

# **Re-thinking Contextualisation in Solomon Islands school leadership professional learning and development**

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the perceptions of Solomon Island mentors and regional administrators of a Solomon Islands aid-funded school leadership professional learning and development intervention. The focus is on contextualisation, used here as a broad term to refer to the adoption of ways of understanding, thinking and working recognisable and coherent within local practice. The scope of the article includes the significance of the configuration of relationships between delivery partners, the power of cause-based motivation, programme delivery protocols and ways of understanding successful outcomes. Using data drawn from two perspectives in a multi-faceted programme construction and delivery model, the article offers some provocations regarding the potential of re-framing relationships and practices in aid-funded development programmes in educational leadership and beyond.

**Keywords:** contextualisation, education, leadership, aid programmes, professional development, Solomon Islands

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## Introduction

In Solomon Islands, teachers are often appointed from the classroom to be school leaders with little preparation (Sisiolo, 2010) in a situation where professional learning and development (PLD) focussed on school leadership is scant. What training exists has been on a small scale and, with occasional exception (Rouikera, 2013), generally available only in the capital, Honiara (Lingam, 2011; Lingam and Lingam, 2014). However, research reports an appetite among practicing school leaders for further PLD provision on a national scale (Lingam, 2011).

Given the topography of Solomon Islands, the development of a school leadership programme on a national scale is complex. However, delivery is not the only challenge. Donor-funded aid in Solomon Islands has its own conventions (Willetts, Asker, Carrard, and Winterford, 2014) that frame what can be imagined and achieved. Expectations about relationships in the initiation, design and delivery of programmes present challenges to innovation. Despite this, contextualisation of PLD is at a premium. Diversity is a feature of the nation: over 80 languages are spoken; there are both patrilineal and matrilineal cultures (Maezama, 2015); and the experiences of school leaders are also varied (Houma, 2011). In order to develop the leadership capacities of school leaders in this situation, re-thinking what contextualisation might mean by seeking the strengths of Solomon Islands offers a productive way forward.

This article draws on the experiences of mentors and administrators during the Graduate Certificate in School Leadership (GCSL) programme. The experiences of participants are discussed elsewhere (Sanga and Reynolds, 2020, forthcoming). The GCSL grew from the Solomon Islands School Leadership Programme. However, here the two packages are treated as a single four-year national school leadership PLD programme, executed between 2014- 2018.

The GCSL consists of five modules: Professional Development; School Leadership; School Management; Teaching and Learning; and Community Partnerships. It was initiated by the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT), developed by the Institute of Education (IOE) of the University of the South Pacific (USP), and undertaken by the Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM) – a group of Solomon Islanders concerned for leadership in Solomon Islands who, during the course of the programme, became an NGO. The programme was delivered to over 1,400 school leaders across nine provinces and provided many school leaders with accreditation of their leadership development through USP. A total of 49 training venues and 26 facilitators were involved. A completion rate of 75.6% was recorded across all five courses (Institute of Education, 2019).

The geographic scope of programme delivery provided the GCSL with opportunities for contextualisation. However, looking deeper into the inception, design and delivery of the GCSL there are further layers of contextualisation that challenge habitual practice in the field of donor-funded PLD provision. These include: the direction of the initial call for the programme; relationality as a basis for inter-institutional arrangements; *tok stori* (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019; Sanga, Reynolds, Paulsen, Spratt, and Maneipuri, 2018) in programme negotiation and as PLD delivery mode; attention to gender as an element of culture; a strengths-based approach to local languages; and the creation of a *learning village* involving mentors, educational administrators, school leaders, teachers and wider local communities so that all benefit from a shared vision of leadership.

In order to background the context, this article reviews literature relevant to donor-funded school leadership PLD in Solomon Islands. This is followed by a sketch of the research approach to the GCSL. Data is then presented and discussed in a more-or-less chronological account, before a discussion of the significance and potential of a layered understanding of contextualisation within donor-funded programmes.

## Literature review

In order to provide a platform from which to appreciate the intent of this article, the following literature review provides a progressively narrowing focus on Solomon Islands school leadership. The review touches on areas

of potential impact on school leadership PLD in Solomon Islands: educational administration; donor-community relationships; training for school leadership; and some characteristics of Solomon Islands school leadership as evident in the literature. The review ends with a summary that relates this wide range of concerns to contextualisation of school leadership PLD in the GCSL.

## Leadership and educational administration

The Solomon Islands education system serves nine provinces and the capital territory of Honiara. A tension between centralisation and decentralisation across the archipelago has historically been reported (Premdas, 1982). A recent example can be seen in inclusive education where Simi (2008) points to the potential of locally effective school leadership to support inclusiveness, but Pillay, Carrington, Duke, Tones, Chandra, and Heeraman (2015) describe difficulties at school level from top-down initiatives divorced from local realities. Similarly, Maebuta (2013: 122) describes “the dysfunctional coordination that characterises the interrelationship between the Ministry of Education, individual education authorities and schools”. In these circumstances, there is a premium on mechanisms capable of local contextualisation and concurrent support of sustainable local-national relationships.

## Educational leadership, donor-funding and contextualisation

Solomon Islands education has long been supported by aid (Moseley, 1994). However, Sanga (2003b) notes that aid policies have not promoted strong leadership. While examples of donors taking a hands-off approach exist, there remains a “need... for undivided attention focused on the people who are being assisted in order to enhance their autonomy, encourage their active participation and enable their own leadership further” (Sanga, 2003b: 34). Research suggests that the Solomon Islands donor community holds a range of ideas about project leadership (Willets et al., 2014) from donor-led to community-led strengths-based approaches (SBA) that resonate with *kastom* (customs). However, “as a development approach in a country where externally driven development support has led to citizens and communities becoming clients of aid, rather than active citizens in their own country” (2014: 366), adopting SBA represents a challenge to established practice.

At the core of donor-funded SBA that support autonomy and recognise contextual strengths are respectful relationships. To Sanga (1996: 66), “indigenous participation in educational policy development is not a *given*, but a privilege that must be negotiated with other powerful stakeholders” so that “the challenge for educational leaders is to include international aid donors and local participants...[through] dual principles of respect and mutual trust”. This view is supported by McGee and Rodie (2011) who also warn that although partnerships can deliver value for money, questions remain regarding the sustainability of educational change aid is withdrawn.

Inclusion and partnership are not limited to project leadership and personnel. Methodological and ontological considerations are key elements in productive, respectful donor-local partnerships. Sanga and Reynolds (2019: 23) note: “Well-meaning imported understandings which do not deliberately honour place-based thinking can draw accountability borders around programmes erasing much of what could count”. A relevant example of methodological contextualisation is the inclusion of *tok stori* (storying) in donor-funded programmes. *Tok stori* is a Melanesian place-based dialogic understanding of the world, amenable to pedagogic use in leadership development (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019). Melanesian educational leadership programmes that deliberately seek out leadership experiences through *tok stori* may uncover leadership strengths described by a number of researchers (Bosamata, 2011; Houma, 2011; Maebuta, 2013; Sanga, 2003b; Sisiolo, 2010). By recognising the potential of place-based thinking, “the aims of donor-funded programmes, if suitably reframed and re-actioned, can be attained through Indigenous means” (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019: 24).

## School leadership training in the Solomon Islands context

Discussions of the purpose and nature of Solomon Islands education go back to *Education for What?* (Bugotu, Maeke, Paia, Ramoni, and Arnold, 1973). Since then, efforts at contextualisation have been undertaken. These include Solcentric (Lingam, Burnett, Lilo, and Lingam, 2014) adjustments to curriculum, alignment of local values and practices with early childhood education provision (Burton, 2012), attempts at the inclusion of language-group culture in the curriculum (Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, 1994) and citizenship education through the *wantok* (Melanesian kinship network) model (Fitoo, 2019).

The contextualisation of school leadership has received less attention, although leadership PLD has not been totally absent. Lingam (2011) investigated school leaders' experiences during a residential diploma programme. Leaders felt they "lacked time management skills, faced difficulties in managing staff, involving community participation in school work and faced difficulties in decision-making" (2011: 149). Similarly, Lingam and Lingam (2014) surveyed teachers undertaking a Diploma in Educational Leadership and reported a mismatch between frequent centrally imposed changes to education and opportunities for PLD.

Away from Honiara, Sisiolo (2010) in Choiseul and Malasa (2007) in a multi-location study identified lack of training and support inhibiting effective school leadership. Although Rouikera (2013) described benefits from a provincial level donor-funded PLD leadership programme, he also described the blunted potential of leadership and suggested that contextualised "programmes...need to be tailored to the local education context and needs...with an emphasis on a school-based approach which involves local support personnel" (2013: ii). Despite a lack of training, Bosamata (2011) found some school leaders do mentor new staff but recommended ongoing national PLD to increase quality education.

## Characteristics of school leadership in Solomon Islands

In a context where little training has been available for school leaders, it is pertinent to ask questions of leadership style. Memua (2011) describes the social justice cost of teacher-centred learning and undemocratic school leadership practices in Community High Schools. Sanga and Houma (2004) found that school leaders did not prefer the kind of instructional leadership that might reduce teacher-centred pedagogies. They also observed that "regrettably, the Solomon Islands system is a killer of school leaders" (2004: 68). Akao (2008) describes leadership in schools as often devoid of consultation while Aruhu (2010) reports a need for principals to develop planning skills. As a solution, Rodie (2011) advocates for school leadership embedded in "villages of learning" (2011: 209) to improve student outcomes by promoting reflective dialogue, collaboration and the mentoring of new teachers.

Participation in Solomon Islands school leadership is significantly gendered. Akao (2008) reports for 2006 that females made up 27.8% of secondary teachers but only 2.9% of principals. In addition, she reports that any woman's attempt to practise collaborative styles of leadership faces patriarchal cultural norms. Houma (2011) also found females with potential leadership abilities faced problems not posed to males while Elisha and Edwards (2014) point to women's unrecognised leadership skills and experience in church and community as an untapped resource. Maezama (2015) in a study in a matrilineal setting on Santa Isabel, describes the way women's power and respect in community contexts does not always transfer to organisational contexts such as school leadership. She argues that in that context, "Western ways of defining and practising leadership...continued to marginalize women in their workplace" and that the educational leadership potential of women can only be realized if indigenous Bugotu views of leadership are "integrated in Solomon Islands' national policy, legislated, and included in the school curriculum" (Maezama, 2015: 61). Culture is clearly a consideration in the relationships between gender and school leadership.

## Summary

This review has pointed to the significance in Solomon Islands for school leadership PLD to: support productive, sustainable central-local relationships in education; be framed by SBA to deliver contextually rich programmes; acknowledge a dearth of PLD; recognise a deep fund of leadership experience; leverage local understandings and methodologies together with their pedagogical potential; and appreciate the significance of culture as context at the province, village and school levels. Acknowledging these concerns creates a template for successful school leadership PLD that recognises that education in the Solomon Islands is not a personal resource; the concept of a social self (Mila-Schaaf, 2006) is relevant in Melanesia. Therefore, a relational approach to developing and delivering PLD promises much as the basis for contextualisation.

## Research context

The perceptions of GCSL participants as quantitative and qualitative data are discussed elsewhere (Sanga and Reynolds, 2020, forthcoming). Here, we mine the perceptions of those involved in programme initiation, development and delivery. At the end of the GCSL, we approached key team members through face-to-face *tok stori* where possible, or by electronic means. In total, eight members of the FFM, two females and six males (P1-P8), together with one administrator from IOE (P9) and one person with FFM and IOE affiliations (P10) gifted their perceptions. Of the respondents, one is Tongan and the remainder Solomon Islanders. Because MEHRD had commissioned its own evaluation, MEHRD staff were not approached.

The eight resultant *tok stori* transcripts and two written submissions were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2014) to reveal patterns of contextualisation. Rendered as themes, these are reported and discussed in a more-or-less chronological sequence from GCSL inception to delivery. Because the research cohort is small and fairly easily identified, in addition to some redaction, there is little attribution of comments. The exception is that the gender of respondents is indicated when deemed significant. A distinction between FFM (F) and IOE members (I) has been preserved: institutional position is relevant to contextualisation.

## Data and discussion: Perceptions of the GCSL

As the first national Solomon Islands school leadership programme, the GCSL responded to the calls for systemic responses to the need for educational leadership PLD (Bosamata, 2011; Rodie, 2011; Rouikera, 2013) in a situation characterized by one FFM mentor as chronic: “schools have been poorly managed and historically nothing has been done to improve this. Communities have come to accept poorly managed schools as the norm” [F and P6]. In this section we discuss the way aspects of accepted practice are challenged through contextualisation of the GCSL as a process and as an outcome.

## Initiation as contextualisation

The inception of the GCSL took place within MEHRD as a vision for school leadership that required knowledgeable input to be translated into successful contextualised PLD. The GCSL inception included a *false start* where, in the words of one mentor, a local tertiary institution “did not respond favourably” (P6) to the central idea of taking the PLD to the leaders, suggesting that “When they are ready then school leaders could come [to them]” (P6). This mirrors the past practice (Lingam, 2011; Lingam & Lingam, 2013). Instead, the vision was “a programme that went to school leaders” (P6) so that contextual relevance would be assured. This situation was resolved by MEHRD turning to IOE.

The direction of initiation is significant. Historically, the pan-Pacific focus of USP has promoted centrally devised programmes hosted in a regional centre to which participants travel. According to IOE administrators,

the default model was “to run... with one training venue for two weeks and maybe sixty people at most. And after the training that was the end of the programme, close shop, job done and we move on,” (P9) based on “the assumption and approach of *train the trainer* model”(P9). As a consequence, training is at least one step decontextualized from those to whom the learning is intended. However, in the case of the GCSL, significant differences were clear:

This was a request from a country. It was rare to have received such a request with so much clarity around what it was that they wanted...I felt in my heart that I could not possibly say *No* to a country request. (IF and P10)

The opportunity to deliver within this vision of clarity provided IOE new opportunities to respond to needs.

## Relationships in team development

Accounts gathered from IOE and FFM of the development of the programme delivery team concur on the value of relationships centred on trust and confidence. According to an FFM member, a relational approach is “based on Solomon Island communal culture” (P4), a Melanesian expression of the social self (Mila-Schaaf, 2006).

## The pilot programme

A four-person group, inter-connected through mentoring relationships, initially developed the pilot. This team was steeped in a passion for leadership development, equipped with Pacific regional expertise and Solomon Islands education leadership experience. Existing relationships and motivation combined to produce enthusiasm:

We had [already] worked with each other. While I was with my family in NZ, I was asked ... if I wanted to join the [programme] in Solomon Islands. I was keen to do so. Because my heart wanted to help. So, the four of us started the pilot... (P4)

*Heart* sits well with Solomon Islands communitarian values (Gegeo, 2001) where existing warm relationships are leveraged and interpersonal connections valued.

As the pilot progressed successfully and metamorphized into the GCSL, team expansion was required. Without advertising or publicity, a group “grew out of the GCSL programme” (P4) in an organic way through interpersonal contact. In this, “the initial core group (which then became FFM), was recruited by [one person]” (P4) and then expanded through a snowball-like strategy of known contacts. Through this process, team identity also grew, and, mindful of gender, the team re-named so the M in FFM meant *Mentors* not *Men*.

## The significance of friendship

According to one mentor, the desire and opportunity to work together preceded a full appreciation of the task ahead.

All of us knew each other well from either high school or USP... It was not until we got into the programme before we realized the importance and scope of the programme. (P4)

A similarly organic account is given of the relational basis of FFM – MEHRD interaction. The FFM were related to MEHRD through IOE. Some boundaries of responsibility were clear:

MEHRD decides on delivery venues, dates, and EA communications. FFM provides facilitators and delivery of the programme and reports on it. IOE takes care of administrative logistical issues. (P5)

However, through *tok stori*, negotiation was frequent and relationships between institutions honoured the history of relationships between people:

It is a Solomon Island relationship; not a contractual relationship. FFM members know MEHRD officials as individuals. (P10)

Although of value in protecting the interests of funders, the GCSL experience suggests that, contextually, a contract can be less effective than interpersonal commitment within a team and across institutional boundaries. Interpersonal relationships between respectful individuals serving a common cause can be significant:

MEHRD is both a client and the boss... But the *boss* relationship does not deter our working relationship with MEHRD. In fact, the way we have been working with MEHRD has gone beyond organizational ways of being or doing. It has been about relationships between ...FFM members and ... MEHRD officials. (P10)

One mentor's account stresses *soft* skills, inter-personal commitment and coherence as significant consequences of the team-building strategy employed so that warm relationships became a strength in programme delivery:

We have a trusting relationship with each other. We depend on and support each other to work well and do so together as a team. We were interested in and committed to building each other's capacities. (P1)

Another mentor's experience points to the power of friendship as an organisational mode:

So, the friendship relationship has made the FFM a force for change in Solomon Islands... we believe in what we commit to because of our friendships. (P2)

As the team expansion continued and required more formal mechanisms, FFM members passed on the core vision and relational understandings through a structured socialization process:

When we had to include [further] facilitators... we called for individuals to submit their CVs... We had lead facilitators who mentored new facilitators. We had regular briefings and *tok stori*; and de-briefings... Throughout the programme we've all become friends. (P4)

Significantly, a flat structure organisational was maintained to downplay hierarchy such that "whether an FFM member had been on the team for three years or three days, both were paid the same fee level." (P10)

## Diverging from the past

Individual donor-funded education programmes do not sit in isolation. From mentors' accounts, a clear sense of negotiating between past practice and innovation is clear. Relationships are important for the ways they affect the way advice is offered and understood. One mentor described ministry officials as being:

...familiar with TAs (Technical Assistance consultants) who come in and regularly offer advice through telling or asking questions...in these roles officials are always seeing consultants having an upper hand. (P5)

Relationships of this nature can foreground shallowly-contextualised solution-based thinking of outside consultants (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019).

Changing past patterns of programme organization requires confidence. One mentor explained, “initially we lacked the confidence in Solomon Islanders doing work of this nature. We lacked a belief in ourselves” (P6). However, a deliberate re-thinking took place: “We countered such a belief by saying that Solomon Islanders must be confident as Solomon Islanders; and demonstrate this through our credible excellence and performance” (P6). Another mentor reported that, “in the beginning even the MEHRD doubted us... They are used to having consultants do things... Then... the MEHRD began to see what local experts could do” (P10). Understanding this process, the mentors deliberately “involve[d] MEHRD officials throughout the delivery programme” (P5) so that facilitators’ capabilities became visible to administrators.

## Delivery as context

Although *pijin* (Solomon Islands) as a lingua franca, cultural difference is a key feature of the Solomon Islands. As a result, attention to context is often a matter of adopting a local focus. Two contextually significant aspects of the GCSL are geographic de-centralisation and *tok stori* as an indigenous mode of engagement.

## Contextualisation through decentralisation

A pioneering aspect of the GCSL was to meet leaders in their own settings. This deliberate contextualisation was well understood by mentors:

GCSL is a programme that connects with the Solomon Islands school leaders.... It meets them where they are at; it meets them in their setting; it meets them at their realities. (P3)

One consequence was that mentors were not only with school leaders but also with key people from leaders’ contexts. Members of leaders’ schools, culture groups and, often, villages also attended GCSL sessions. Thus, the PLD was augmented so that:

In the GCSL, as school leaders engage with each other in their cluster groups, they also engage with school teachers and school board members. (P2)

As a consequence, discussions extended into communities so that support and understanding of school leaders and their development became shared. In many cases, local chiefs and dignitaries opened the proceedings and attended.

## Tok stori as context

The mode of delivery, *tok stori*, also promoted contextualisation. First, as engagement, *tok stori* involves dialogue: people share a common space and speak of their experiences, seeking clarification without judgement.

We are there with them. We tok stori with them. We respond to their questions. We support them on-the-spot. (P3)

Second, *tok stori* promotes reciprocal learning, capitalizing on the experiences of others in similar contexts. The result is that learners’ contextualized experiences are shared and validated rather than relegated by comparison. Mentors found this led to significant learning:

Because tok stori was used, participants were able to sit together and learn together about key concepts, as experienced by other participants. These concepts could then sink into people's minds and hearts. (P5)

One mentor articulated the contextual advantages of *tok stori* by comparison with more hierarchical forms of engagement:

Tok stori reduces the normal barriers which we create for learners in our usual lecture format... if delivered as lectures, participants... would have focused more on learning only to be able to do the assignments... (P5)

Using *tok stori* with which participants were familiar provided further accessed the *kastom* domain:

Particularly when discussions are based around cultural understandings of leadership, tok stori is very effective for deep understanding of context and relevance. (P5)

Contextualisation in the GCSL embraced the vernacular. Although *pijin* was used for *tok stori* in multi-lingual groups, local languages were harnessed for smaller group work where appropriate.

## Context and gender

In Solomon Islands, school leaders who are women face contextual issues (Elisha and Edwards, 2014; Houma, 2011; Maezama, 2015). Early on, the pilot team realised the significant contributions made by female mentors:

The majority of ECE school leaders are women. So too are the primary school leaders. As well, culturally, male mentors are not able to support female school leaders effectively. (P4)

In particular, because *tok stori* is framed through contextual cultural parameters such as gendered the audiences, knowledge and experience are restricted in the Solomon Islands context:

Relationally, women's tok stori may touch on some very sensitive issues so they need women mentors to be able to tok stori freely. In the programme, we had to deal with school leaders as human beings, hence, allowing them to tok stori about things which affect all of their lives. (P6)

Responding positively to the restrictions and opportunities inherent in gendered relationships in Solomon Islands is a matter of observing, understanding, and honouring the contextual and gendered nature of school leadership in Solomon Islands.

## Outcomes

One outcome of the GCSL is that 1084 school leaders completed the PLD so that they were eligible to graduate with USP certification. Another outcome, perhaps more significant for Solomon Islands education, is behavioural changes of school leaders. As an example, mentors report school clustering strategies:

Historically, schools seemed to have been operating in isolation... Now as part of a clustering group, school leaders are working together, helping each other as leaders. ... This clustering initiative is a direct learning from the GCSL. (P2)

Clustering behaviour varies by location, echoing the relevance of contextualisation as a GCSL strategy:

In Temotu province, the school mentor clusters the school leaders in mixed groups of strong leaders and weak ones. This arrangement, unlike the usual geographical clustering, is very effective and responsive to needs at the school level. (P7)

A third outcome involves the development of closer relationships within the Solomon Islands educational leadership community such that:

Since the programme, I have noticed that whenever school leaders come into Honiara ... they are often keen to tell us what they are doing and why they are in town. When really, they do not have to tell us anything at all. (P2)

Another outcome claimed by FFM mentors for the GCSL involves “enhanced relationships” and increased understanding between MEHRD officers and provincial educators:

Because they are present and hear the tok stori of school leaders, officers are able to understand and can respond appropriately. (P5)

Further, the GCSL catalysed the formalisation of a cause movement, the FFM, as “a vehicle for building the capacity of leadership in Solomon Islands” (P10). As one mentor explained: “An organization is structural. A cause movement is not. A cause movement privileges a vision or an ideal” (P5). The FFM remains an NGO participating in Solomon Islands leadership development, for example through themed conferences for educators (Leadership Pacific, 2019). To mentors, “the FFM has disproved a national stereotype. As we speak, MEHRD has seen FFM as equal partners because of what we have been able to do” (P6).

Closing the circle, an outcome claimed for IOE is “a new way of serving the Pacific region”(P9):

The project taught us many lessons about Solomon Islands, about service, about educational leadership and most importantly about who we are as a people, and as an educational development institution (P9).

These varied outcomes suggest the potential of deliberate contextualisation strategies to reap benefits beyond course completion. This is particularly true because relationships outlast written assignments in a Melanesian context where relationality is a key ontological feature (Vallance, 2012).

## Final Discussion

This article has focussed on what contextualisation might mean in donor-funded PLD through the example of the Solomon Islands GCSL. Although contextualisation can be limited to the adjustment of course materials to local needs, here a wider meaning has been investigated. This includes examining as context the GCSL’s origins and direction of inception; institutional relationships underpinning PLD development and delivery; team development and motivation; geographical, dialogic and cultural aspects of delivery; and a range of outcomes that extend beyond course completion and accreditation. These layers of contextualisation are not restricted to method but also touch on methodological and, ultimately, ontological matters.

It is worth considering connectiveness between these layers of contextualisation. Sanga (2003a) points to the importance of critiquing relationships in donor-funded aid in the Pacific region, tying this to power, control over agenda, prioritisation and structure. The structure of relationships embedded in the GCSL points to the way that institutional norms can be re-moulded by SBA that recognise people and practices and the relational

focus that connects them as cultural. Without abandoning the assurance benefits of contractual relationships, the institutional understandings behind the GCSL, vested in on-going warm personal relationships and connections, opened a space for the creativity and commitment of the FFM: those whose experiences and standing gave them much to offer.

The utilisation of *toké stori* provided an avenue to deliberate and deep sharing of power within institutional negotiations despite necessarily hierarchical relationships. This mode prefaced the use of *toké stori* in delivery and the legitimisation of the inclusion of school leaders' leadership experiences within the GCSL. In other words, the structure of power relationships during inception and development foregrounded methodological opportunities for valuing context-based inputs and priorities into the PLD agenda. The ontological appreciation of the world as a dialogical space in which narrative and pedagogy frequently overlap provides the cultural logic to link these layers of contextualisation.

Contextualisation can also be a matter of expanding what counts (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019). Other aspects of contextualisation of the GCSL include geographical movement from the centre to provinces; the invitation to use local languages; welcoming wider school and community participants in discussions; and the acceptance of *kastom* as part of context, such as through acknowledging the ways gender plays out in leadership in Solomon Islands education. In addition, expanding what counts can include recognising as positive and valued outcomes the development of local confidence, capacity and standing; institutional learning; reframed institutional relationships; and the varied responses of leaders to their learning. When seen in this way, the GCSL speaks of the potential of re-thinking contextualisation as a layered concept in order to appreciate more fully what PLD can do participants, facilitators and their communities.

## Conclusion

The GCSL partially filled a gap in Solomon Islands educational leadership PLD over a four-year period by setting up dialogues with school leaders in many locations across nine provinces. Although some issues were experienced by mentors and administrators in development and delivery, and not all school leaders gained the learning they deserved, this article has focussed on the positive benefits of the way the GCSL provides a context for rethinking contextualisation of donor-funded PLD. Plans are afoot to offer similar opportunities to more Solomon Islands school leaders, and the GCSL, re-contextualised is also being offered in Marshall Islands. We hope that through clarity and courage, future programmes will develop so that contextualised inception produces maximises advantage in the form of deeply contextualised, layered outcomes.

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