

# PREFACE

The late king of Tonga (my country of origin) once referred to education as a 'kato he loto kato' (a basket within a basket) which I have interpreted to mean – the knowledge, skills and values that we learn as a result of our various journeys, and which are stored, interpreted and shared within a wider, all embracing cultural context which we define for ourselves and which others define for us.

This notion points to the importance of recognising that manifestations of culture, such as dances and attitudes, have their origin in a wider cultural context – a basket that holds the ways different social groups perceive and relate to the world and to other groups. Being able to recognise our own basket or cultural context and to open up to the gifts of other baskets seem to be extremely important educational aims.

In terms of North-South relationships it is common to witness the projection of one group's basket of knowledge as a universal basket – one that is more valuable than all others and that should be imposed through strategies of human resource development, capacity building, enlightenment, cash employment, good governance, human rights, freedom, democracy and education. The expectation is that the recipient of these baskets of knowledge will change for the better. People who participate in these interventions rarely ask: How do people in this community, this place, conceptualise wisdom, learning and knowledge? Nor do they wonder if the values inherent in and propagated by their agendas are shared by the majority of people whose lives are meant to be improved as a result of their intervention. Few even realise the ideological and philosophical conflicts associated with differing perceptions of championed ideas, leaving many communities confused and, in some cases, angry.

In the same way, in international forums I have often felt obliged to ensure that different baskets of knowledge, especially those of indigenous peoples, are included in discussions because of the continuing impact that these forums have on our future (educational) development. In the context of considering global education and instruments such as the Millenium Development Goals, Education For All or Education for Sustainable Development for example, some important questions are still rarely asked such as: What development? What education for all? What and whose sustainable development? Whose human rights? Good governance for whom? And, most importantly, what and whose values underpin the (education) conversations that we are involved in?

These norms and rules of global engagement in education are often defined by experts in so called developed countries. They reflect the cultures of the people who make the decisions. They emphasise individual rights at the expense of collective rights, and they promote an individual-centred view of the world rather than a relational view of the world. And what do you get from such an education? The idea that wealth equals material accumulation rather than the enhancement of social relationships. Perhaps we need to promote a new conceptualization of wealth in the world – as productive, social relationships – and educate ourselves and our children accordingly.

My hope is that we would develop and encourage a pluralistic view of learning, knowledge and wisdom in order to reflect the diverse heritages of every culture. This will help us move beyond labels such as 'romantic' as opposed to 'rational' views of knowledge, education and culture, and also beyond labels such as 'ethno-science' and other 'ethno'

things which do not question inequalities between various knowledge systems and differing cultural forms of rationality.

But learning to unlearn and to learn from others – to question long held beliefs and open oneself to different forms of knowledge is never easy. As higher education institutions and international forums around the world continue to privilege Western ways of being, knowing, thinking and relating, the importance of preparing learners to engage with other perspectives is paramount. The challenge of the ideology that supports the idea of one rationality, the pressures to arrive at consensus and the continued silencing of different perspectives pose a huge challenge in terms of education for an ethical relationship to difference.

The Through Other Eyes Project for teacher education has taken up and responded to this challenge in a positive, productive and innovative way in its educational agenda and learning activities. This initiative, coordinated by Prof de Souza and Dr Andreotti, supports educational processes that will enable teachers to engage in these debates and develop the skills to perceive one's basket of knowledge, to recognise the gifts of other baskets, to engage in dialogue and to transform perceptions and relationships.

**Professor Konai Helu Thaman**  
Unesco Chair in Teacher Education and Culture – University of the South Pacific

