

Is There a Better Way to Teach Theology to Non-Western Persons? Research from Papua New Guinea that Could Benefit the Wider Pacific

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Abstract: *One issue that creates many problems for theological educational training in the Pacific Islands is the imposition of a Western model of education. What transpires is that learning is often hampered and hindered by the wide cultural gaps between a Western style lecture/lecturer and an Island style communal reciprocal approach. In many ways the Islander's approach is much like an apprenticeship. Learning takes place by observation, imitation, listening and participating. Questions are not often raised, and if they are, it is never as a first option. What is presented here is a way of thinking about how to maintain the quality of education, but tie it more closely to the island participants.*

Four years of research from 2005 to the end of 2008 were devoted to studying better and more efficient ways of teaching theology to Papua New Guinea (PNG) students within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG (ELCPNG). This research was done while one of the authors, Gwayaweng Kiki, PNG citizen, ordained Lutheran pastor, and trained school teacher lived on campus at Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. The study was internationalised by virtue of the fact that his principal supervisor was resident in Australia, and Kiki was studying for a degree in an Australian University.¹ The contact with the supervisor was undertaken in three ways: by annual visits to Australia, by the use of airmail postage and by email, some 300 to 400 email contacts were made over a four year period.

This research functioned in three ways. The first was the “identification and exposition of the problem of an institutionalized approach to theological education training.” Of particular importance was an analysis of the present teaching and learning methodologies being used in the training of Lutheran Church pastors in PNG. Second, was “praxis and cross-cultural learning,” that gave ways of knowing and learning as used by non-Western oriented persons. In this regard writers such as Paulo Freire,² Thomas

¹ Published as Gwayaweng Kiki, *Wokabaut-Karikulum: A Community Praxis for Theological Education Training in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea* (Koln, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009).

² See Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*, preface by Jao da Veiga Coutinho (Middlesex: Penguin Education, 1974), and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, new rev. 20th-ann. ed. Trans. by Myra Bergman (Ramos, New York: Continuum, 1997).

Groome,³ Earl & Dorothy Bowen,⁴ James Plueddemann⁵ were considered. Third, a *Tok Pisin* “concept,” set forth a description of what really is entailed in the terminology used for the title that emphasises what in fact is connoted by the words “*wokabaut-karikulum*”. In this regard, non-indigenous theorists of education, teaching, and curriculum were considered along with indigenous Melanesian scholars of culture, religion and theology. Their insights regarding Melanesian epistemological systems were important. On the community scale, students/teachers “interact” with congregations and “interface” with communal/social “structures or networks and set the parameter” for *wokabaut-karikulum* “to result in distinct” PNG Melanesian learning “experiences” to borrow Pazmino’s words, in which knowing becomes a process of engaging the place, i.e. the community.⁶

The aim in this paper is to translate praxis as a way of knowing into a PNG cross-cultural learning context. Attention to shared process presupposes that PNG epistemology has the capacity to adapt to theological education training. The following themes will be presented: Praxis and cultural forms of learning; a dialogue; the nature of knowing in a Melanesian context; shared praxis in a theological education training context; the concept of *wokabaut-karikulum*, a Papua New Guinean way of knowing and learning; and constitutive components of that community praxis for theological education training.

The “Point Series” articles and writers have contributed to the study of the PNG Melanesian worldview, religion, culture and theology.⁷ There is a growing awareness amongst both expatriate and local indigenous clergy and lay theologians (academics and/or theological educators) as well as general church workers in PNG of the significance of this growing body of knowledge. This is highlighted in this quote: “the relationship between ministry and the Melanesian context ... challenges the church worker with the dangers and possibilities of a serious dialogue with the Melanesian context.”⁸

PRAXIS AND CULTURAL FORMS OF LEARNING: A DIALOGUE

Generally, in recent years, there is a growing consciousness among Pacific Island theologians and educationists for doing both theology and education in a different way. In practice this starts with the people’s own culture, experiences, and is more practical in its orientation in midst of the continual challenge of globalization on political and social

³ See Thomas H. Groome, “Shared Christian Praxis: A Possible Theory/Method for Christian Education,” *Lumen Vitae* 31 (1976):186-208. Also *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980); *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry-The Way of Shared Praxis* (New York: HarperSan-Francisco, 1991); and *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Allen, Texas: Thomas More, 1998).

⁴ See Earl Bowen and Dorothy Bowen. “What Does It Mean To Think, Learn, Teach?” in *Internationalizing Missionary Training: A Global Perspective*, ed. William David Taylor (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1991) 202-214.

⁵ See James E. Plueddemann, “Culture, Learning and Missionary Training,” in *Internationalizing Missionary Training: A Global Perspective* 217-229.

⁶ Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1990) 172-173.

⁷ See Darrell L. Whiteman, “Melanesian Religions: An Overview,” in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, ed. Ennio Mantovani, no. 6. (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984) 87-122. Also Ennio Mantovani, “What is Religion,” in *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, no. 6, 23-48, and Brian Schwarz, ed., *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia*, no. 7 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1985).

⁸ Back cover comment, Mantovani, see n.7 above.

systems, economy, culture and faith of the Pacific people.⁹ A growing interest has sprung up to refashion indigenous epistemologies.¹⁰ It has resurfaced amongst Pacific academics and politicians in the region at large. It is worth noting one such view of Ratu Joni Mairaiwiwi, (ousted Vice President of the Republic of Fiji, during the military coup in 2006). Ratu Mairaiwiwi (speaking at the opening of the first Pacific Epistemological Conference at the University of the South Pacific in July, 2006) said:

There is no doubt that the Pacific people need the tools of Western education to be able to compete on equal terms with the world beyond their shores ... the danger was that there were no similar structured forms to immerse them in their own cultural and customary contexts as a countervailing influence. "Unless we collectively commit ourselves in reconstructing or refashioning our own epistemology, the risk is that others will define us" ... In stating this, I mean no disrespect to the enormous body of work that has already been found by the people from outside the region. They are owed a debt of gratitude. However, it is time for us to reclaim our knowledge for ourselves ... the achievement of defining a person was a sense of autonomy and self-assuredness that accompanied the ability to discern patterns of the past, present and future ... "The debate about Pacific epistemologies is largely carried on in English. Universal language it may well be, but it does very little for the survival and enhancement of our own languages." Much more needs to be done in this regard. There are practical problems associated with the lack of resources. But far more worrying is the absence of the political will to do anything about it.¹¹

Seen in this light, there is a growing consciousness for the need/necessity of PNG and the Pacific educational systems to be firmly grounded in the local/indigenous cultures and values. Education in this setting would need to be seen as a holistic and integrated pattern that "should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation both to contents and methods."¹²

What is needed is the development of a PNG epistemology that deals with the acquisition of knowledge that can be also used for formal schooling. This, therefore,

⁹ See, for example, Mikaele Paunga, "Dreaming the land (Ocean): Resistance and hope in Pacific Islands Practical Theology," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 5 (2005): accessed 07 March 2006: available from http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_5/practheol_paunga.htm; Judith E. Mckinlay, "What do I do with Contexts? A Brief Reflection on Reading Biblical Texts with Israel and Aotearoa New Zealand in Mind," *Pacifica* 14 (June 2001): 159-171; Philip Gibbs, "Resistance and Hope in a Theology of Land for Papua New Guinea," *Australian eJournal of Theology* 5 (2005): accessed 07 March 2006: available from http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_5/practheol_gibbs.htm. See also Konai Helu Thaman, "Different Eyes: Schooling and Indigenous Education in Tonga," in *Education, Cultures, and Economics: Dilemmas for Development*, eds. Leach Fiona E. and Angela W. Little (London: Falmer Press, 1999) 69-77; idem, "Toward a New Pedagogy: Pacific Culture in Higher Education," in *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education*, eds. G. R. Teasdale, and Zane Ma Rhea (Pergamon: IAU Press, 2000) 43-50; Michael A. Mel, "Indigenization of Trainee Teachers in Papua New Guinea," in *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education*, eds. G. R. Teasdale, and Zane Ma Rhea (Pergamon: IAU Press, 2000) 15-32; Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, *Knowing and Learning: An Indigenous Fijian Approach* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 2006) 61-63.

¹⁰ See for example, Thaman, "Different Eyes"; Mel, "Indigenization of Trainee Teachers"; Nabobo-Baba, *Knowing and Learning*.

¹¹ *The Fiji Times*, Suva, 5th July 2006.

¹² J. Delors (Chair), *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of its International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (Paris: UNESCO, 1996) 37, quoting Priscilla Puamau, "Heart, Soul and Spirit Knowledge in Pacific Schools: The Spirit Dimension of Schooling," paper presented at the Pacific Epistemologies Conference (USP, Suva, July 3-7, 2006, photocopied): 1. See also Mahendra Singh, ed., *Pacific Pride: The News Letter of the Pride Project* (Suva: Institute of Education, The University of the South Pacific), 4 (October 2005): 3-4.

implies that to develop an alternative approach to theological educational training in PNG there needs to be an exploration of culturally relevant methods that would be suitable for a seminary setting in ELCPNG institutions. Anthropology studies show that culture is an important influence/issue on how people learn in terms of communicating cross-culturally. Seminaries should adopt socio-cultural contexts that meet the needs of the students and the communities that provide these students. These ways should be adopted and adapted to ways of undertaking pastoral care, pastoral ministry and pastoral training. For this to take place effectively there has to be continuing dialogue. Such dialogue is invaluable for identifying and accepting cultural forms which are useful for teaching and learning. It is at this critical point that the present article takes its stance and seeks to address the cultural gap clearly evident in ELCPNG theological educational training, between classical formal learning processes that often stand over and against a national language concept that the people in PNG use. Thus, we seek to produce an approach that is praxis oriented, practical in nature, undergirded by sound theory and written well enough to challenge theological educators, both Western expatriates and Papua New Guineans including those from the Pacific. Again, it is encapsulated in the very title *Wokabaut-Karikulum*.

Any theory and practice of learning relating to the educational functions of teaching and learning, which treat epistemology as independent of ontology have misconceived the religio-cultural nature of PNG Melanesian ways of knowing and learning. PNG religion, culture and theology, are built upon a Melanesian (traditional tribal) worldview that is cosmic, and in which everything, including deities, spirits, animals, humans, plants and natural phenomena are linked together into a cosmos. In other words, it is the unity in which everything exists together in an inextricable mix, cementing the natural and supernatural world together into a single system, an ordered whole without which nothing can exist. The deep-felt value called "life," as seen in this Melanesian reality, is a religious experience, a biocosmic religious experience for Melanesians where both biological existence and cosmic renewal stand together. PNG Melanesian life is an interrelated experience, in which religious and non-religious experiences are not differentiated.¹³ Such a world view shapes their perception of reality and one that implies that knowing and existence or knowing and being are interrelated; an integrated whole for knowing that has a holistic outlook on life.¹⁴

The central interest is toward "understanding the environment so that one is able to interact with it."¹⁵ It would seem, however, that this view of human knowledge and its epistemological expression in the PNG Melanesian society is interpreted as constituting what Jürgen Habermas¹⁶ calls "Practical Interest," and an action that arises from this interest is "interaction." Habermas explains it the following way:

By interaction ... I understand Communicative action, symbolic interaction. It is governed by binding consensual norms, which define reciprocal expectations of

¹³ See G. W. Trompf, "Man Facing Death and After-Life in Melanesia," in *Powers, Plumes and Piglets: Phenomena of Melanesian Religion*, ed. Norman C. Habel (The Australian Association for the Study of Religions, South Australia, 1983).

¹⁴ See Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

¹⁵ Shirley Grundy, *Curriculum: Product or Praxis* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993) 13.

¹⁶ See Jürgen Habermas, *Towards a Rational Society* (London: Heinemann, 1971) 92.

behaviour, and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects.¹⁷

Habermas identifies three basic cognitive interests that he proposes as three approaches to knowledge. “These interests constitute three types of science by which knowledge is generated and organized in our society.”¹⁸ Robert Pazmino reiterates Habermas this way:

(1) the approach of the empirical-analytical science, which incorporates a technical, cognitive interest and yields information; (2) the approach of the historical-hermeneutical sciences, which incorporates a practical interest and yields interpretations, and (3) the approach of the critical oriented science, which incorporates an emancipatory interest and yields analyses.¹⁹

These three ways of knowing tend to work with a dialectical tension. Pazmino further expresses these three approaches as: “(1) information that expands one’s technical control (2) interpretations that make possible the orientation of action within common traditions, and (3) analyses that free consciousness from its dependence on hypostatized powers.”²⁰

Clement puts it this way, “knowing arises from the engagement of persons with their personal, sociopolitical, physical and spiritual environments.”²¹ Pazmino expresses a similar idea in the sense of Freire’s praxis interest, that is, he “maintains that persons can never be understood apart from their relationships with the world through thought-language. For Freire reality implies constant interaction between persons as thinking subjects and history and culture.”²²

Hence, the PNG Melanesian knowledge of life is both an epistemological and ontological experience, as Groome would call it, an “epistemic-ontology,” for there is no separation of epistemology and ontology or knowing and existence. Life is a unity of epistemology and ontology, knowing and being, that is, it involves not only knowing, and not only doing but also being. Thus the move toward understanding and deliberation becomes a moral and or religious process motivated by a practical interest into taking the right action within a particular environment. It is an ontological activity in the sense of “practical action” as “practical interest.” This interest is “grounded in the fundamental need of the human species to live in and as part of the world, not to be, as it were, in competition with the environment for survival.”²³ This type of practical approach to knowing leans more toward a PNG Melanesian empirical epistemology in which knowledge arises from concrete experience of life rather than philosophically.

There is a difference between learning a body of knowledge and experiencing a method of facing life. Lawrence Stenhouse distinguishes between initiating one into the

¹⁷ Ibid. 92.

¹⁸ Grundy, *Product or Praxis* 10.

¹⁹ Pazmino, *Foundational Issues* 161-162.

²⁰ Ibid. 162.

²¹ Neville David Clement, “A Praxis Approach to Learning: Epistemological Implications for Religious Education in a Christian Context,” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Newcastle, 2004) 330.

²² Pazmino, *Foundational Issues* 162.

²³ Grundy, *Product or Praxis* 13.

social values and norms of the society and inducting one into the thought systems or knowledge of that culture.²⁴ It goes without saying that this type of approach to learning is holistic. Therefore, as mentioned above, knowing in the PNG tradition exhibits a unity and is a way of life to be lived not a series of facts to be learned.

KNOWING AND RELATIONSHIP

In the biblical tradition, Groome expresses that knowing involves “‘knowing the Lord’ as an activity in which God takes the initiative,”²⁵ and “God reaching out calls for a response of the total person, an entering into relationship with God.”²⁶ In one sense, knowing in the PNG tradition is parallel to the biblical tradition for it involves “relationship”. Seen in this light, one could say that religiously, PNG Melanesian people are “beings of praxis” and their religious epistemology achieves concrete expression in lived experience in the community. Hence, to know life “is a dynamic, experiential, relational activity involving the whole person and finding expression in lived response.”²⁷ For naturally, “relation is reciprocity.”²⁸ Only in community and relationship can one become human, a knowing being and only in interacting as a participating member of a people can one become who one is. Moreover, knowledge is ranked under community, an idealized PNG Melanesian cultural value and social order of human relationships because without community and relationships, it is worthless. Knowledge is grounded in community and leads to right action or practical action. Significantly, “words do not suffice; actions must take place”;²⁹ in the passing on of knowledge. Thus to bring interpretation to bear on “exchange” is a concrete action, i.e. “a reciprocal giving and receiving, expression of a relationship”.³⁰ Community is the only way life is built. In fact, the communal social and cultural context of reciprocity expresses a fundamental principle of knowing and relationship. Stenhouse observes that knowledge is socially constructed or constituted, and that “sociology of knowledge, then, does not deal with tests of truth, but its perspective implies a relativism of truth”;³¹ it can be judged only in relation to other things such as one’s personal situation. PNG Melanesian knowledge is not concerned with metaphysical absolutes buttressed by philosophy. Clement would say that a praxis way of knowing “is dependent on cognitive processes, and thereby constructivist ... both epistemologically and sociologically.”³² But if the concept of praxis is suggestive of constructivism both epistemologically and socially, in terms of praxis in general, and in particular of Groome’s shared praxis, then it is not opposed to relational characteristics of knowing in the PNG tradition.

²⁴ Lawrence Stenhouse, *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (London: Heinemann, 1976) 80.

²⁵ Groome, *Christian Religious Education* 141.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 141.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 144

²⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1970) 67.

²⁹ Ennio Mantovani, “Traditional Values and Ethics,” in *An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures*, ed. Darrell Whiteman, point no. 5 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1995) 204.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 204.

³¹ Stenhouse, *Introduction to Curriculum Research* 14-25 and cited in Grundy, *Product or Praxis* 159.

³² Clement, “Praxis Approach” 378.

SHARED PRAXIS AND WOKABAUT-KARIKULUM IN A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TRAINING CONTEXT

The notion of *wokabaut-karikulum* as a relationally-shared approach to learning is characteristic of the unity between knowing and being. This is also observed in the sense that “the individual is a totality rather than a being composed of body and mind, knowledge is an activity in which the whole individual is engaged.”³³ It is possible to view knowledge as a union with the person and community in order for knowledge to exist and be socially distributed. It embraces group dynamics of learning and knowing of what Groome calls “partnership, participation and dialogue”.³⁴ This is premised on the epistemological grounds of the convergence between ways of knowing in Freire’s liberation praxis and Groome’s shared Christian praxis approach. In this sense, both Freire and Groome use praxis to influence curriculum theory. For example, Freire’s, “critical consciousness-raising praxis approach”³⁵ begins not simply with present practice and reflection, but with community patterns that he calls life themes that come out of the actual experience of people, in particular, experience of oppression. The real reason for Freire’s process of education is to free people from their oppressed conscience, as Groome puts it, “Freire argues that education is to be an exercise in freedom. Promoting critical consciousness (‘conscientization’) that disposes people to act and arises from reflection on their historical experience ... is essential to his praxis approach.”³⁶ The point is that Freire’s educational praxis takes place in a situation of group dynamics, of human relationships, in dialogue which makes one a conscious being; who exists in a dialectic relationship with others and with the world; who “engage in critical thinking – thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action.”³⁷ For Groome, Christian education is the sharing of life lived in light of the Christian tradition. This is evident in the word “shared” as one of “partnership, participation, and dialogue”³⁸ and is “integral to the group dynamics of shared praxis.”³⁹ These are the “three communal aspects [that] the approach encourages participants” to act in faith, hope, and love “within the very teaching/learning community itself.”⁴⁰ According to Groome, “shared praxis takes place in a situation of group dialogue”⁴¹ in which “sharing in dialogue certainly contributes to building such a community.”⁴² The endeavour to adapt and translate the general concept of praxis into the PNG epistemological context lies somewhat close to Groome’s notion of praxis. He writes:

I indicated that to engage people’s “present praxis” in a pedagogical event is to turn them to the consciousness that emerges from and the agency expressed in their whole way of “being” as “agent-subjects-in-relationship” in place and time, that is, to reflect on

³³ Pazmino, *Foundational Issues* 164.

³⁴ Groome, *Comprehensive Approach* 142-145.

³⁵ Groome, *Christian Religious Education* 175.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 175.

³⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 73.

³⁸ Groome, *Comprehensive Approach* 142.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 144.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 144.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 184.

⁴² *Ibid.* 188.

whatever is “being done” by them, from them, through them, and is “going on” around them, to them, and to others in their sociocultural context⁴³

Mutuality is synonymous with the communal dynamics of relationship and is present in the teaching/learning event. First, it is a mutuality of partnership in which “one experiences oneself ... as an agent-subjects-in relationship responsible for one’s own and others” learning and sees other members as ... to whom and with whom one is responsible for the teaching and learning event.”⁴⁴ The consequence is that “partnership moves away from dependency”⁴⁵ in learning. Also (second), it is a mutuality of participation that seeks “to encourage people to express, reflect, encounter, appropriate, and make decisions, while respecting each person’s participative style.”⁴⁶ The consequence is that “participation moves away from passivity.”⁴⁷ Third, mutuality of dialogue fosters “dialogue and conversation with oneself, with others, and with God.”⁴⁸ The consequence is that it affirms self and others and promotes self-reflection. Fourth, it includes a dialectic hermeneutics which is present throughout the shared Christian praxis approach, “in that it brings participants to interpret both present praxis and Christian Story/Vision.”⁴⁹

Learning in the PNG Melanesian society is group oriented and involves group dynamics where cultural preference may contrast considerably with a typical Western value. Groome says that “shared praxis invites people to hermeneutics that are critical in a dialectic sense of their own and of their society’s praxis.”⁵⁰ *Wokabaut-karikulum* suggests that learning should interchange between the seminary classroom and the Christian community. However, Groome’s shared Christian praxis focuses on a group of Christians sharing in dialogue as a microcosm of the Christian community, that is, “to build a Christian community within the group.”⁵¹ In applying a praxis approach to theological education training in the PNG context, this paper supports the statement of Clement:

the notion of praxis is not necessarily dependent on any specific philosophical ideology but, rather, praxis is a general notion adapted to particular ideological contexts ... As the analysis of Groome demonstrates, theology has the capacity to adapt the concept of praxis to religious education in a Christian context.⁵²

PNG epistemology as it operates within *wokabaut-karikulum* works with the concept that these learning procedures are socially constructed. Critical theory or “critical theorems”⁵³ can be used to reconstruct the PNG way of knowing and its credibility can be tested in light of the general notion of praxis. To put in Grundy’s words, this is to “comprehend that there are explanations for the ways in which [the PNG Melanesian people] are experiencing education other than the “natural” explanations which have

⁴³ Ibid. 135.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 142.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 144.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 144.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 144.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 144.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 145.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 145.

⁵¹ Ibid. 188.

⁵² Clement, “Praxis Approach” 378.

⁵³ Grundy, *Product or Praxis* 111-112.

always been accepted.”⁵⁴ This represents a potential for “enlightenment and emancipation.”⁵⁵ Emancipation in this sense is reflective, responsible but autonomous action that is recognized collectively as a group and not as individual autonomous action. “Thus emancipatory interest is empowerment for groups of people to engage in autonomous action.”⁵⁶ The principles of emancipatory interest constitute elements of praxis, and apply to curriculum. The essential elements of praxis have to inform curriculum practice in theological education training.

The process of a relational/experiential knowing demonstrates community in relationship. Thus community relationship has the capacity to adapt/adopt the concept of praxis to theological education training in a PNG cross-cultural context. To this end, Groome made a relevant statement for his shared process of praxis that “Christian religious educators are educating for faith identity/agency that is radically communal, and our pedagogy should be likely to promote our purpose.”⁵⁷ Thus the theological curriculum and pedagogy should reflect this reality.

KNOWING AND COMMUNITY

The principal part of the PNG Melanesian learning system consists in engaging the “place,” in community, where the learner is shaped, realized and continues to become. If the Melanesian worldview centres on life and correctly describes it as an integrated whole that finds expression in community, and if community is a relationship of people, then the knowledge of life is passed on to people through meaningful relationships in which collaboration is desirable for mutual support of the community’s wellbeing. This has to be seen as a dialogical relationship in which a system of shared meanings and interpretations is formed within the community for the wellbeing of the community. The wellbeing of the community means good relationships and sharing, a relationship that functions dialogically, hence reciprocating in the action of giving and receiving. Learning is “people-oriented as contrasted to task-oriented ... [in which] to build interpersonal relationships, and to meet the needs of others.” It is obvious from this discussion that theological educators have to articulate the desirable features of community (such as group work) in classroom learning. Notice this quotation:

If the teacher works towards a sense of community, it might appear difficult to create an atmosphere conducive to the free expression of ideas, the development of a self-concept and respect for the rights of others to hold values, when the social context is centred in individual achievement.⁵⁸

It is essential for theological educators to understand the sociology of classroom learning in order to be aware of the social factors impinging upon such learning. “The social dimension appears particularly important among learners to whom acceptance by peers is important.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid. 112.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 112-113.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 113-114.

⁵⁷ Groome, *Comprehensive Approach* 142.

⁵⁸ Grundy, *Product or Praxis* 164.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 164.

Horsburgh, speaking to the PNG context on a theological curriculum for the whole person alluded to the point that generally, the pattern in enrolling students for theological training for ministry in PNG (or Melanesia) today is that they come to their training as already formed adults, already formed by their community, often married with children.⁶⁰ Naturally, this provides a relationship between students' experience and "insight into real-life issues and learning theories,"⁶¹ "a more experiential and problem-centred learning approach."⁶² If the banking/depositing of ideas dominates teaching and learning, then "the participants may be regarded as instruments, rather than the agents of change. The relationship between the teacher and student will become an "I-It" relationship (to use Buber's phrase⁶³) where persons become objects or tools to be utilized in the realization of a goal."⁶⁴ The dangers resulting from such a learning style may include "forgetting about the service character of the task they are trained for."⁶⁵ On the other hand, a learning approach which ignores theoretical development of the learner's knowledge may result in teaching the practical how-to-do-it techniques merely as a bag of tricks for ministry but cannot result in effectively solving complicated problems. The dangers resulting from such learning style may include "inadequately equipping leaders [ministers or ordained pastors] to direct the congregation in a theologically well reflected manner."⁶⁶

Wokabaut-karikulum speaks the language of a theological curriculum for the whole person while knowledge-oriented pedagogies often bypass the "personal, interpersonal, and social levels."⁶⁷ Such an orientation ignores the obligations of relationship within PNG society.

KNOWING AND SELF

In the PNG Melanesian society and way of life, knowing and self is realised in one's relationship to others: Horsburgh writes:

In pastoral care, the same is true. All the activity comes through the person of the priest or minister. A curriculum which treats of the whole person cannot limit itself to a theoretical knowledge of how to perform ritual acts or of what is important in pastoral relationships. It must expose the student to an actual encounter on which the student can reflect and through which the student can learn.⁶⁸

Wokabaut-karikulum fosters the human relationships and obligations, and seeks by this integration to develop the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual components—Buber says that "in relationships through which we live, the innate You is realized in the

⁶⁰ Michael Horsburgh, "A Theological Curriculum for the Whole Person." *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8/2 (1992): 7-17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 13.

⁶² *Ibid.* 15.

⁶³ See Buber, *I and Thou*.

⁶⁴ Grundy, *Product or Praxis* 150.

⁶⁵ Kurt Riecke, "Why are Changes so Difficult to Make?" *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 23/1 (1993):17-38 at 24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 24.

⁶⁷ Groome, *Religious Education* 184-185.

⁶⁸ Horsburgh, "Theological Curriculum" 14.

You we encounter; that this is comprehended as a being we confront.”⁶⁹ *Wokabaut-karikulum* gives appropriate recognition to both the use/function of the self and to human relationships, thus “providing more chances for an integrated growth of knowledge, pastoral skills and personality.”⁷⁰ It does not separate the physical and emotional self and devote its attention exclusively either to the mind or the heart in learning. It includes in its scope the whole range of the self in the task of learning, and reaches to people and community with its norms, laws, expectations, structures, and traditions which give order to human relationships, thus making learning interactions concrete and tangible. Thus community shapes one’s perception and meaning—one’s self.

KNOWING AND THE CHANGING CONTEXT

Generally, “the community in which we live defines, to a great extent, what we will perceive.”⁷¹ That is to say, “much of the time, we live in an orderly world, drawing on past clues to replicate meaning as we walk through life. When these ordinary clues do not work, the process of meaning-making and discovery is made apparent.”⁷² In this sense, new experiences are reviewed drawing “upon our past knowledge to make interpretations that help us choose the dimensions of a new experience to which we will attend.”⁷³ “Coping with these changes includes the ability to adjust oneself to new situations. That has to be learnt, so that it can become a basic attitude of life,”⁷⁴ and where good relationships between educators, students and the congregations transpire. This point in relation to church as an agent of change has been widely discussed through the years by writers of Melanesian religion, culture and theology. For example: “the minister is first of all challenged to discover this life concept (of the people) and its theological implications. Secondly, he has to enter into a meaningful dialogue with his congregation, talking with them about their aspirations, their concerns, and their solutions.”⁷⁵

This would imply keeping a close contact with colleagues, with interdisciplinary teaching, and with community, in order to keep up with all the new information and findings and issues challenged by the biblical message. These issues (social, political and/or economic) “have to be brought up, so that the challenge of Christian teaching is not watered down.”⁷⁶ They are able to reflect and evaluate daily-life situations and give competent counsel and guidance, especially in view of the rapid changes taking place in PNG.

WOKABAUT-KARIKULUM: A PAPUA NEW GUINEAN WAY OF KNOWING AND LEARNING

It is not possible to think about the PNG Melanesian knowledge as a system of propositional truth but as experiences conceived of as everyday realities. Reinhard Tietze

⁶⁹ Buber, *I and Thou* 78.

⁷⁰ Riecke, “Changes so Difficult” 32-33.

⁷¹ Jack L. Seymour, Margaret Ann Crain, and Joseph V. Crockett. *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning, Learning, and Vocation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 42.

⁷² *Ibid.* 43.

⁷³ Mezirow quoted by Seymour, Crain & Crockett, *Educating Christians* 43.

⁷⁴ Riecke, “Changes so Difficult” 22.

⁷⁵ Ahrens quoted by Riecke, “Changes so Difficult” 23.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 28.

in a study on “Ministry for Development,” concentrating on rural development and education, says that PNG needs a holistic approach to development “aimed at meeting the full range of human needs and improving the total life of people.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, he says:

Melanesians have always viewed life holistically, and, despite a desire for money, are able to appreciate that a much wider kind of growth other than growth in income is needed. There is a deep need to raise awareness about development that is concerned with the whole person, the whole society, the whole of life. This awareness-raising is urgently required in all levels of government, in churches, in parishes, congregations and communities, in short, in the whole nation. Unless this holistic understanding of development becomes widespread, Papua New Guinea will continue to be burdened by developmental approaches which are not only irrelevant to the needs of the vast rural majority, but are ultimately harmful to the people and the nation.⁷⁸

Importantly, *wokabaut-karikulum* is not a new drive to provide an alternative to theological education. Really, *wokabaut-karikulum* attempts to rekindle the historical steps already taken in the Lutheran church of PNG from its humble beginnings. If one can make this re-connection, then, structures in theological educational training today can become dynamic and result in the first steps back to PNG ways of learning. The evidence is written clearly in the Lutheran missionary movements from the 1900s onwards. The development of indigenous and/or PNG Melanesian forms of theological, liturgical, and congregational life were clearly apparent within the work of these early missionaries. The early missionaries basically accepted the idea that theological education training for pastoral ministry would need to develop its own form and character – that of an indigenous training and ministry. Hence there developed within the earlier missionary movement, and growing out of a concept of the multiple ministries, the practical concept of “the elder, the teacher-preacher, the evangelist,”⁷⁹ with emphasis on shared congregational responsibilities. As apparent sophistication came about, it was accompanied by many new developments from the 1970s onwards, and this brought about major changes in the pathways of theological education. Erickson,⁸⁰ Riecke,⁸¹ and Schiller⁸² in particular saw clearly the problems and called for remodelling of the seminary training programs along PNG lines of thinking and learning. But this call for reformation-action with its indigenous approaches to seminary training fell largely on deaf ears. Generally, during the early Lutheran missionary movement, positive discussions and attitudes toward the development of an indigenous Lutheran church in PNG are clearly evident. Kemung affirms this, as well as promoting the Melanesian idea of *nareng-gareng* (i.e. receiving-giving) as the principle for mission in the ELCPNG:

It can be said that the historical development of the church provides evidence which shows that efforts were made to help the church grow as a Melanesian church. Schools were run in local vernaculars. Besides that, songs and prayers were developed in local languages. Increasingly, spiritual responsibilities were being handed to the local congregations under the lay leadership from witnessing to the congregations ... They

⁷⁷ Reinhard Tietze, “Ministering for Development,” in *An Introduction to Ministry in Melanesia*, ed. Brian Schwarz, Point no. 7 (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1985) 269-270.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 269-270.

⁷⁹ Herwig Wagner and Hermann Reiner, eds. *The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea: The First Hundred Years 1886-1986* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1986) 383-388.

⁸⁰ A. Erickson, A. “Search for Alternatives,” *Catalyst: Social Pastoral Journal for Melanesia* 4/3 (1974): 53-58.

⁸¹ Riecke, “Changes so Difficult.”

⁸² Greg Schiller, “Cultural Anthropology, Teaching Methodology and Theological Education.” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 15/1 (1999): 55-71.

also practiced *nareng-gareng* within congregations, between the congregations and the schools and between the congregations and their mission areas.⁸³

Kemung affirms in 1998 that “visitation was the method of missionary work and church growth used by the early missionaries”⁸⁴ and even today the significance of this method is seen in congregational ministries. He further makes an important statement which applies here directly to the purpose of *wokabaut-karikulum*:

Church leaders, especially those on the circuit and congregational levels, want to apply that method of work. Almost everyone, including academics, theologians and missionaries agree on the importance of that method. The only people who have not yet recognized the importance of this method are the pastors of the church. This indicates that the theological institutions of the church need to work more on the area of contextual theology and practice.⁸⁵

Today, the significance of this relational method has largely been pushed aside in congregational ministry, and this is due to it being lost from the curriculum of the seminary and hence from the pastor’s repertoire. This way of shaping pastors for ministry is clearly deficient.

CONSTITUTIVE COMPONENTS OF WOKABAUT-KARIKULUM AS A COMMUNITY PRAXIS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TRAINING

The features of PNG cultural values which the approach of *wokabaut-karikulum* encourages lie within the very teaching/learning community itself and foster participation and dialogue. There are three constitutive components: community, relationship and sharing. These components are closely interlocked and interdependent as the following will indicate.

COMMUNITY

The social structure of the PNG traditional village or tribal group is not based on the individual but community. In contemporary PNG, community is people living in relationship, that is, relationship to other people and the social environment in general, and to the physical world. Generally, within the village community context (of small groups) there exist many that are informal in nature, including family groups. Jon Paschke speaking of learning in the small group context in Melanesia affirms that “a great proportion of learning occurs in the peer group, whether it is of children, young boys, young girls, mothers, men, local chiefs etc. ... Notably, these informal groups often constitute people of the same sex [or gender].”⁸⁶ In the Lutheran Christian community context, whether it be urban or rural congregations, small ministerial groups such as congregational elders ministry, youth and women ministry, Sunday school ministry, social welfare ministry, HIV/AIDS ministry, and so on, are identified as contexts for engaging theological students in training. Various groups provide the context for training,

⁸³ Numuc Zirajukic Kemung, *Nareng-Gareng: A Principle for Mission in Papua New Guinea* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag fur Mission und Okumene, 1998) 175.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 184.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 184.

⁸⁶ Paschke, “The Small Group” 58.

“bring[ing] together studying, action, worship and challenges for personal growth” and “widen[ing] the view for different forms of theological work.”⁸⁷ This exposes the learner to an encounter by integrating theological studies into community praxis. That is, a place “to develop well trained and dedicated Christian persons [or ministers/pastors of church], being able [or to be able] to serve their community in an effective and inspiring way.”⁸⁸ Substantial evidence exists, affirmed by Paschke who says that “small groups are a key to learning within Melanesian cultures ... using the small group context as a strategy in teaching Christians demonstrates a good Melanesian “cultural fit” and should be encouraged as a culturally relevant setting in which to facilitate Christian learning.”⁸⁹ Partnership calls teachers into “being with” students and parishioners. Again group and community relationships are central and important values.

In an effort to develop Christian communities during the early Lutheran mission era it seemed “logical to appeal to the community as a whole.”⁹⁰ This was illustrated in the so-called “Keysser Method,”⁹¹ named after the pioneer German missionary Christian Keysser. He was a Lutheran missionary giant who applied this missionary method in 1903 with an orientation towards group/community renewal. Keysser was very practical in his approach to evangelism. The community played a dominant role in church life, depicted as God’s community, in which it fostered the mutual experience of God, and “a strong feeling of belonging to each other.”⁹² That is, the people “all belong to the new God. If he was their father then they were sisters and brothers.”⁹³ Schleiermacher’s work on religion, in particular, on association in religion or church would describe this religious fellowship and mutual experience as “social, for that is the nature of man, and it is quite peculiarly the nature of religion.”⁹⁴ Mutuality is present in the communal dynamics where there is “a feeling of belonging, unity, fellowship, and responsibility in the newly developing Christian community – a feeling which was part of traditional societies divided in clans.”⁹⁵

RELATIONSHIP

There are four main categories of relationships in the traditional PNG context. These are relationships with ancestors, within the community, to other communities, and to the total environment. The work of Stephen Bevans on contextualization models, in particular his “transcendental model,” has enhanced perspectives on relationships that deal with concerns with one’s own religious experience and one’s own experience of oneself.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ Riecke, “Changes so Difficult” 33.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 33.

⁸⁹ Paschke, “The Small Group” 59.

⁹⁰ Albert Frerichs and Sylvia Frerichs, *Anutu Conquers in New Guinea: A Story of Mission Work in New Guinea* rev. ed. (Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969) 68.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Christian Keysser, *A People Reborn*, trans. Alfred Allin and John Kuder (Pasadena, Calif.: The William Carey Library, 1980) 17.

⁹³ Ibid. 17-18.

⁹⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, trans. John Oman, intro by Rudolf Otto (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965) 148.

⁹⁵ Kemung, “Nareng-Gareng” 187; see also Keysser, *A People Reborn* 14-23; Schleiermacher, *On Religion* 148-149.

⁹⁶ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. exp. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002) 103-116.

That is the language “as an individual, as a subject, one is determined at every turn by one’s context.”⁹⁷ Relationships start with oneself and do not and cannot start in a vacuum but are contextual and communal because of the contextual nature of the subject or the learner. This communal context promotes the I/Thou relationship in which one experiences oneself as an “I,” as a subject in relationship to others and sees them as a Thou.⁹⁸ Therefore, the starting point of relationship begins with the learners own community’s religious experience, one’s own community experience. That is, theological education training is conceived as a process of “bringing to relationship” students’ participation and dialogue in which one realizes who one is or who they are “as a person or persons of faith who are in every possible respect a product of a historical, geographical, social and cultural environment.”⁹⁹ Put this way, to borrow from Bevans, theological students in PNG exist in a “particular point in time [determined by relationships, because they are] a recipient of a particular national and cultural heritage” that is wholly communal.¹⁰⁰

SHARING

Closely related to community and relationship is “sharing.” “The ideal form of Melanesian interpersonal relationships is expressed best in the English term ‘reciprocity.’”¹⁰¹ In this context sharing and reciprocity is fundamentally a way of life, not merely a way of living; it is a way of so remaking people in their whole self, that they become physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually alive through sharing, and their sharing becomes a relationship. Hence, sharing is by a process of “brotherhood” relationships. In the PNG traditional community, relationship tends toward equivalence by helping and being helped. That is, it operates by the principle of reciprocity and is sustained between members within a given community, extending to other communities by giving and receiving. In this sense, “it is a two-way street of reciprocity and interdependence.”¹⁰²

Sharing in this sense means reciprocal interaction in dialogue; it is giving-receiving of ideas, beliefs, and values through dialogue and conversation with oneself and with others. In one sense, Groome is right when he says that “shared praxis encourages participants in dialogue ... [and] is an event of mutual discovery and discernment—sharing our lives and wisdom with others and discovering both theirs and our own in the process.”¹⁰³ Through sharing in dialogue one gives and receives, building a stronger bond of friendship between the learning partners, creating a state of intellectual and moral reciprocity. The learners relate to each other in groups and as a community on campus extending to the larger community/congregation through patterns of exchange.

The PNG idea of community, relationship and sharing is essential for the wellbeing of the community. Community, relationships and sharing are integral to partnership, participation and dialogue in the communal dynamics of *wokabaut-kakrikulum* as a

⁹⁷ Ibid. 104.

⁹⁸ See Groome, *Comprehensive Approach* 143.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 143.

¹⁰⁰ Bevans, *Contextual Theology* 104.

¹⁰¹ Whiteman, “Melanesian Religions” 109.

¹⁰² Ibid. 110.

¹⁰³ See Groome, *Comprehensive Approach* 144.

community praxis. The term *wokabaut-karikulum* is based on a concept of shared praxis and means community, relationship, sharing, participation, and dialogue.

CONCLUSION

The understanding of *wokabaut-karikulum* exhibits a concern for building the gap between the formal Western learning processes and Indigenous informal learning processes. By using a national (or common) lingua franca concept the author hopes to speak a language which can be understood by Christians of PNG as they participate in theological educational training. The topic aims to challenge theological educators, students and congregations of the ELCPNG. In one real sense it could be said that *wokabaut-karikulum* is not a new conception for PNG. The views of *wokabaut-karikulum* as a way of knowing and learning are already deeply embedded in the everyday life patterns of the PNG people. The real task is to embed these ideas within the seminaries of the PNG Lutheran church. *Wokabaut-karikulum* is a concept that not only gives identity to PNG people but to theological education training for ministry in a PNG context. In the PNG traditional communities, people learn informally and non-formally. *Wokabaut-karikulum* applies cross-cultural critical theory to theological education training programs.

The hallmark of *wokabaut-karikulum* is its emphasis on active participative learning, integration and community focus that displays the characteristics of PNG Melanesian epistemology.¹⁰⁴ This works towards developing a community praxis for theological education training in PNG. In a real sense, *wokabaut-karikulum* is a relationally-shared process of engaging the “place,” that is, the community, in which people interact with other people in their social and cultural context. This is the learning principle on which *wokabaut-karikulum* is based as a community approach to learning and knowing in the PNG cross-cultural context. *Wokabaut-karikulum* restores an active learning partnership and dialogue that empowers community and that empowers a holistic approach. This involves educators, students and community working together. *Wokabaut-karikulum* finds expression in Freire’s praxis, leaning more towards Groome’s shared Christian praxis and it displays characteristics of relational/reflective/experiential education.

This article endeavours to speak the same praxis language in which learning is a relational/reflective/experiential process, a shared experience uniting the communities and theological schools, a process of engaging the place. The practical implementation of a community praxis approach to learning is the direction that needs to be taken. Hence, *Wokabaut-karikulum* promotes awareness of the relationship that exists between knowing and learning when cultural context is based on engaging the place, where people live, work, play and gather. Thus in this way *wokabaut-karikulum* is a method for integrating informal, non-formal, and formal learning experiences with ministry in community life. Learning is a unity of knowing, being and doing—a PNG Melanesian experience. To this end, the underlying cultural values of community, “relationship, and “sharing”, are significant components of *wokabaut-karikulum* as to enable students in PNG to become

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps Kraft’s orientation of educational procedures applies here. That is, the *wokabaut-karikulum* approach “facilitates participation in real life contexts ... It does not treat life in compartmentalized units [but as] an integrated whole; emphasizes [not] thinking only, [but] living as well; oriented toward the formation of individuals.” Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* 277-278.

active participants in this kind of learning. This makes *wokabaut-karikulum* in itself, a participative learning approach. The authors' vision is that ELCPNG theological education training will become truly dialogical and participatory. It is learning in partnership with community liberating consciousness and motivating to action.

This article is somewhat unique, in that nothing like it currently exists in the ELCPNG with regard to theological education training. Moreover, its uniqueness opens the agenda not only for the ministerial training seminaries and colleges of the ELCPNG, but also within an ecumenical context relating to other churches and ministerial training in PNG, Melanesia, and the Pacific.

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