:

Following the ethnic tensions of 1999 and prior to the arrival of the Regional Assistance Programme to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003, the machinery of government in the Solomon Islands virtually collapsed. Civil servants were not paid, services were no longer provided and provinces such as Makira, although not directly affected by the crisis, were cut off without funding and left to fend for themselves. Teachers, like all other government employees, were not paid yet, surprisingly, most schools continued to function, albeit at a fairly dysfunctional level, to the credit of remaining teachers and supporting communities. During this period teacher workloads were high, schools were massively under-resourced and teacher strikes were frequent. (FR 1)

In early 2003 another teacher took up an assignment with the Makira Education Board. Andrew Sorensen<sup>12</sup> was a secondary school teacher assigned to the Santa Ana Community High School. The objectives of his assignment were: “To assist the Principal to increase the effectiveness of teaching in the school at both the academic and vocational level. To assist with the training of existing teachers. To improve academic standards and increase the number of students continuing to Form 5.” (VSA, AD 1020)

Andrew brought more than 40 years experience to the assignment, had filled senior education roles in New Zealand for the last 30, and had spent the previous five years on VSA assignment in Vanuatu. His experience both as a school leader and in Melanesian education gave him a unique insight in to the problems that were being faced in the province. After the first six months of the assignment, he began organising formal sessions concentrating on teaching methodology. Early on he identified a group of competent and motivated but untrained teachers and a certain “lack of professionalism with the qualified staff”.

Andrew also identified the hangover from the crisis as impacting on the school even though problems in Honiara seemed remote. “Parents simply cannot afford the fees – hence the school is short of funds.”

During a field visit by the VSA field representative in 2003 there was discussion with Andrew about a more targeted strategy to improve secondary education. The field representative wrote that there were increasing numbers of requests for teachers which VSA couldn’t possibly fill. “Providing individual teachers to schools... will not tackle underlying problems in the schools of Makira Ulawa Province... A more rational approach might therefore be

to establish an in-service teacher training scheme. This would benefit all schools.” (FR 2) To that end, the Chief Education Officer, with the assistance of Andrew Sorensen, put forward a proposal for an assignment that was likely to involve a full time volunteer ‘training coordinator’ with periodic short-term volunteer input as teacher trainers.

Meanwhile, by Andrew’s second assignment report in early 2004, he talked of progress at Santa Ana being slow – almost “glacial”. However during that time class rolls, bell times, detention for lateness, systems to keep the grounds clean, the reintroduction of a sports programme, and the introduction of monthly testing had been put in place. The news on teacher training on Santa Ana was bleaker with the young teachers walking out because salaries had not been paid. Andrew called for training to be formalised.

In March 2004 the VSA field representative met with the Provincial Government Ministers who were strongly supportive of the in-service teacher training programme VSA had proposed. Andrew wrote in his assignment report: “The Provincial Government has endorsed this scheme at executive level and have allocated SBD\$30,000 in the provincial budget next financial year. This is a significant contribution and indicative of the level of buy-in that the Province has made to the scheme,” The Chief Education Officer was keen for Andrew to set up the scheme.

In May of that year Andrew Sorensen was appointed Teacher Training Programme Manager moving to the provincial education offices in Kirakira on Makira. Objectives of his new assignment were:

Schools within a manageable geographic area that would benefit from in-service teacher training one-year pilot programme are identified. Selected schools agree to participate in a one-year in-service Teacher training programme. Sufficient donor funding, to cover operational costs for a one-year pilot programme (approx. NZ\$10,000 required) is secured. (VSA, AD 1232)

In November the field representative met with Andrew after he returned from visiting schools and reported good progress. The field report outlines how Andrew had been collecting baseline information on the state of all schools within the Province so the teacher training could commence.

By the next field visit in August 2005, the in-service teacher training was well under way with Andrew making steady progress and reporting that a recent workshop meant he had covered basic training with all untrained teachers. Andrew reported that VSA’s sourcing of funding, through the Pacific Conservation and Development Trust, meant workshops were organised for 102 untrained teachers, and two trips to Honiara were made to link the

province with the growing interest. He was now launching into more detailed training at different levels. The field representative wrote: “Subsequent to this field trip Andrew has since advised VSA that the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education now plans to conduct similar... programmes in all other provinces.” (FR 3)

In early 2006, riots in the capital Honiara, and the flow-on effect to the provinces, dominated VSA’s strategic thinking. While the VSA Teacher Training and Professional Development Programme under Andrew kept ticking over in Makira Ulawa Province, supporting the provincial governments to operate so that basic services could be provided became the central plank of VSA’s Solomon Islands programme.

By 2007 in Makira-Ulawa, the VSA field representative reported that initial training of untrained teachers had been successfully completed and the schools and their communities had responded very positively to the input provided by VSA.

By this time the impact of the NZAID sector wide approach (SWAp) was beginning to be felt in the province, particularly with the construction of new classrooms in many schools. Various other changes had occurred within the Provincial Education Authority so the overall morale and effectiveness of education in the province had improved significantly. Andrew Sorensen’s VSA assignment which had been extended a number of times, evolved to provide support where needed as the effectiveness of the Provincial Education Authority grew. (FR 4)

The VSA field representative reported the overall improvement in education and administration in the Province could also be put down to VSA’s Provincial Legal Adviser who tackled issues of corrupt practices within the Education Office. It was identified that NZAID and EU funding of education meant resources were more readily available but the challenge now was to ensure that these were used effectively.

In VSA’s Solomon Islands Programme Strategy 2007–2011 there was a commitment to continue to focus on education – particularly in Makira Ulawa Province – through in-service teacher training. Subsequently, two new volunteers were recruited to follow up the work of Andrew Sorensen.

Bruce and Gwen Levick were appointed to roles as School Project Development Officers for the Makira Ulawa Education Authority in February 2009. The objectives of their assignments were: “Schools complete an assessment of their infrastructure development needs. Schools complete a project-funding proposal that accurately reflects the strategies outlined in the school development plan. Head Teachers, Chairmen of the School Committees and Project

Managers have the skills and knowledge to monitor projects, ensuring that they deliver intended outcomes within the allocated budget.” (VSA, AD 1638)

The Levicks began their assignments by collating information on examination results of more than 1000 students to gain a statistical overview. The results, in graph form (see Figure 1, page 18), formed the basis of discussions with school leaders at workshops about student achievements and improving the quality of teaching. Other achievements throughout the year included developing an introductory programme for school leaders on roles and responsibilities that was presented throughout the province by the Levicks in tandem with Solomon Island’s education officers. A professional development programme designed for school leaders from early childhood to secondary level delivered in a series of six two-day workshops around the province. Resources were prepared from scratch and the introduction of interactive learning was well received. This work led to many positive responses for local staff. “I’ve learnt more in the past two days than in the past 40 years,” said one principal attending the workshops.

Bruce and Gwen also developed material resources. A revised checklist was introduced for contact visits (inspections) and a new staff appraisal form designed, piloted and subsequently introduced to all schools. *A School Leaders’ Handbook – A Guide for Principals, Head Teachers and Early Childhood Education Supervisors* (Makira Ulawa Education Authority: 2010) was developed using the workshops to test relevance of topics, and gaining valuable input from the attendees, and also education officers. It was explained that this resource would supplement the mandatory requirements of the official *Teaching Services Handbook and Financial Management Manual*. “It is not intended to be prescriptive but to enable school leaders to adapt its contents to suit the needs of their schools and communities,” wrote the Levicks.

Twenty principals picked up the copies of the Handbook before the due distribution at the beginning of term one 2010. “Indeed it was a silent achievement!” said one school leader of the publication of the School Leaders’ Handbook. “The whole Education Community of the province must take ownership of the manual.” Bruce and Gwen made a presentation on their work on leadership and management to the MEHRD Annual Joint Review, which received a great deal of positive feedback. A weekly radio broadcast, modelling a positive approach to addressing educational issues, was also well received.

In just one year, the Levicks had achieved in many schools throughout Makira Ulawa Province what VSA teachers based in on their own in remote schools had felt too marginalised to attempt – to instil a thirst for teacher training, improved education standards, and supportive monitoring.

# Chapter 3

## What are the results and impacts of the in-service teacher training and professional development programme?

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### Introduction

The move by VSA away from providing individual teachers and towards a more comprehensive approach of in-service teacher training and educational leadership was instigated in the Makira- Ulawa province in 2003. This programme came to involve three volunteers: Andrew Sorensen, Bruce Levick, and Gwen Levick. Each of these volunteers came with a great deal of experience in the New Zealand education setting, in teaching, teacher training and school management. They also had substantial education experience working in overseas locations. VSA was very fortunate to recruit these volunteers who were well-equipped professionally and personally for these assignments.

### Findings from the Research

Experienced teacher Andrew Sorensen had responded to local needs. With the support of the Makira Ulawa staff, VSA changed the approach to education assignments. These went from being single, school-based, teaching positions, to an outreach programme of in-service teacher training and professional development in the 79 schools of the province covered by the Makira Ulawa Provincial Education Authority. The VSA-facilitated Teacher Training and Professional Development Programme began with Andrew Sorensen and continued with the work of Gwen Levick and Bruce Levick.

The results, outcomes and impacts of the small number of volunteers who have worked in this area are gathered under six broad headings:

- Training of untrained teachers.
- Strengthening the professional leadership of schools.
- Putting systems and methods in place

- Utilising a range of learning media
- Building the confidence and competence of the Makira Ulawa Education Authority staff
- Linking with the MEHRD and the Education SWAp

## Training of Untrained Teachers

“Initially time was spent gathering information and building a network of contacts in the Province,” Andrew Sorensen wrote in a report in 2006<sup>13</sup>. To assess professional systems and class work required visiting more than 40 schools. “One of the real difficulties has been that there was almost no record of [the] untrained teacher population... The official figures were very low... When visiting schools one discovered a vast hidden population of untrained teachers.”

Andrew had seen the evidence in his earlier assignment in Santa Ana Community High School where, out of 11 teachers, only the principal and he were trained - the other nine were young and untrained. “When I looked a bit closer I discovered they were the glue holding the damn system together.”<sup>14</sup>

It is the untrained teacher [who] is the regular attendee to classroom duties, who attempts a work plan book, who marks regularly, who designs tests, who puts time into extra-curricular activities and who covers for the trained teachers. In the primary sector they are the sports coach, the librarian, the cultural group leader... in the secondary schools their timetables are often heavier than their qualified counterparts.<sup>15</sup>

Untrained teachers could have been seen as a liability. Andrew Sorensen saw them as an asset, a potential resource that could be enhanced, through a programme of in-service training. He believed their enthusiasm and energy could be tapped to strengthen the education system in the Province. After determining the number of untrained teachers, Andrew set about providing them with training.

In his first year, as the Teacher Training Programme Manager, workshops were organised for 102 untrained teachers. The first was held in Makira’s administrative centre, the town of Kirakira. Thirty untrained teachers were invited; 63 turned up. This put a strain on the budget and pressure on facilities. “Regardless of the numbers and the usual infrastructure negatives, the enthusiasm and energy of these mostly young people ensured its success and a positive outcome.”<sup>16</sup>



needs, and sources and take action in this crucial area.” Wrightson (2008) detailed the areas of concern, including the fact that there was an estimated 2,500 untrained teachers in both primary and secondary systems with forecasts for that number to increase. The vast majority of teachers had no opportunity to upgrade their training. Since that report, there have been moves to institute a new programme entitled Distance and Flexible Learning for Teacher Education (DFL). This is an encouraging initiative however there have been delays in implementation.

The Permanent Secretary of Education, Mylyn Kuve, views DFL as one of the key strategies for a way forward to strengthen teacher effectiveness. “We are working on the distance education or DFL so it is made available to more teachers in the provinces and then that’s where we can train more teachers within a short time. And that’s a big task because it is looking at providing mentors for classes of schools.”<sup>17</sup>

By first acknowledging the plight on the untrained teacher and then initiating training, listening to problems, developing resources and reviewing performance, the in-service training had ignited sparks of learning that, it was believed, could spread through the schools in the Makira Ulawa province.

### Strengthening the professional leadership of schools

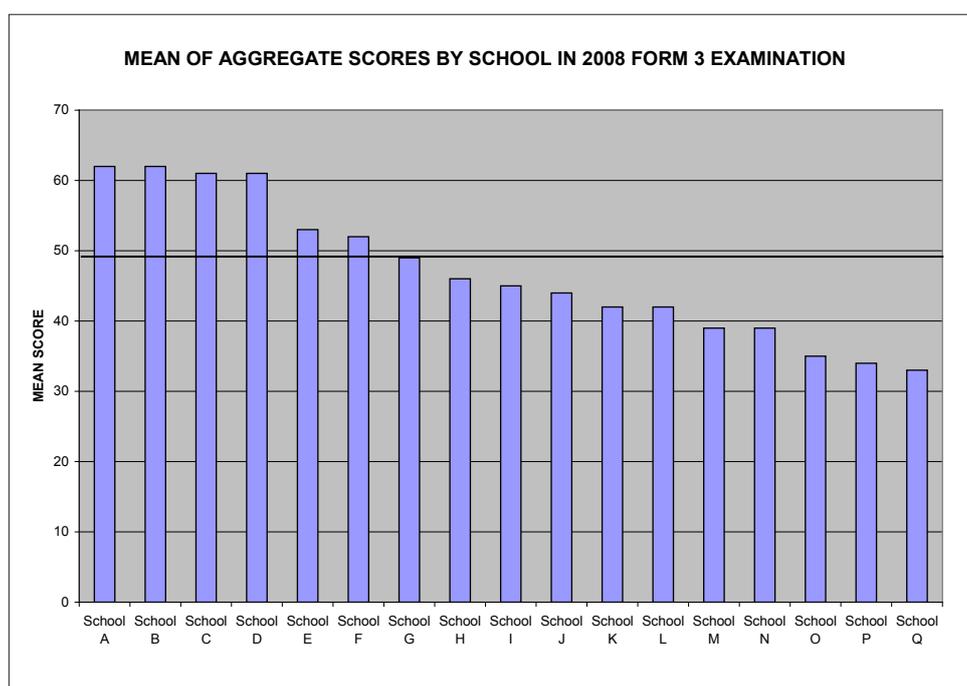
I went to one school out in the bush from Kirakira. It’s four hours from the river, crossing it 12 times, and then it takes you an hour (well it took me three) to go up a track. When I got there they said you are the first senior officer to be here since 1996. That was ten years later. So you praise them for keeping the school going... just one teacher and three untrained were keeping that school going.<sup>18</sup>  
Andrew Sorensen.

Andrew had identified a number of basic issues for schools that centred on leadership. This had been clearly highlighted by his visits to the schools around Makira Ulawa. He observed a lack of communication from head-teachers to staff, a general lack of record-keeping, student roll-taking, marking, and recording results. There was also a major problem due to the lack of regular visits by school inspectors and an uncertainty about what expectations and standards the schools should aim for that would help a school progress and provide a good quality of education.

Bruce and Gwen Levick were appointed to roles of School Project Development Officers for the Makira Ulawa Education Authority in February 2009 to follow Andrew. Both had extensive backgrounds in education up to principal level and both had previously had roles as advisers to the Ministry of Education in New Zealand.

Bruce and Gwen started their assignments with the Makira Ulawa Education Authority with the task of analysing exam results for Standard 6, Form 3 and Form 5 for the province. They manually transferred the marks of more than 1000 students onto a computer-based format so that statistical analysis could be done. It turned out to be a useful exercise in many ways. “The results were presented in graphical form to school leaders at workshop and formed the basis for very worthwhile discussion with individual schools on student achievement and improving the quality of teaching.”<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 1**

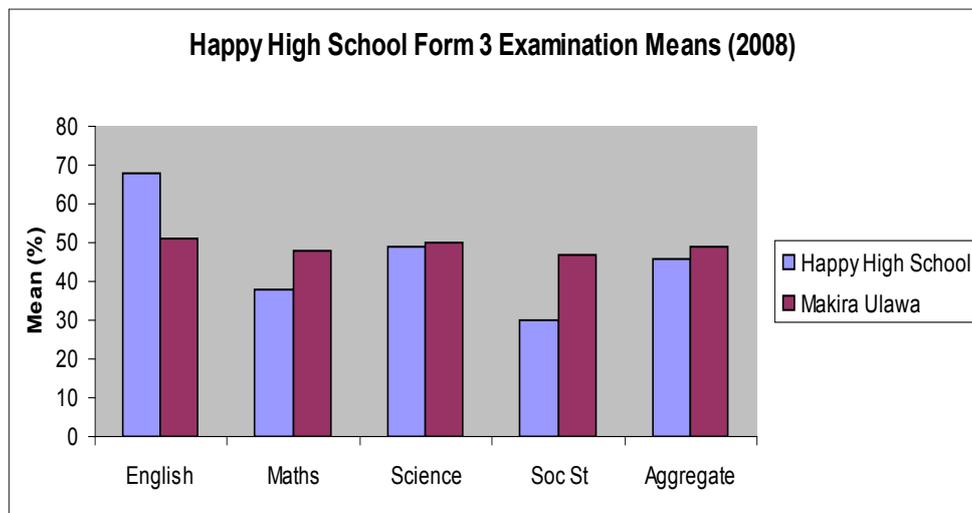


Gwen said the exercise also established their credibility with school leaders, as it was an exercise they saw as useful. Previously exam results had only been posted on a noticeboard at Kirakira with no analysis. The results gave no references as to how one school compared with another nor did they show a break-down of results over provinces. Now the principals and senior teachers had better information on students’ examination results. Bruce and Gwen calculated the means and standards deviations across subjects so that schools could see more clearly where there were areas of concern and where to focus their energies to aim for improvements (see figures 1 and 2).

Bruce also ran workshops on basic statistics so school leaders could get a better understanding of the results.

They were very keen to know how they were doing in comparison to other schools... We would tell them they were coming 10<sup>th</sup> out of 56 schools. We were quite happy to say who'd come first but we weren't keen to tell them who'd come 56<sup>th</sup>. If they had done really badly we worked through reasons why that could have been and how they could address that in the future.<sup>20</sup>

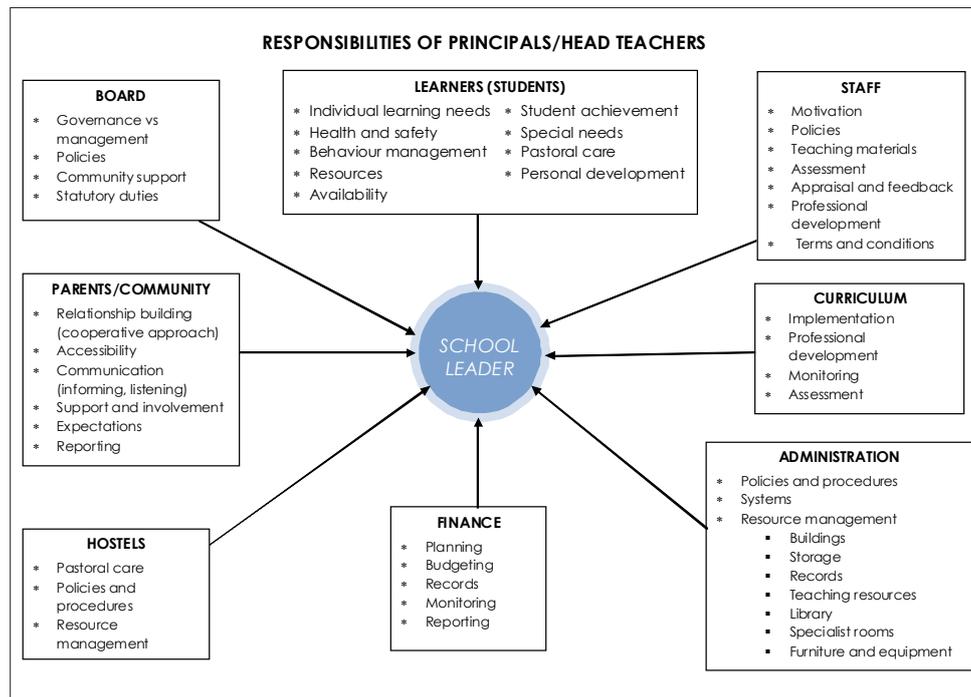
Figure 2



The next initiative that Bruce and Gwen facilitated was workshops on the educational roles and responsibilities of a school leader. These workshops were presented throughout the Province as part of a programme of two-day, MEHRD-run, Financial Management workshops.

“They [school leaders] were just thirsting for anything that could improve education in the Province and they knew that perhaps weren't doing it very well. When we pointed out glaring problems or mistakes no one ever tried to skive around it. They would say ‘we accept that - that's right, how can I put it right? We'll do that next time’. And this was really quite refreshing,” says Bruce.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 3



### Putting systems and methods in place

The workshops led by Gwen and Bruce were interactive and participatory in nature, and came to form the basis of a School Leaders' Handbook (which is discussed later in this chapter). The aim was to look at leadership and team work and to that end a number of exercises were used such as the 'aeroplane' exercise as Gwen explains.

You have to build an aeroplane and it has to be able to fly, and you have half-an-hour with which to do it. It is outcomes-based education – not percentages but the outcome that was important. You could get different levels of success. It looked like an aeroplane and it wouldn't fly or it looked like an aeroplane and it would fly three or five metres... so that gave them a good idea of outcomes-based education which they had difficulty understanding in the first place. And it was just amazing how they got better and better at actually doing this, and full of resources.<sup>22</sup>

The Levicks felt awareness had been raised about the educational leadership role of a school leader, particularly in the area of raising the quality of teaching. Principles and examples of good practice in school leadership and effective management were discussed throughout the presentations, group discussions and use of scenarios.

A revised checklist was introduced for school 'contact' visits (a euphemism for school inspections according to Gwen). Andrew had seen how the lack of visits and contact had affected the schools and the Levicks also saw evidence of low morale due to lack of feedback. The visits continued with a template for the reviews. Bruce says the principals were always given a chance to have their say and they all placed a refreshingly positive angle on the comments.

It's actually terribly humbling to hear [them say] 'thank you ever so much for coming to the school, no one has done that for the past three years. We feel we are all alone here. Now we can see that there are problems. Now we know what we have to work on to put it right – we know what can be done better and we will set it up.'<sup>23</sup>

Elements of the workshops were included in the contact visit checklist so that education officers were to report on aspects of leadership such as lesson observation, term planning, and awareness of the principal's role as leader of learning. Nearly all schools in the Province were visited by either a volunteer or an education officer in 2009. "This laid the foundation for ongoing contact and support of the schools in the future. Consolidation and reinforcement of good practice will be the key to sustainable growth in capacity among school leaders and Authority staff."<sup>24</sup>

For the Levicks, the ongoing positive feedback from principals helped legitimise the road they were taking with training. They discussed the positive outcomes for the school leaders where parental and community support would increase if the education of their children was improved. Following are comments from participants.

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge, in general, for the officers made contact visit to my school to inspect my teachers and myself. I felt that this visit has given me more strength again to... manage the school and the teachers' performance... On the next visit, the visit would [find] teachers to be more dedicated and committed and me to continue assessing teachers more regularly. This type of visit should be done every term in a year. (Head Teacher, Primary)

Thank you for your report about the school as per visit to us recently. I am so pleased about your feedbacks as it is the first time we received a report as such. Thank you especially for your positive comment and suggestions. (Principal, Secondary)

The report is welcome and very delighted of the prompt feedback received. The teachers understand their weaknesses and strengths and will carry out effectively and efficiently our obligations and responsibilities at the correct times. 16

The School Leaders' Handbook, which was published in January 2010, was a culmination of workshops and discussions throughout the Makira Ulawa education community. It is a guide designed to work alongside the information on mandatory requirements detailed in the official manuals. The Handbook was printed with the sponsorship of the Rotary Club of Masterton South.

Bruce says the Handbook evolved through the workshops and isn't prescriptive.

It is what, through discussion and exploring issues with the leaders, seemed to be or come to the surface as being viable solutions to the things that any school should be doing. I think that was a really important thing that they would see reflected in the Handbook, some of the things that would come out of discussion groups at the workshops - rather than us saying. It was a book that said; this should happen in a school, this is a template for it to happen, it is not obligatory that you use this template but you should be using something and if you have something better than this, feel free to use it. So it didn't lock them into something that they had to do... What was good that it was then reflected in the Contact visit checklist that went through... They had to read the book to make sure that things were right for the inspection and that took place at a later stage.<sup>26</sup>

A quiet confirmation that the Handbooks was seen as valuable by school leaders was noted in the fact that principals came to work before the school year started and before the Handbook had been distributed to get their personal copy. Gwen says in some ways it was too early for them to see a paradigm shift in thinking but the number of principals coming in, especially to get the Handbook, was one of the signs of change. This is reflected in the following comment.

We would like to acknowledge the fine effort rendered by Bruce and Gwen Levick in the successful completion and publish of the Education Authority School Leaders' Handbook. Indeed it was a silent achievement! The whole education community in the province must take ownership of the manual. All school leaders must accept the handbook as an educational tool that provides self training in school management and administration.<sup>27</sup>

Other work included a new staff appraisal form which was designed by the Levicks at the request of the CEO of the Makira Ulawa Education Authority. It was piloted at several schools and subsequently introduced to all schools in the province.

## Utilising a range of learning media

Andrew and his colleagues at the Provincial Education Authority had earlier seen the need for modelling professional teaching methods and, faced with the difficult terrain and lack of roads throughout the country, they came up with a radio programme.

The Ministry [of Education] was quite against it. They didn't want it. We pushed ahead mainly because the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation fell in love with us... saying they'd been trying to do this sort of thing for years but the Ministry wouldn't do anything.<sup>28</sup>

A weekly broadcast by Andrew Sorensen and then the Levicks from Kirakira was widely listened to by teachers throughout the Islands according to anecdotal reports. Andrew recalls Te Motu teachers coming through a workshop commenting they were regular listeners as “there wasn't a lot of other professional development for them”.

This view is acknowledged by the Permanent Secretary of Education, Mylyn Kuve, who, in an interview with VSA, admitted there is little for teachers at the margins.

To be honest, there is not much training for teachers out in the schools. The only training they are receiving is in-service on the new curriculum materials that they are developing. Our division, and teacher training and development is also running some courses on school leadership and management. But many teachers in the field have been out there without any refresher courses.<sup>29</sup>

Andrew says the reaction out in the schools to the radio broadcast changed his thinking around how to get the message out to remote communities. He recalls visiting 13 schools one week and then making sure he relayed positive aspects of the schools on the radio that weekend. He heard back that in one village they were banging on the walls and cheering during the broadcast when they heard their school being spoken about in an encouraging way.

The Levicks also continued to do the radio broadcast, which was played after the local news and the shipping news at six o'clock every Wednesday night. Initially they started with a series on competency-based education talks but expanded it to doing interviews with local children, education officials and even the local police constable who was doing a lot of work in the schools.

## Linking with the Education SWAp and MEHRD

Nearing the end of their assignment Bruce and Gwen Levick were invited to make a presentation about their work on leadership and management to the MEHRD Annual Joint

Review in Honiara. Attending the meeting were the chief executives from all the provinces, the chief education officers, the directors of all the divisions, and the Permanent Secretary of Education. The feedback was extremely positive. Bruce believes many of the participants had heard their radio broadcasts and were open to learning more about what they were doing. It had struck a chord.

The 2009 Review of the SWAp in the Solomon Islands noted the concerns of people from each level of the sector over the length of time the SWAp has been in existence without significant impact at classroom level.<sup>30</sup> This viewpoint has been echoed by Andrew Sorensen and Bruce and Gwen Levick who witnessed isolated schools and ill-equipped school leaders struggling with incomprehensible budgets and lack of professional input. Both talk about policies written by experts from Australia and New Zealand being unworkable in rural Solomon Islands communities. They argue that you can't have an effective school development plan when even the basic reporting systems are not in place.

Bruce Levick says the intense interest at the Annual Joint Review in what he and Gwen were doing in Makira Ulawa was in part due to a growing awareness that lot of policy doesn't filter to the outer communities.

They have wonderful policy documents that go on for pages and pages and pages. Most of them have been written by some technical assistance [programme] that's come in from another country... It's all very good. If you could implement the whole lot of it you would have the best education systems in the world. But they haven't successfully narrowed down to putting it into effect in the country at all.<sup>31</sup>

A case in point is the provision of classrooms. As part of the Solomon Islands SWAp with NZAID the Primary School Storage Infrastructure Project (PSSIP) was launched in 2005. The project was the designing and building of two structures; storage, library and office building and a double classroom for primary schools. It was called a 'qualified success' in a review in 2007.<sup>32</sup> In 2009 Bruce and Gwen Levick reported buildings unfinished as communities, who were expected to do some of the work, hadn't bought into the project. An example was a school where the community were required to put the windows and shelving in so they had some ownership of the building. "[The building] still had gaping hole where the window should be two years after it was built and some of the books were lying on the floor, never been used," says Bruce.

The Levicks saw this as a direct result of poor school leadership where principals didn't have the relationship with the communities or were already busy with harvesting copra and coca crops in their plantations. Furthermore, there was the lack of follow up from the Education Authority.

Bruce says they aimed to get the Authority to visit each of the 70 schools in the province and they were close, stymied in by inhospitable waters of the ‘weather’ coast on the south of Makira. Bruce set out three times but never made it to the ten schools on the weather coast illustrating the difficulties of the geographical isolation of some schools in the Solomon Islands.

### Confidence and competence of Makira Ulawa Education Authority staff

Mylyn Kuve sees a place for VSA’s work in the provinces as mentors to provincial officials and school leaders. “Capacity is always an issue for us; the capacity in terms of staffing, the number of people in the office, and the capacity of knowledge and skills to carry out the duties. So the case with the Makira Education Authority is a good one.” Mylyn Kuve says there is value in VSA scaling its work up in the provinces, “not just helping with identifying the needs for training but overall planning of the provincial level –like being mentors to officials at the provincial level”.<sup>33</sup>

Bruce and Gwen Levick found themselves reluctantly helping with accounts for the Authority when the accountant was moved to Honiara. Because of problems with the financial systems they instituted regular financial reporting and emphasised monitoring and accountability for expenditure. Other areas where they contributed to on-going capacity building and institutional strengthening included:

- Modelling and application of leadership and management principles
- Weekly staff meeting re-introduced with agenda issued prior to meeting and minutes distributed promptly after
- Planning and budgeting strengthened
- Mentoring of CEO in addressing issues of concern to find long-term solutions
- Structured contact visits to nearly all schools undertaken with an agreed reporting and feedback format
- Teacher appraisal method reviewed and formalised
- Encouraging a wider perspective on education.<sup>34</sup>

### Summary of Findings

Andrew Sorensen identified a lack of leadership skills and planning skills at the grassroots of education and at the desk of the principal. He also saw the need for a handbook to give school leaders a structure to follow. The Levicks used the workshops to design, alongside

school leaders, an effective handbook which is now being used throughout the Makira Ulawa province.

Bruce Levick noted:

I think they all [provinces] have the same problems too. They are aware of the problems... The simplistic view is to say you could go over there two or three months, you could run a similar set of workshops for the principals, you could work a concentrated or focussed way with the education authority and perhaps modify in the way they do things. You could help them implement Contact visits that were meaningful and that wouldn't take two years to do. It would take two years to embed and to really be effective... But part of our success I think was the slow [pace], the river running over the stones; the softening things, the smoothing of edges, the gaining of respect and confidence in what we were doing, and then being happy to take on board what we were suggesting.

At a workshop for principals Bruce summarised his education philosophy by writing a quotation from W. B. Yeats on the whiteboard: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." Bruce wrote:

Being a head teacher or principal is a great profession – it has variety, responsibility, excitement. We are in the business of education. We make or break students. Will we light that flame or put it out with that pail of water by boring them and filling their heads with facts that they will probably forget anyway if they do not fit a context? We must take our school leaders forward with us. Inspectors are not there to catch the school leaders out, but to support them and make them better leaders.

# Chapter 4

## What were the lessons learnt from this research project?

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The purpose of undertaking a series of case studies of VSA programmes in the Pacific is to monitor and evaluate our work with the objective of developing an understanding of what works well and what is less effective. The aim is to learn from our successes, and from our failures. The real value of monitoring and evaluation is in applying that learning to improving the quality of development practice.

This case study, looking at VSA's changing role in education in the Solomon Islands, follows VSA's progression from a provider of volunteer teachers into one of leadership training and mentoring for better educational and organisational outcomes.

Six lessons have been drawn from the findings of this study.

### Lesson One

Traditional approaches to volunteering need to be regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant.

Many years of sending volunteer teachers to the Solomon Islands had not significantly improved education outcomes or decreased the number of untrained teachers. Worse still, following the ethnic tensions of 1999, the paralysis of government departments meant provinces like Makira Ulawa, where this case study is based, didn't receive funding and "were left to fend for themselves".<sup>36</sup> Remarkably most schools continued to run in some state, despite teachers not being paid, but the schools were greatly understaffed and under-resourced. Untrained teachers took up the slack and helped to keep things ticking over.

Not surprisingly the demand for VSA teachers was high, however the opportunity of anything remotely resembling skills training/transfer was almost unlikely as the New Zealanders were busy filling the huge gaps left by the situation. This set the whole programme of VSA's place in education in the Solomon Islands into sharp relief, and one volunteer living 'in' the picture was able to draw some strong conclusions.

Andrew Sorensen was a secondary school teacher with Santa Ana Community High School Makira Ulawa Province. He saw the energy of the unpaid, untrained teachers and he saw

an opportunity. In 2003 he put together a proposal and in May of 2004 he was appointed Teacher Training Programme Manager moving to the provincial education offices in Kirakira on Makira.

Andrew had seen the old way of providing skills was treading water and the only way to make progress was to formalise a training assignment. VSA listened to the people on the ground and to the Makira Ulawa Education Authority which could see the benefits in strengthening the provincial office.

Through Andrew's experiences and research in this role, and his counsel with the school leaders in the schools around Makira Ulawa and the Authority, he came up with an evolved assignment for those who were to follow. Bruce and Gwen Levick were appointed to roles as School Project Development Officers for the Makira Ulawa Education Authority in February 2009 as a result of that thinking.

Learning from assignments and then developing and growing those assignments is one way for our volunteers, and for VSA, to remain effective and relevant to our partners in developing countries.

## Lesson Two

Completing a detailed survey, undertaking a critical analysis, and presenting the results can shift thinking and lead to fresh approaches.

Andrew Sorensen's analysis of in-service teacher training needs uncovered a large number of 'untrained' teachers in the Makira Ulawa Province. He'd already discovered during his time on Santa Ana that these young people were "the glue holding the damn system together."<sup>36</sup>

Visits to each school and relationship-building formed an understanding of where the strengths and weaknesses were for the schools. He also identified uncertainty about standards. The analysis of these visits could inform policy for the Provincial Authority but also fed back into the schools themselves as a mirror of what was unfolding. The proposal for formalising training for untrained teachers therefore had an easy passage into reality as the proof was there – the research had been done.

Bruce and Gwen Levick's assignment was a direct result of the information from the schools themselves establishing there was a major problem around the lack of regular feedback and training, and confusion over standards. The Levicks continued the research that would inform them and the education community by collating examination results

and presenting them in formats the school principals could use to effectively see their school's performance as part of a larger picture.

Gwen and Bruce Levick's compilation, analysis and presentation of examination results became the catalyst for building respectful working relationship with the school leaders over the year in the form of interactive workshops. It provided a solid base for the discussion. From the workshops, principals were able to identify what information would be useful to have on hand to keep the schools up to standard. That information in turn fed into the School Teachers' Handbook that was produced by the Levicks and the Education Authority.

Volunteers are in a unique position, in the communities they are placed, of having a clear and unbiased professional standing as they come into their assignments. By adding to that stance research and critical analysis that informs them and the people they are working with, they may be in a position to help facilitate finding answers or a new way of looking at a long-entrenched problem. This will only be relevant in some assignments but is a tool worth VSA exploring further. It may also be relevant to strengthen volunteers' pre-departure briefing programme.

### Lesson Three

#### Volunteers are in a unique position to recognise and mobilise community strengths and assets

Andrew Sorensen's 'reframing' of untrained teachers as assets rather than liabilities led to formalised training and more reliable pay for these important members of the education community in Makira Ulawa province. It also meant the untrained teachers felt more valued.

The workshops led by Bruce and Gwen Levick also came from the same premise – 'we have the skills let's recognise them in ourselves and our students'. Unconsciously these three volunteers were doing in a small way what more and more academics are writing about. It comes under the label asset-based community development (ABCD), strength-based development, and post-development thinking.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) contested the focus by governments, donors and even the media was on 'problems' in challenging communities. The consequences of that, they said, was a needs-based approach which led to people seeing themselves as incapable and hopeless, and denied the wisdom of those communities (Mathias 2003). There is a whole body of work around ABCD and asset-mapping which may be a way of the future for development workers. However, just asking the question, "what have we got?" instead of "what do we need?" might be the difference in the way volunteers and their counterparts begin their conversation and where they end up.

## Lesson Four

### What is happening at the grass roots can inform high level planning

The introduction of the Education Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) in the Solomon Islands in 2004 followed a growing international movement since the mid 1990s of donor governments attempting to harmonise their aid while addressing issues across one sector in a developing country.

SWAps are seen as an alternative to long-used project-based funding which has come under increasing criticism for being uncoordinated, entirely led by donors and having no buy-in from the recipient countries. Even more damning, projects have often run parallel administrative systems that have “undermined rather than strengthened national capacities to plan and implement systems.” (West, 2004:7).

“SWAp is a wind of change – will you build shelters or will you build windmills?”<sup>37</sup> This was the concluding statement in a background paper on SWAps given to Education Ministers at the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat in Auckland in 2007. NZAID, the Government agency responsible for delivering New Zealand’s Official Development Assistance, has been working with development partners using SWAps since 2003 in line with its commitment to the Paris Declaration (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2009).

The use of the proverb above followed some optimistic but cautionary notes about how SWAps, which evolved in an African context out of large populations, ministries and numbers of development partner, were being adapted to the smaller populations and capacities of Pacific countries.

In Uganda, where one of the first Education SWAps was put in place, the impact of the SWAp has been reviewed at many levels. One such review points SWAps being conducted in the formal policy sphere in the language of technical rationality.

Connections need to be made to the experience of most teachers and pupils, and their communities, as it is to individuals, and the institutions they inhabit, that the tasks of realising reform ultimately fall. It is therefore not surprising that change can sometimes be slow or can generate suspicion or scepticism. (Ward et al, 2006:165)

Gwen and Bruce Levick’s presentation on leadership and management to the MEHRD Annual Joint Review in Honiara in 2009 was a way of feeding up to the policy makers in Honiara. Sometimes it is difficult for NGO programmes to fit into wider policy at the centre of the Ministry but, by keeping the channels open and the conversations happening, volunteers can be the conduit to understanding and change.

The development of the School Leaders' Handbook was informed by the needs expressed by teachers in remote schools. It evolved out of participatory workshops and the various sections were developed out of what the principals themselves saw as areas they needed to work on.

### Lesson Five

#### A centralised approach to development has a limited impact on a decentralised population

Anecdotal evidence, and VSA's work in Makira Ulawa Province, suggests that the Solomon Islands Education SWAp has had limited impact on teaching practice in remote schools. VSA's work in education in the Solomon Islands began before the NZAID sector wide approach (SWAp) was put into place in 2003. There is a clear feeling in the provinces that what happens in Honiara at MEHRD level takes a long time to filter down to the provinces. However policy changes do impact on what gets financed, who gets trained, what is expected and monitored, and long-term objectives.

The *Review of the Solomon Islands Education Sector Wide Approach Arrangement* (NZAID 2009) reported that there had been improvements in schools and classrooms as a result of programme initiatives like school grants, curriculum and teacher development "...all funded under the SWAp arrangement". However the report cautioned there was major concern being expressed "...by people at each level of the sector at the time of the SWAp has been in existence without significant impact at classroom level". The review also quotes Catherwood (2009:8) who noted that "a major weakness to date has been in implementing MEHRD policies and activities of the plan to make a practical difference 'at the chalk face'".

After six years of implementation the impact of the centrally-planned and driven SWAp on improving students' educational achievement and teachers' professional development was limited.

### Lesson Six

#### A small number of volunteers can have a significant impact if their efforts are well focussed

This case study demonstrates that three volunteers have been the catalysts for improving the approach to professional development in the Makira Ulawa Province. This is a very small sample but the evidence presented demonstrates the deep impact over a wide area of a small number of well-focussed, committed and hard- working volunteers.

The approach that was applied to one province in the Solomon Islands has the potential to be scaled up to other provinces and become accepted practice. The products of these

volunteer assignments (Handbook, training programmes, checklists etc.) are important outcomes, but the processes employed are equally important. Any replication of this work would require carefully planned processes. The 'lessons learnt' would be a good point of departure for planning further interventions in the Solomon Islands or elsewhere.

# Chapter 5

## Final comment and recommendations

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While this case study was being written a new volunteer took up his assignment as an Education Adviser with the Makira Ulawa Education Authority to continue and build on the work of the three volunteers featured in this study. Further requests have been received by VSA for other volunteers to work with provincial education staff to strengthen education leadership in other Solomon Island provinces.

These requests pre-empt the major recommendation of this study: that Volunteer Service Abroad continues to work with education authorities in the Solomon Islands to build on the lessons learnt in this study to strengthen in-service teacher training and the professional development and educational management skills and knowledge of senior education staff in the provinces of the Solomon Islands.

In conclusion, the writers wish to acknowledge with gratitude the many teachers (trained and untrained) throughout the Makira Ulawa Province, the school principals and head teachers, and the Education Authority staff who do their best each day to ensure that a fire for education is burning in the hearts of their students.

# Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Dr Peter Swain is VSA's Pacific Programme Manager, Adele Broadbent is Communications Coordinator. Alexa Funnell, whilst undertaking a Practicum from Victoria University, did some preliminary work on the case study.
- <sup>2</sup> Foreword to the Solomon Islands National Education Action Plan, 2007-2009. Dr Sikua wrote the foreword as Minister of Education, shortly after he became Prime Minister.
- <sup>3</sup> Professor Kabini Sanga, a Solomon Island educator based at Victoria University, reviewed a late draft of this report. He noted that "...the VSA story in Makira is a valuable one" and "this study makes a valuable contribution". Furthermore he suggested that "Sharing and learning from it further are essential." Professor Sanga also made some suggestions on how the report may be strengthened. His suggestions have been incorporated into the final draft. We thank Professor Sanga for the time he took to read the report and acknowledge his contribution to strengthening the final draft.
- <sup>4</sup> 'The crisis' refers to the civil conflict centered on Honiara between 1998 and 2003 (see McLean 2001, Fraenkel 2004.)
- <sup>5</sup> The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was an Australian-led military intervention force, endorsed by the Pacific Forum Leaders Meeting, that arrived in the country in mid-2003 at the request of the Solomon Islands government and quickly disarmed the rival indigenous militia groups.
- <sup>6</sup> See, for examples: Laracy (1989) and Crocombe and Tuza (1992).
- <sup>7</sup> This figure includes all primary, secondary and provincial schools in the Makira Ulawa Province.
- <sup>8</sup> The term 'teachers in training' (unfortunately referred to by the acronym TITs) is used as a euphemism in Makira Ulawa Education Authority documents to refer to 'teachers' with no formal training or teaching qualifications, in contrast to the smaller number of trained and qualified Teachers in the Province. Frequently untrained teachers are also unpaid.
- <sup>9</sup> See MEHRD: ESIRP, ESP 2004-2006, ESF 2007-2015, and NEAP 2007-2009.
- <sup>10</sup> See VSA 2009. Solomon Island Country Plan
- <sup>11</sup> All text in quotations marks is taken directly from the volunteer's assignment reports. Copies of all volunteers' quotes cited in this case study are held in the Solomon Island Case Study Archive
- <sup>12</sup> This volunteer and the following two have been identified as they have been extensively interviewed for this Case Study.
- <sup>13</sup> AS1 -Andrew Sorensen report 'The Untrained Teacher' (2006).

- <sup>14</sup> AS4 –A Sorensen transcript 1 (interview ).
- <sup>15</sup> AS1
- <sup>16</sup> AS1
- <sup>17</sup> M Kuve transcript of interview
- <sup>18</sup> AS4
- <sup>19</sup> Assignment report (A3) 6 January 2010
- <sup>20</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>21</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>22</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>23</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>24</sup> Assignment report (A3) 6 January 2010
- <sup>25</sup> Appendix to assignment report (A3) 6 January 2010
- <sup>26</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>27</sup> Appendix to assignment report (A3) 6 January 2010
- <sup>28</sup> AS4
- <sup>29</sup> Mylyn Kuve transcript from interview
- <sup>30</sup> Review of the Solomon Islands Education Sector Wide Approach Arrangement, E Pedersen & E Cox (2009).
- <sup>31</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>32</sup> <http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/what-we-do/review-and-evaluation-report-summaries/review-and-evaluation-report-summary-eva0703sum.html>
- <sup>33</sup> MKuve transcript of interview
- <sup>34</sup> From Assignment Report three (A3) 2010
- <sup>35</sup> Bruce and Gwen Levick interview transcript
- <sup>36</sup> AS4 –ASorensen transcript 1 (interview ).
- <sup>37</sup> “When strong winds blow changes, some people build shelters and some people build windmills” Chinese proverb

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