WANEM WE MIFALA I WANTEM [WHAT WE WANT]: A
COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE OF VERNACULAR EDUCATION IN
VANUATU

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Pacific Islands Studies.

THESIS COMMITTEE

[Signatures]
Dedication

Blong olgeta komuniti memba blong Ronevie mo Tautu [To the community members of Ronevie and Tautu]

Figure 1: Nesline (last name unknown), Tautu Village. 2007. Photo by

Figure 2: Elder Daniel Nato, Chief Edward Gordan, and Elder Nathan Malsets, Tautu Village. 2007. Photo by Ashley Vaughan.

Figure 3: Edga and Lucy Gordan, Tautu Village. 2007. Photo by Ashley Vaughan.

Figure 4: Chief Philip Dalley and youth, Ronevie Village. 2003. Photo by Michael Lameier.

Figure 5: Elfina Dalley, Ronevie Village. 2003. Photo by Michael Lameier.

Mi glad tumas blong olgeta sapot blong yufala we yu bin giv han lo mi bigwan, espesel long taem we mi bin wan Pis Kop mo long taem we mi bin mekem risej mo tu taem ia we mi stap raetem thesis blong mi. Olgeta prea mo storian blong yufala i stap lefemap mi mo wok blong mi mo i mekem hat blong mi i glad tumas. Taem we mi bin stap wetem yufala, yufala i bin sarem ol hom blo yufala, mo ol kakae blo yufala, mo plenti kava blo yufala, tu. Yumi bin spendem fulup naet blong laf nomo. Hemia nao from wanem mi givim wok ia i go bak long yufala.
Acknowledgements

Wan Manggo Tri¹

Wan mango tri, i save givim bak
Frut long yumi we i swit mo raef
Be tri, i no mekem frut hem wan
Sun i givim laet blong hem
Win i sakemaot sid
Ren i givim laef
Graon i angka
Mo Kakai
Oli
Wan

The sun, wind, rain, and soil are all elements that not only assist the mango tree with its growth and production of fruit, but they are also part of the tree. Likewise, this project is an assimilation of feedback, support, encouragement, ideas, information, and much more.

*****

First and foremost, I would like to thank my fiancé, Mike Lameier. His generosity has allowed me to accomplish one of my life goals. When I needed encouragement, feedback, financial support, or just a sounding board, he gave it freely. Additionally, Mike graciously allowed me the use of his photographs. To him, I am most grateful.

Of course, without the community members of Tautu and Ronevie Villages, this project would be nonexistent. Their contributions are invaluable. These community members went out of their way to make sure the research went smoothly. During my

¹ [The Mango Tree – A mango tree can give back/ To us fruit that is sweet and ripe/ But the tree alone does not make the fruit/ The sun gives its light/ The wind spreads the seeds/ The rain gives life/ The ground is the anchor/ And food/ They are all/ One]
visit, many a night was spent discussing my studies and the project, and I received numerous prayers and words of encouragement. I am grateful for the open hearts (and kitchens!) of all the community members. In particular I would like to thank Chief Edward Gordan, Lucy Gordan, Jamima Gordan, Edga Gordan, Chief Philip Dalley, Effina Dalley, Sophie Dalley, Sumbleas Mal and his family, Elder Daniel Nato, Elder Nathan Malsetts, Ronevie community members who participated in group interviews, the Tautu Women’s Group, Roslyn, Babu Man, Babu Woman, Salote Ray, Marley Nato, Lisa Nato, David Nalo, Mamran Riding, Jacklin, Nasara Group One, the Freswota Council of Chiefs, and the community members who participated in interviews but wanted to remain anonymous. Tankio bigwan!!

Over the past two years, I have only been able to offer my family short phone calls and a few visits (with the explanation that I am busy writing papers or reading for a class). Furthermore, I have spent close to six years living an ocean away from them. They have remained understanding and supportive of my work, and I am grateful. My sister, Amber Shipman, received many a panicked phone call from me begging her to read over a paper. She read this thesis in its entirety, even when she would rather have been planting flowers in her garden. I am truly indebted to her. Also, my aunt, Teresa Shivers, took time out of her busy schedule to read through a chapter of the thesis. I very much appreciate her viewpoints as an educator.

Pierre Gambetta, Linda George, John Laan, Robert Early, and Helen Tamtam, provided incredibly insightful interviews, and I am thankful for their contributions to the project. Also, I would like to thank Kevin George for providing an update on Peace Corps’s involvement in education in Vanuatu. Ralph Regenvanu gave guidance on final
outcomes for the project as well as information regarding the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in formal school curriculum. Furthermore, Janet Stahl was especially helpful in providing a direction for the thesis and areas of need in the vernacular education campaign. I would like to thank Janet for her dedication to reading a chapter of the thesis and providing particularly useful feedback.

I am extremely grateful for my thesis committee members, Professors Geoffrey White, Terence Wesley-Smith, and Yuko Otsuka. I chose each member because of their dedication to academia and knowledge of their individual fields of study, but I mainly chose them because of their abilities to motivate students. Geoff met with me on a regular basis to discuss the project. He has been a wealth of knowledge, especially in regards to culture, custom, identity, and history. Also, he was able to point me in the right direction concerning references. When I was in the midst of a terrible bout of writer’s block, Terence offered me just the encouragement that I needed to finish up the project. Because of my interest in vernacular education and language, it was especially helpful to have Yuko on my committee. I thank my committee for always holding the interest of their students at heart. Also, I would like to thank Professors Ken Rehg, for editing my term paper, which eventually became part of the thesis and David Hanlon, for providing guidance on my project proposal.

I would especially like to thank Marata Tamaira for her constant encouragement (lifting up) and willingness to discuss this project on several occasions over coffee. Her insight into the academic process has been an inspiration. Importantly, Marata, exceptionally talented in the area of title writing, assisted me with the title of this thesis. Other members of my cohort, Madonna Perez-Castro, Ann Marie Kirk, and James
Viernes, have also provided a safe forum for discussion. I am beyond thankful that I have such wonderful friends. Also, I would like to thank Ashley Vaughan, who met me in Vanuatu during my past visit, for listening to me talk (perhaps endlessly) about the project and offering useful suggestions for research. Fortunately, Ashley allowed me to use her photographs from our trip, as my camera was essentially useless.

After I had returned to the U.S. from the Peace Corps in 2005, I spent several months toiling over the next stage of my life. Luckily, I was able to discuss my options with my friend, Sara Lightner, who also served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Vanuatu and was, at that time, a student in the Pacific Islands Studies Masters of Arts program at the University of Hawai‘i. During a particular phone call, when I was almost 85 percent sure I would come to Hawai‘i, I confided to her that my decision to seek a degree in Pacific Islands Studies was based mostly on the fact that I was trying to hold on to Vanuatu. Her response reminded me of the fact that our times in Vanuatu are worth holding on to, and she described to me how she had kept her experiences alive through her writing. I would like to thank Sara for her advice and assistance during our move to Hawai‘i.

Pacific Islands Studies has, in fact, allowed me to reflect on my Peace Corps Service, but in a special way. I am appreciative of the experiences and education I received as a student in the Pacific Islands Studies Program. Throughout these past two years, I believe I have gained a better understanding regarding issues that, before, were hidden just under the surface of my experiences. My decision to continue my studies at the University of Hawai‘i also provided me with an opportunity to return to Vanuatu in June of 2007 to conduct collaborative research with community members from Ronevie.
Village and Tautu Village. Of course, the funding for the trip would not be possible if not for a generous grant from the Graduate Student Association. Furthermore, I am grateful to Nancy Mower and her family's generous contribution to my scholarship.

Others have informed this project as well, and they too deserve my gratitude. Jennifer Salai fielded numerous questions regarding education in Vanuatu. Because of her teaching experiences in Vanuatu, she was a valuable resource and checkpoint for the project. Anne Naupa assisted me in finding resources at the Vanuatu National Library. John Lynch, Ralph Regenvanu, and Matthew Spriggs so graciously answered my questions regarding schools, language, and culture. Furthermore, I would like to thank John Lynch for allowing me the use of the Malekula language map.
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEO</td>
<td>Provincial Education Office</td>
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<td>PRIDE</td>
<td>Pacific Regional Initiative for the Delivery of Basic Education</td>
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<td>SPADES</td>
<td>South Pacific Regional Action for Development Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTI</td>
<td>Teachers' Training Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>USP</td>
<td>University of the South Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>VANSTA</td>
<td>Vanuatu Standardized Test of Achievement</td>
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<td>VITE</td>
<td>Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMOE</td>
<td>Vanuatu Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>VTET</td>
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Introduction

A Conversation about Education

Drawing upon a conversation with her friend about the negative effects of development, Konai Thaman brings to light the impact of outside aid and foreign advisors on Pacific Islanders and describes the cycle of neocolonialism in her creative composition entitled, *A Conversation about Development* (Thaman 1993). These conversations, reflecting similar discourse, have been taking place throughout the Pacific for decades. Recently, I had a conversation of my own that reminds me of her work. At one point during my research, I met with a particular person who is also involved with language and education issues in Vanuatu. Disagreeing with this person’s attitudes towards vernacular education, I left the meeting pondering the points made in our discussion. I called my friend – a reading specialist who taught and trained teachers for over four years in both primary schools and secondary schools, located in both rural and urban Vanuatu -- to talk this over. Below is part of our conversation:

“I’ve been in so many classrooms where the students are forced to learn everything in English, and they have no idea what they are reading. Even at the secondary school, the students’ vocabulary and reading comprehension abilities are limited, and this keeps them from producing secondary-level work.”

“You know, when I first began observing in classrooms, I was really impressed with the way students could choral read an English book. They knew every word. Later, I realized they had only memorized the text. When a specific word was taken out of context, the students couldn’t read it, and they definitely had no idea what it meant.”

“Yeah, I experienced that same thing. But you know, when I observed students who went to a vernacular school, I found that they loved the books written in their own language. The students really became interested in the story and the teacher’s lesson because they could understand what was being said. It’s just that the students in either Anglophone or Francophone schools have a much harder time. The over-achievers are
able to cope and struggle through, and they may even pass the class eight exam. But then, they can only go if their parents have the money to pay school fees for secondary school.

“Well, that’s another story entirely. It’s interesting to think about how our teaching experiences in the U.S. have influenced our ideas about what education in Vanuatu should be. It seems there are some people who come to Vanuatu to assist with development projects like education and bring with them a particular frame of reference they use to judge the performance of Ni-Vanuatu and the effectiveness of their social institutions.”

“Oh course, when Ni-Vanuatu teachers are expected to teach curriculum and meet standards based upon best practices of western countries, without having nearly the resources, they are going to face difficulties.”

“And they are teaching in a language which is foreign to them. If I had to teach everything in Spanish, I would feel completely insecure in my teaching abilities. Teachers in Vanuatu, especially at the primary level, have to teach everything in a language which they may not use outside the classroom. Some aren’t as animated and secure in their teaching as teachers who teach in their first language.”

“And how are parents supposed to help their children with homework when they don’t understand the language?”

“Yet initiatives from Port Vila continue to support ideas of outside educational advisors. And it seems as though a new initiative is always being introduced. It’s usually something that has been around for a while but with a different name.”

“Even when there is talk of implementing vernacular education or developing curriculum relevant to the daily lives of students, it comes from the top. But how is it supposed to work on a local level?”

“Seems like there needs to be changes within education, but the right people aren’t being involved with the process.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if any educational program is going to be effective outside of Port Vila then it has to be implemented at the community level because the ministry of education doesn’t have

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1 Students in Vanuatu must pass an exam in class eight to continue their education to class nine and ten. There are also exams for class eleven, twelve, and thirteen. Students begin school in kindergarten at anywhere from three to six years of age. Class one (similar to first grade) students are approximately six years of age. At this time, it is the policy of the Vanuatu Ministry of Education that formal education in Vanuatu be compulsory until class eight. However, students are dismissed from school if parents are unable to pay school fees.

2 Ni-Vanuatu is the term used to refer to the indigenous people of Vanuatu.
the resources to monitor and adequately supply teachers and programs. But a program mandated from the top will not likely work at the local level. Essentially, community members are expected to assist with the implementation of an education system which they have had little part in forming.”

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This conversation illustrates the apparent disjuncture of both students and community members in regards to Vanuatu’s formal school program. The curriculum, medium of instruction (English or French), and school structure have little connection to the daily lives of primary age students, who are citizens of one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world and live primarily in rural villages (Crowley 2000, 47). Importantly, there has been no clear policy designed and implemented by the Vanuatu Ministry of Education (VMOE) to incorporate indigenous language, epistemology, knowledge, and culture into formal education. However, over the past ten years, the Vanuatu Ministry of Education has made some effort to include indigenous language into the curriculum by implementing vernacular education in approximately sixteen primary schools as a pilot program3 (interview with Gambetta 2007). Currently, the VMOE, struggling to obtain vital resources to implement such programs, has begun to rely more on local community support (interview with Laan 2007). Yet traditionally and today, Ni-Vanuatu community members have been excluded from the planning process. In fact, they are seldom given an opportunity to express their concerns, ideas, and desires, regarding formal education. At the same time, community members are concerned about the loss of their heritage languages and ways of life, which, according to some, is being accelerated by formal education.

3 However, today, less than half of these projects remain in operation (Interview with Gambetta 2007).
Indeed, such dialogue has been taking place for well over thirty decades. In the early 1970s, Francis Bugotu, Solomon Islander educator and indigenous activist, led a team of researchers into rural villages throughout the then British Solomon Islands Protectorate to gather local community concerns regarding the state of formal education and whether or not it was meeting the needs of the communities. In the same way, this project aims to present a community perspective of the formal school program, particularly focused on vernacular and cultural education. However, Bugotu and his team went a step further and, based on the responses of community members, made recommendations to the protectorate government (Bugotu 1975, 44). During the first stages of research planning, I, too, aspired to present the VMOE with a functional document which could provide insight into community involvement in formal education and be used to further the vernacular education program on a national level. Yet, my findings from conducting research with Ni-Vanuatu community members brings to light issues which further complicate the process and purpose of education in Vanuatu. Therefore, this project does not include recommendations, but invites the VMOE, local community members, and other stakeholders to explore ways in which to bridge the growing gap between the national and local levels in regards to formal education.
Ni-Vanuatu, the people of Vanuatu, encompass well over one hundred language groups, approximately one hundred six of which are considered to be living⁴ (although many are either threatened or endangered) (Massey University 2003 and University of the South Pacific 2008). Within each of these languages is a unique information package, filled with such traditional knowledge, cultures and customs as sand drawings, secret societies, carved objects (or kastoms), spiritual worlds, black magic, nakamals [places where kastoms are made and traditions are taught; kava bars], custom dances and songs, circumcision, marriage, and exchange systems (Lightner and Naupa 2005). Additionally, the people of Vanuatu live largely self-sustaining agriculturalist lifestyles in close connection with the land.

The Spanish were the first Europeans to visit the islands, landing on the island which they named Espiritu Santo in 1606. They had relatively little impact on local

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⁴ All of Vanuatu’s indigenous languages originate from the Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) language family, extending from Madagascar to the west and Rapa Nui to the east. This language family has in the region of 1,000 to 1,200 languages, categorized as Oceanic, Central-Eastern Oceanic, and Southern Oceanic (Lynch and Crowley 2001, 19 and Ethnologue 2008).
culture and failed to establish any formalized colonies. However, close to 160 years later, two other European groups, Britain and France, arrived in the islands, first as missionaries, traders, labor recruits, beachcombers, and planters, and later as government officials. The British and French governments came to establish what has been known as the longest running condominium in world history. Like many countries throughout the Pacific, western education began in Vanuatu with the missionaries' arrival to the islands in the early 1800s, and traditional forms of education began to dissipate as Ni-Vanuatu began converting and spreading the message of Christianity. By 1860, six mission schools were established, teaching Ni-Vanuatu to read the Bible through indigenous languages (Robert 2005 and Khan 1984). As the missionary population increased, France and Britain began competing for influence in the archipelago and eventually agreed upon a joint annexation where both countries ruled from 1906 to 1980. As a result, they employed dual systems of government and eventually, education. Racing to maintain influence in a fast becoming independent nation, the French and British colonial government began opening schools, taking over missionary schools, and spreading formal education throughout the country. By the early 1970s, government education had been firmly established, and by 1980, 285 primary schools (175 Anglophone and 115 Francophone) had been founded. Although Vanuatu gained its independence in 1980, both the former condo-colonial government and European missionaries have left their legacies, apparent in the formal education system. The next two sections highlight the beginnings of formal education on the island of Malekula⁵ and the traditional roles of community members in the formal school program.

⁵ Malekula is also spelled Malakula.
Skul [School] and Local Communities

According to John Laan, Associate Peace Corps Director and Ni-Vanuatu educator, after formal education was established by the missionaries, Ni-Vanuatu community members were eager to send their children to school to learn what they saw as valuable information; reading, writing and arithmetic. In fact, parents and leaders of communities assisted the missionaries and teachers by volunteering to build classrooms and gardens for the school because they saw it as a way to further opportunities for themselves and their children. In an interview that took place in his Port Vila Peace Corps office, Laan provided this information about the history of community involvement in mission education.

...when missionaries started to set up schools, basically, the communities played an active role. They built classrooms, the teachers’ houses, and the mission provided the teachers. There was unity in the villages...to build schools...I remember in those days, there were days set aside just for school work. And it involved the full day where parents had to go to the sites where the school was set up to build houses and prepare things like that. And they were happy to do it...nobody questioned...whether it was important...There was very little in the way of contributing in the program of the schools or the classroom (from community members). They didn’t see it as really their role. They left it to the teachers (interview with Laan 2007).

Although missionaries directed the operation of missionary schooling, Ni-Vanuatu community members were actively involved in spreading Christianity and education throughout the islands. Many worked diligently to send either themselves or their children to school and provided free labor building classrooms, missionary and teacher houses, churches, and gardens. For those who were exceptionally successful in their education, they risked their lives living on other islands or in less hospitable villages
working as teachers for the Christian cause, some desiring to gain access to, for lack of a better phrase, western goods and lifestyle. Skul or formal education provided Ni-Vanuatu, whose social structures had been largely devastated, a means by which they could obtain western knowledge (contained in books; acquired with the skill of literacy), which would then bring western goods and thereby elevate their social status (Swatridge 1986, 13). The years leading up to independence, when the condo-colonial government finally became involved with the formal education campaign, gave Ni-Vanuatu community members motives for access to something else, the development of a nation.

Kastom and Bislama

Struggles for independence, led by Ni-Vanuatu such as Father Walter Lini, Kalkot Matas Kele-Kele, Hilda Lini, and Barak Sope, sparked interest and a sort of cultural revitalization founded on traditional ideals of custom meshed with aspects of Christianity, forming kastom (Lini 1980). Professors Lamont Lindstrom, University of Tulsa, and Geoffrey White, University of Hawai‘i Mānoa, define custom as “all conspicuous cultural forms and practices that people talk about and incorporate into their sense of identity.” They write that for the people of Melanesia, local identity is related to particular customs that represent specific villages or areas (Lindstrom and White 1994, 4). Custom, or in the context of Vanuatu, kastom, can have various meanings, depending on who is providing the definition and from what part of the country the person lives. In Port Vila and Luganville, kastom refers to aspects of culture and tradition that are often disconnected from localized practices. Nevertheless, symbols, such as the tuska [pig’s

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5 This is not to say the church was not a major influence in pushing for and establishing the independent nation of Vanuatu (Lini 1980).
tusk] and the namele leaf\textsuperscript{7} [namele leaf] and the language, Bislama, represent the nation of Vanuatu and set it apart as a country which both values its indigenous heritage and, because English and French are official national languages, strives to participate on the world stage (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982, 310 and Bolton 2000, 392). Even at a more local level, kastom is a term that receives largely contradicting responses. To members from some “kastom” communities located on the island of Tanna, Pentecost, or to some extent, South Malekula, kastom might be described as indigenous knowledge, traditions, behaviors, practices, and particular objects which are an inherent part of society, the glue that holds communities together, vital to the survival of the people, and representative of their daily lives and practices. This viewpoint of kastom is somewhat disconnected from the national view of kastom\textsuperscript{8} because it is founded on local epistemologies and knowledge and operates through the medium of the local indigenous language (Lindstrom 1983, Lindstrom 1994, 75 and Keesing and Tonkinson 1982, 311). On a tangential note, to a number of Ni-Vanuatu women, kastom is seen as something that has been distorted from tradition and used by men to oppress women (for example, Grace Mera Molisa’s poem “Custom”: “Custom”/ misapplied/ bastardised/ a Frankenstein / corpse / conveniently / recalled/ to intimidate/ women (Molisa 2000, 274)). As Vanuatu’s formal education system proceeds to focus more attention on establishing a population of Ni-Vanuatu who are able to participate in the national, or even global economy, thereby emphasizing French and English languages and values in the

\textsuperscript{7} The pig’s tusk is a symbol which, according to Ralph Regenvanu, represents “traditional wealth”. Additionally, the namele leaf symbolizes peace. It is also used today to mark a taboo area or in relation to a “big man” or leader (Regenvanu 2008).

\textsuperscript{8} On the other hand, Crowley writes that at a national level Vanuatu’s linguistic and cultural diversity are valued and considered to be part of the national identity. In fact the words of the constitution require that indigenous languages be protected (Crowley 1989, 115).
classroom, local community members are forced to negotiate and define for themselves the place in which their own indigenous languages and customs (connected to local identities) fit into both the national agenda and also their own changing communities (Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1999, 25).

Bislama, an English-based pidgin or, in some cases, creole, emerged in the early 1800s, and was used mainly by Ni-Vanuatu males working on plantations in Queensland, Australia or involved with the sandalwood trade. Eventually, in the late 1800s, it became a language of its own, spreading throughout the islands and becoming a lingua franca for both men and women traveling to other parts of the island or region. The years leading up to independence opened a venue for Bislama to be used as a medium for expressing ideas relating to kastom and nationalism. As a result of the Ni-Vanuatu demonstrations, focused on the assurance of a balance between English and French prior to independence, it eventually became Vanuatu’s national language (Crowley 1989b, 132). Today, Bislama has found its place as a unifying force, connecting the people of Vanuatu on a national level, as well as on a regional level⁹ (Crowley 1989a, 129). Yet on a local level, the place of Bislama is more contested, and is very much related to views regarding local and national. On a national level, identities are connected to and defined through the use of Bislama. However, on a local level, indigenous languages hold greater status for cultural identity.

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⁹ Similar languages are spoken in Papua New Guinea (Tok Pisin) and Solomon Islands (Solomon Islands Pijin) which are mutually intelligible to Bislama (Crowley 1989, 129).
Worthwhile Learning: My Introduction to Vanuatu

The people of Vanuatu have an incredible ability to welcome outsiders, not just into their villages and homes, but into their hearts and family. It would not be an exaggeration to claim each person who has visited Vanuatu, with respect and love in their hearts, walks away with at least one family.

Figure 8: Lucy and Edward Gordan, author, Edga, Trisha, Jamaema, Sabrina, Diana, Godwin, Christine, Senya, Asten Gordan, Tautu Village. 2007. Photo by Ashley Vaughan.

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Growing up in a small Oklahoma town, with a population consisting of (in my estimate) less than three percent minority, did not provide me with much in the way of diverse cultural awareness. A mission trip to Dominican Republic my freshmen year of college and a week vacation in Cancun, Mexico were the extent of my travels outside the United States. It is little wonder that, after four years into my teaching career at a small country school in Oklahoma, I had a persistent yearning to, as trite as it may sound,
spread my wings. I joined the Peace Corps – quit my job; sold everything. On October 15th, 2002, I was on a plane from Los Angeles to Port Vila, Vanuatu with a two-year commitment ahead of me.

Our first week of pre-service, cultural training, when my new host family gave me a new name and an island dress large enough for two of me, forbade me to leave the yard alone, and refused to let me speak English, I knew the next two years of my life were going to be the greatest cultural education I could receive (despite the fact that I cried every night for at least the first month). As the months dragged on, my home in Oklahoma became somewhat of a faint memory, and my new Vanuatu life began its imprint on my soul. I cannot say that I immediately fell in love with everything Vanuatu has to offer. As a woman, I found it difficult, to say the least. Working alongside particular males in Vanuatu was especially challenging, and I struggled each day to earn their respect. But I did grow to love the comforting smell of laplap [traditional pudding made from root crops], baking in the ground oven, Bislama (the language I was forced to use to stumble my way through conversations), and evenings with Ni-Vanuatu families, filled with storian [stories; discussions] about black magic, traditional customs, daily activities, my family in America, or just plain gossip. Kava became a part of my life in Vanuatu that I especially loved. Evenings in particular are comforting, when the only lights are lanterns or fires. As the sun goes down, the nakamals begin to open and the sound of hacking and spitting, and the low hum of talking fills the air. I began to appreciate washing my laundry by hand, relying on a lantern or candles to read at night, waking up with the roosters, and always – with the exception of very few places – being surrounded by people.

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I was fortunate enough to have three assignments that, according to their location, were very different. My first year, I began my service working at the Malampa Provincial Education Office (PEO) in Norsup, Malekula. When the entire province moved from Norsup to the nearby town of Lakatoro, the PEO was left behind with its old office and blue education truck. Somehow between the Provincial Education Officer and our Peace Corps Assistant Director, I was given the title provincial curriculum advisor and told my job would consist of visiting the ninety or so primary schools located on the three islands of Malekula, Ambrym, and Paama (hence, Malampa), observing teachers in the classroom and conducting workshops. Of course, this mandate came from Port Vila, where there is plenty of transport, email, fax, and a regularly working telephone. As it turns out, neither Peace Corps nor the province had the necessary resources for me to successfully carry out these goals. So, I bought a bike and tried to ride to all the schools located within a day's ride away, and for those far away schools, whenever possible, I hitched or bought a ride with one of the island's transport trucks.

In Norsup, most of my evenings were spent at one of the five or so nakamals [kava bars], listening to the guys from work make fun of each other or re-enact various experiences on ships, in trucks, or in bars in Port Vila. Occasionally, I walked to the nearby village, Tautu, to eat dinner with a family or visit the other Peace Corps volunteer. I lived on the grounds of Norsup School, and there was not much by the way of a Norsup community – most people who live in Norsup work either at the school, PEO, or hospital. It was not until my second year, when I moved to the small group of islands just off the southern tip of Malekula called the Maskelyne islands and lived in the village of Pelonk, that I felt I was part of a community. I was given a host family and a garden. Weekends
were spent doing laundry, working in the garden, collecting firewood, weaving mats, fishing, and collecting octopus and clams off the reef. For women, kava, pants, and walking around alone were more or less illegal, so I was happy to have the chance to become involved in the community.

Again, my job assignment did not turn out to be exactly what I had planned, and consequently, I created for myself a job of teaching classes seven and eight English and science and assisting the class two teacher with a reading program. Living in the village, as opposed to the school grounds, and teaching at the community school gave me an opportunity to experience a small part of what life is like for Ni-Vanuatu students. I learned that village life is starkly different from formal schooling, and I learned that most community members had no idea exactly what I did at the school. They knew I was a teacher, but they assumed what I did at school had little bearing on their lives in the village.

Because teaching in Maskelyne allowed me an opportunity to see, first-hand (and on a daily basis), the struggles of teachers, students, and community members to make the Vanuatu Ministry of Education (VMOE) policies work on a local level, I began to question the purpose of not only my job, but also the place of formal education in Vanuatu. What was the purpose of my students spending over forty hours each week studying at school when, firstly, they had little reading comprehension, science, or mathematics skills, and secondly, after completing class eight, they were going to live as self-sustaining agriculturalists in the village?

Peace Corps requires a two-year commitment, with an option to extend for one year or more. After my experience in Maskelyne, I was not ready to leave. At that time,
I was concerned with assisting the Vanuatu Ministry of Education with providing students a quality education. Although at that time, I believed the solution for creating quality education began with teacher training. Thus my job at the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE) began. Contrary to my expectations, this assignment was focused on curriculum development and the creation of an in-service training unit instead of teacher training. Both of these projects were part of the ministry’s basic education initiative, and they were each having a difficult time getting off the ground. At the same time, Peace Corps was assisting the ministry in developing higher literacy standards. Consequently, one of my jobs was to organize a national reading symposium focused on educators (not community members) coming together and discussing the state of the country’s low literacy rates. The Effective Learning of Reading in the Primary Level: Charting the Way for an Improved Methodology was held in May 2005.

Two very significant things happened at this symposium which caught my attention and changed the way I had viewed education in Vanuatu. Firstly, the Vanuatu Exams Unit announced (for the first time) the class four literacy scores. As it turns out, sixty percent of class four students were functioning below the lowest levels of literacy. Most of us educators, Ni-Vanuatu and non-Ni-Vanuatu alike, had already assumed students were struggling with literacy, but to actually hear the scores was quite alarming. Secondly, Professor Robert Early from the Pacific Languages Unit at the University of the South Pacific, Helen Tamtam, also from the Pacific Languages Unit, and Janet Stahl, educational advisor for the Summer Institute of Linguistics, presented sessions on the purpose for and benefits of implementing vernacular education in Vanuatu. Why this had not occurred to me earlier, I do not know, but their argument for teaching students to read
and write in a familiar language created a link with my experiences in the classroom, and I began to understand some of the reasons as to why my students were struggling with not only English, but also with every other subject.

Perhaps the idea of teaching students to read and write in their own languages before learning English or French continues to place emphasis on the fact that students should learn these foreign languages for the purpose of succeeding in a western-style education system. It could be said that implementing vernacular education for the purpose of teaching literacy is merely a more effective way to teach students English or French. As a non-Ni-Vanuatu, it is not for me to decide what the purpose of education in Vanuatu should be. Though, as an educator, I cannot deny my passion and interests lie with the education of students in Vanuatu. I believe education should be familiar, relevant, and beneficial to the daily lives of students and meet the needs of the local community. As Konai Thaman maintains, education is “an introduction to worthwhile learning” (Konai 2002, 5). Are students in Vanuatu receiving “worthwhile learning” from the formal school program? Is “worthwhile learning” for students who return to their villages to become self-sustaining agriculturalists the same as students who migrate to Port Vila to become leaders of the country, work in a restaurant, or open a business? How will students acquire “worthwhile learning” through a language and epistemology that is completely foreign to them? And to local Ni-Vanuatu community members, what is “worthwhile learning”?

*Any national cultural policies must be based on local cultural ideas and practices. A national cultural policy must not be imposed from the top to the bottom, but must come from the bottom to the top...Melanesian peoples must determine for themselves the meaning and significance of the terms, culture, custom, and tradition and the importance of these concepts within national and village life (Chief Willie Bongmatur 1994, 85).*
There continues to be a trend in formal education, in Vanuatu and throughout the Pacific, where ministries of education look to the outside—funding agencies, volunteers, skilled advisors, and other stakeholders—for the answers to these questions, when in fact the answer lies within. At this time, there is a disconnection between formal education and village life, and the only ones who can establish and maintain that connection are Ni-Vanuatu educators, students, and local community members. During the time I was working for the Vanuatu Ministry of Education, I believed change had to start with policy. I later realized, however, policy affecting local communities is really only as good as the paper it is written on if it is not implemented effectively at the local level. For this project, I decided not to focus on the Vanuatu Ministry of Education or Ni-Vanuatu educators but on the other, incredibly vital, half of the equation, local communities.

At this time, the most significant contribution I can make to the vernacular education campaign is to provide a community perspective on the purpose of education, the use of vernacular, and ways in which communities can be involved in the process. From my experiences working with community schools on Malekula, I learned parents are willing to provide money through fundraising and school fees. However, except when their children’s final grades are posted outside the classrooms, they rarely venture onto school grounds to discuss issues of academia, language, culture, or custom. Some of the parents tend to view school as an institution separate from village life, where teachers are responsible for the education of their children.\textsuperscript{10} On the other hand, some teachers assume parents are uninterested in their children’s progress or intimidated by those more formal education.

\textsuperscript{10} Here, I draw upon my experiences living in the village of Pellonk, Maskelyne and working at the nearby school.
educated. Even further removed from local communities is the Vanuatu Ministry of Education, located in Port Vila.

Furthermore, because Vanuatu has a centralized government, many communities in Vanuatu are detached from Port Vila. Ideally, VMOE inspectors should visit schools and insure that they are operating properly, yet the VMOE lacks the necessary resources to visit many schools on the outer islands. Therefore, in order for a vernacular education program to succeed, it is essential that communities are actively involved in its implementation and lines of communication among teachers, VMOE officials, and local community members are opened. Konai Thaman writes, “While much has been written about the impact of colonialism on Pacific economies, environments, politics, and social structures, little attention has been focused on its impact on people’s minds, particularly on their ways of knowing, their views of who and what they are, and what they consider worthwhile to teach and to learn” (Thaman 2003, 2). Although, Ni-Vanuatu educators are taking an initiative to research and analyze current educational issues, communities are an invaluable source of local knowledge which will contribute to education reform.

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Wanem We Mifala I Wantem: An Overview

Much of this research took place during sessions of kava drinking, working in the garden, sitting in someone’s kitchen, or spelling under a mango tree. While both communities organized more formal group interview sessions, most of my interviews were in the form of storian [informal discussion]. As much as possible, I made myself available to be around community members. I wanted to see what their daily lives are like and get a feel for their struggles, joys, values, interests, and worries. This proved to
be very effective because there was always more to say after the tape was turned off, and more often than not, this information was the most valuable. Also, spending time with community members allowed for more informal discussions, which resulted in more openness. In total, fourteen community members and educators participated in individual interviews. Additionally, I conducted three group interviews. With the exception of a few, all interviews were conducted through the medium of Bislama, as it is the only indigenous language in which I am fluent. Because this project highlights conflicting issues regarding the place of Bislama in local communities, I find my use of it rather ironic. Of course, lanwis ['local language', a Bislama term for indigenous language, or language of the place (which I will use throughout the thesis)] does provide more insight into the viewpoints of community members. Using the metaphor of a house, English or French would be the roof, only reaching the surface, Bislama would be the walls, providing support and connection, and lanwis would be the foundation, allowing for deeper understanding.

Framing this research and project, are the questions laid out by Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Smith 1999, 10). A few of which are: “Whose research is it?” “Who owns it?” “Who will benefit from it?” Also, the work of Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, Knowing and Learning: An Indigenous Fijian Approach provided me with an example of an indigenous approach to research. Vanua Research, based on respect for local Fijian community members and their ways of life, encourages researchers to go through the proper channels in order to obtain information. Many times, I sat down for an interview, expecting to start right away discussing the questions I had already prepared. How quickly did I learn the interview process was going to take much longer than I had
predicted. Before we could arrive at the questions, the group or individual being
interviewed spent a good ten minutes discussing everything but the topic at hand. In this
way, I was both forming and maintaining relationships beyond the scope of research.

Nabobo-Baba writes that, as researchers, we have a responsibility to understand
local epistemologies and develop meaningful relationships with those involved in
collaborative research. Although, at times, my relationships with community members
made conducting research a bit more complicated. Because of my connections with
particular families, I chose to work with the people of Tautu and Ronevie. (One of my
own host families lives in Tautu, while my fiancé’s host family lives in Ronevie). Before
leaving Hawai‘i for Vanuatu, I called each family to let them know I was coming and the
purpose for my visit. Yet I found it very difficult to begin the research process because
of other obligations and expectations. I had not seen my host family or friends for over
two years, and there was much catching up to do. For example, the day I arrived in
Tautu, I was whisked away with my family to visit an auntie who was on her death bed.
Then there were all kinds of other pleasant and welcomed distractions – new babies,
dinners with different families, church services, weekly family worships, nightly kava
drinking, accompanying mamas and sisters to the garden, river, and ocean, and the list
goes on. To community members, my work could always wait until the next day. Of
course, this was beyond enjoyable for me, but in the back of my mind, I had a nagging
sense that my time in the village was short and there was much more information that I
still needed to gather. As Professor Vilsoni Hereniko, University of Hawai‘i Mānoa, so
required a balancing of selves, relating to being a researcher, family member, friend, and
foreigner (Hereniko 1995, 8). In the end, I had gathered more than enough information; my time spent with community members only added richness to the research.

This insider/outsider dichotomy poses other issues as well, especially in regards to the topic of this project. Education is a controversial topic that evokes heated discussions and passionate feelings. Writing about Vanuatu’s education system as a non-Ni-Vanuatu, has caused me to tread carefully across issues dealing with the government, educators, and the feelings of local community members. Yet, in some ways, my being an outsider has allowed me to raise questions and critique particular aspects of formal education in Vanuatu that, possibly, an insider (Ni-Vanuatu educator or community member) could not do. In Vanuatu, there are times when critique could cost one her position as an educator or place within society. To prove this, many community members, especially women, asked for their involvement in the project to remain anonymous (thus the use of quotation marks around particular names). Interestingly, more women than men wished for me to keep their names anonymous. Perhaps, this is because of the roles women play in the community. Although there is a place for women in decision-making, most of the leadership belongs to the men. Therefore, I believe, in some ways, I have more freedom to ask questions and raise issues because I am removed from the situation. In other ways, I have had to be more careful of how I phrase particular issues regarding the situation of students and the quality of formal education. In the context of western academia, the researcher and academic should present herself as being the authority or expert on a particular topic. Ultimately, I steer clear of speaking as an authority on education in Vanuatu. As much as possible, I have attempted to allow the voice of community
members and other Ni-Vanuatu involved with formal education to speak throughout this project.

*Wanem We Mifala I Wantem: A Community Perspective of Vernacular Education in Vanuatu* is multilayered. Formal education in Vanuatu is an extremely complex topic, and trying to bring to light all the factors contributing to this particular situation would be like trying to hit a moving target. Nevertheless, I have attempted to present a somewhat full picture of formal education in Vanuatu and touch on the heart of the issues. This thesis addresses topics spanning custom, language, education policies, and disjuncture of youth, the purpose of education, community involvement, gender, and the competition of the national agenda with local agendas, all of which are entangled.

Within this thesis, I have focused on local community members and their involvement, or lack of involvement, in formal education. As much as possible, I have sought to respect the agency of Ni-Vanuatu community members without skirting the real and critical issues. I found writing this thesis a most challenging experience. It was impossible for me to describe the lives of community members and students and my own life in Vanuatu using a traditionally academic method. Inspired by writers such as Epeli Hau‘ofa, Konai Thaman, Vilsoni Hereniko, and Albert Wendt, I turned to creative writing and ethnographic fiction. Chapter One, "Negotiating the Middle", begins with a fictional narrative highlighting a young Ni-Vanuatu woman’s struggles to find her place in the village. As a class ten student, this particular young woman has aspirations of becoming a teacher or a nurse, yet when a most traumatic event ends her opportunity to complete her education, she finds it difficult to adjust to village life. "Elsi’s Stori" provides a textual picture of life in a rural Ni-Vanuatu community and highlights the
disconnection of village life to formal schooling. Also, this chapter offers an overview of the disjuncture of both students and local community members, raises questions regarding the purpose of education in Vanuatu, and emphasizes the conflict between national and local agendas.

A descriptive account of my last visit to Ronevie Village opens Chapter Two, “Olsem Wanem Long Tufala Komuniti”, where I present information regarding language, religion and values of the people of Ronevie and Tautu Villages. This chapter also provides a brief description of curriculum, the role and struggles of teachers, community involvement, and a typical day at school. The purpose of “Olsem Wanem Long Tufala Komuniti” is to offer a backdrop for the following chapters.

Chapter Three, “Ples Blong Lanwis, Bislama, Franis, mo Inglis”, addresses issues of language and education by first looking at the status of Vanuatu’s indigenous languages, Bislama, French, and English in regards to the formal school program. The chapter then moves into presenting a community perspective of the place of these languages in the both schools and the communities, drawing attention to their concerns for providing their children with opportunities to learn two global languages, while at the same time, maintaining their heritage languages and cultures. The conclusion discusses issues concerning language loss, the quality of education, literacy, and the national agenda. “Ples Blong Lanwis, Bislama, Franis, mo Inglis” is a springboard for Chapter Four, “Considering Vernacular Education from a Community Perspective.” In this chapter, community members of Tautu and Ronevie Villages make their case that indigenous language maintenance must go hand-in-hand with traditional ways of life, indigenous epistemology, local knowledge, culture, and custom. They offer suggestions
for implementing a culturally relevant vernacular education program and discuss issues regarding the need to balance the needs of local communities and the country as a whole. Complicating assumptions that all local communities want or need a vernacular and cultural education program in their community schools, community members provide the VMOE with valuable insight into the capacity of communities to implement such programs.
Singsing blong olgeta man faol i spolem slip blong mi. Long Vanuatu, man faol ia, sinspect blo olgeta, oli bos blong moning ia. Oli stat blong singaot long eli moning, bifo san i gat tingting blong pusum hed blong hem i go long skae. Olgeta man faol ia blong Vanuatu, i no olsem olgeta man faol blong Franis mo Ostrelia we oli gat wan sinspect olsem kok-a-dudel-du. Sinspect blo olgeta blo mifala i save brekem sora blong mifala mo tu oli pusum wing blong olgeta biaen. “Kok-a-ra-a-raaaaar!” Flap, flap, flap, flap! Mi harem man faol ia we hemi wantem mekem haos blong hem klosap long windo blo mi. Hemi sendem sinspect blong hem, i go aot long moning ia we hemi tudak finis. Hemi wewemap olgeta fren faol blong hem we oli kavremap ful aelan ia. Mi save harem olgeta we oli sendem aot sinspect blo olgeta. Toktok blong olgeta hemi, “Ol mama mo ol yang gel! Yufala i mas aot long bed! Yufala i gat wok blong mekem!”
Mi no gat janis blong stap nomo long bed blong mi tingbaot drim we mi bin gat lo naet, tu, mi no save stap blong harem win, we i kolkol, i go long fes blong mi. Mama i wekap finis. Mi save harem hem. I stap lo kijin blong mekem faea blong dring ti. Hemi wet blong mi blong skrasem kokonas mo skinim kumala blong ti blong mifala. Mi save harem Dacana we hemi mekem noes blong moning long bed blong hem narasaed long mi. Lo naet ia, hemi bin sik, be hemi save se hem, tu, mas girap. Hemi mas tekemaot aean blong kava blong letem i save drae long san blong moning ia. Jon, smol brata blong mi, hemi slip yet. Hemi gat taem blong slip yet, ating wan aoa, bifo Mama i singaot long hem blong kam dring ti. Papa, hemi go finis long Lemip blong giv han long Angkel Franswa wetem bot. Hemi bin traem blong wok fulap long ol kaen difren job mo salem kava blong pem olgeta skulfi blo Dacana, Merian, mo Jon.

"Kok-a-ra-a-raaaaaar!" Flap, flap, flap, flap, flap! "Ol mama mo ol yang gel!
Yufala sud girap finis!" Mi mekem wan noes blong mi we mi no glad blong wekap yet, mi pusum up hed blong mi, mo mi girap up long bed. Mi pusumaot han blong mi we mi filim net blong mostik we i stap kavremap bed blong mi. Taem blong statem wan dei bakegen—wan dei we hemi gat wok blong mekem long garen, planem olgeta yam mo digim up maniok blong kakaes lo sava; maet mbae mi lukluk long krab blong sofmad. Wan dei we hemi fulap wetem was blong olgeta famle blong mi, we mi go long reva blong kasem wota. Wan dei we mi mas mekem kakaes blong dring ti, aftenun, mo sava. Maet mbae mi fidim pig olgeta makas blong kakaes. Hemi no wan samting tunaes blong wok long garen. Hemi givim mi taem blong tainting. Mi nidim tingbaot long tufala yia ia long wei we mi bin ting se laef blong mi mbae i lidim mi long wan ples, be naoia, mi stap long wan narafala ples olgeta.
Mi go insaed long kijin. Mama i stap finis. Hemi bin putum dres blong wok blong hem, mo hemi sidaon narasaed long faea blong fanem smok we i stap kamaot long ol smol pis wud. Afta, hemi letemap hed blong hem blong luk long mi. Mi save lulkuk long ae blong hem we i gat wan taed we hemi dip tumas. Hemi letemap ae blong hem blong go long drae kokonas wc i stap long kona long kijin, mo mi save se hemi wantem mi blong skrasem olgeta. Mama i bin putum finis wan stampa wud blong mi sidaon long hem klosap long faea. Mi sidaon long hem, mo mi stat blong openem kokonas wetem bus naef blong mi. Mama, i pusum dis blong kokonas long graon floa we i kam long mi. Mi alawem wota blong kokonas i go long hem. Taem mi openem faef kokonas, mi stat blong skrasem mit blong olgeta. Mitufala i no toktok. Mama, hemi taed tumas blong mekem toktok. Mi save luk hem, hed blong hem i go daon blong hemi slip, be afta fan i stat blong kamaot long han blong hem, hemi wekap bakegen. Long naet, hemi las wan we hemi go slip, mo samtaem mi no save se hemi slip tru wan long taem ia. Fulap taem mi save harem hem we hemi muv olbaot long bed blong hem, mo mi tingbaot se wok blong tingting blong hem i stap gohed long slip blong hem.

Mifala i no toktok, mo hemi oraet blong mi. Insted, mi tingbaot hao laef blong mi mbae hemi sem mak wetem Mama blong mi. Mi olsem studen blong hem. Hemi tijim mi hao blong lukaotem famle blo mi olsem hemi lukaotem famle blong hem. Sista blong mi, Fredlen, we hemi fasbon, mbea hemi mered long tu manis taem. Papa hemi bin wok had blong mek sua se hemi meredem Ronol, we hemi bin wet long ansa blong Fredlen bitim wan yia finis! Mi save se hemi no wantem meredem hem. Hemi no rili save hem. Be wanem samting bakegen mbae hemi mekem? Hemi bin finisim skul blong hem long klas sikis, mo naoia hemi go long olgeta miting blong olgeta yut mo ol samting long jos
no mo. Hemi no mo mekem wan mo samting bakegen. Hemi stap wet long haos blong taem we hemi mas mered. Papa, i bin traem blong giaman long mi wan dei. Hemi bin talem long mi se wan boe, i bin kam long haos blong mifala blong askem mi. Afta, Papa i bin talem hem se mbae hemi jas tingbaot ansa blong boe ia. Mi bin talem long hem, mbae i no gat nating. Mi gat eitin yias nomo. Mi gat janis yet blong aot long vilij.

Mama, hemi stat blong skinim kumala nao, mo mi, mi go aot bihaen long haos blong kasem smol ael an kabis. Long taem nao, mi save luk san- hemi stat blong kam antop bitim hil ia. Jon, mbae hemi wekap i no long taem. Hemi mas wokbaot blong go long skul. Oltaem hemi wokbaot wetem olgeta pikinini lo vilij, mi minim se olgeta pikinini we olgeta parens blong olgeta, oli bin pem skulfi finis. Oli stap kam bak long skul long taem we i tudak finis from se oli mas mekem studi blong olgeta. Afta, oli save kam long haos blong kakae. Long yia ia, hemi stap long klas sikis. Mbae hemi tekem exam blong klas sikis long Novemba, mo Papa i bin talem long hem se spos we hemi pasem exam, mbae hemi save go long klas seven long Tekamb o Ransit. Mi wari se mbae hemi no pasem exam blong hem. Hemi no stap long top long klas blong hem, mo Mama mo Papa, tufala i no save helpem hem wetem studi blong hem from se hemi studi long Franis nomo. Spos mi gat janis, mi traem givim han long hem, be taem we hemi bin statem skul blong hem, mi bin aot long vilij. Naoia i had blong hemi kasap. Mi tekem lif blong aelan kabis blong givim long Mama, mo hemi putum long saspan wetem kumala mo melek blong kokonas. Samting ia, hemi ti blong mifala long moning, be samtaem, Mama, hemi yusum maniok. Spos se Jon, hemi save go long junya sekenderi skul, mbae hemi no kakae olgeta aelan kakae. Mbae i kakae raes blong dring ti, aftenun, mo sava.
Nao Jon, hemi kam insaed long kijin. Mi save luk se hemi wantem slip yet mo hemi no hapi nating from se hemi no wantem blong girap yet. Mama, hemi mekem plet blong hem blong givim long hem. Hemi putum ti blong hem i go long glas mo hemi putum tu suga long hem. Mi mekem plet blong Fredlen. Hemi bin aot blong muvem tufala buluk. Naoia, Mama hemi wekemap gud mo hemi jikim Jon from hea blo hem we i olbaot. Hemi givim hem wan kom blong fiksim hea blong hem bifo hemi aot blong go long skul. Mi mekem plet blong mi mo ti blong mi. Afta, mi klaem antop long floa bambu, mo mi sidaon wetem olgeta. Long taem we mifala i kakae, Josef mo Daved, tufala man we oli mekem wok blong kopratif long Tisvil, oli stap kutem olgeta tri narasaed long vilij blong mifala. Tufala i putum hed blong tufala long doa blong kijin. Mama, i talem se, “Yu kam”, mo hemi talem long mi se mbac mi mekem tufala plet blong kakae mo ti blong tufala. Olgeta i bin stap long vilij blong mifala tri manis finis. Mama mo mifala ol gel we mifala i stap long haos, mifala i lukaotem olgeta was blong olgeta mo mekem kakae blong olgeta. Olgeta i fo, mo ol taem oli kam long haos blong kakae long sava- taem we kava i finis. Hemi naes we oli save stap long plesia. Famle blong mifala, oltæm i rere blong lukaotem ani man we hemi stap visitem mifala. Mama, oltæm, hemi mek sua se eni visita oli gat kakae mo bed blong slip. Hemi hapi blong talem se hemi save lukaotem gud olgeta ges we oli kam long plesia.

Mama, hemi stap long medel long wan stori we hemi talem hao nao wan wael pig i bin givim fraet long Jon long las taem we olgeta boe i bin go blong sperem pig long bus. Afta, smol Bong, we haos blong hem i stap narasaed long mifala, i kam blong kasem Jon blong go long skul. Jon, hemi stap dring ti blong hem kwiktaem. Afta, hemi komem hea blong hem, pikimap buk blong hem, mo hemi go wetem Bong mo olgeta pikinini blong
vilij. Taem mi luklu olgeta run togeta wetem basket kaliko blong olgeta wetem kakae mo pepa blong olgeta, i stap mekem mi tingbaot long taem we mi bin wan studen long Ondui Skul. Mi bin top long klas blong mi long saens, agrikalja, mo Franis. Mi tingbaot se Papa, hemi bin hapi taem we mi bin pasem exam blong klas sikis. Hem wetem Mama, tufala i bin sendem mi blong go long Tekamb blong junya sekenderi skul.

“Elsie O!” Mi harem Mama i stap singaot long kijin. Hemi wantem mi blong wasem olgeta plet bifo mitufala i go long garen. Joseph mo David, tufala i bin go finis, nai mifala woman nomo, mifala i stap lo haos, rere blong statem olgeta wok blong mifala. Mifala i mekem wok ia evri dei nomo. Taem we mi bin stap long Tekamb, mifala ol studen, taem we mifala i hanggre, mifala i bin save go long stoa blong pem ol kaen loli o Twisti. Mo fulap taem mifala i bin hanggre from se Jif Kuk Tomson, hemi no bin givim tumas aelan kakae, be hemi bin givim mifala fulap raes. Long vilij, hemi mo gud from se evri dei mifala i save kakae aelan kakae, be hemi had wok tumas. Evri dei mifala i mas go long garen blong kasem kakae. Afta mifala i mas plenem kakae bakegen. Mi go long kijin mo karem bus naef blong mi mo wan bigfala bag blong raes. Long Redsands, mifala i no yusum basket mo truk. Mifala i wokbaot, mo mifala i karem olgeta kakae blong mifala bag long haos. Taswae mifala i nidim bifikala bag blong raes. Mama tu, i tckem bak wetem bus naef, mo mitufala i stat blong wokbaot long riva blong go antop lo rod. Taem we mifala i kasem plantesen, hemi talem mi blong stikim sam grin kokonas blong mifala i dring long taem we mifala i wokbaot. Mi no rili save se plantesen, hemi stap haomas menet long vilij, be hemi takem mifala blong go kasem medel long moning blong kasem. Ren i bin kam daon long plesia blong mekem se graon hemi sofsof blong mifala i dig long hem. Mi gat wan garen blong mi we hemi stap
klosap long garen blong Mama. Taem we mi bin kam bak long skul, tu yia finis, hemi
bin helpem mi blong plenem hem, mo evri dei be Sandei, mi wok long hem. Blo mi, mi
gat lif laplap, aelan kabis, kumala, yam, banana, mo taro. Taem we i taem blong hem, mi
save karem bredfrut, bata frut, mango, gwava, mo aranas long olgeta tri we i stap olbaot
long karen blong Mama.

Taem we mifala i kasem garen, Mama hemi go long wei blong hem, mo mi, mi go
long wei blong mi. Garen blong hem, i stap antop mo lo rod. Fredlen, hemi stap long
haos blong stat blong wasem olgeta klos blong mifala. Mi laki we mi save wok long
garen. Spos we mi mas wasem klos wetem Fredlen, ful moningia mi mas lisin long hem
taem we hemi tokbaot hu i bin go long miting blong olgeta yut mo taem we hemi mered
hemi no wantem muv i go long Tisvil. Mi faenem rop blong yam blong mi, sidaon long
lek blong mi, mo yusum bus naef blong digem graon we i stap kavremap yam ia. Taem
we klas naen tija blong mi long Tekamb, hemi bin stori wetem mifala baot olgeta fiuja
blong mifala, hemi bin askem mifala blong raetbaot olgeta job we mifala i wantem blong
mekem taem we mifala i finisim klas tweelev mo tetin. Papa, hemi bin tales long mi finis
se spos we mi pasem exam blong klas ten, mbae mi save go long klas leven mo tweelev
long Sao.

Long taemia, mi bin ting se maet mbea mi laek blong kam wan sekenderi tija
blong agrikalja. Long taem finis, mi bin gat interes long agrikalja, mo mi bin stori wetem
wan tija blong mi tekem olgeta klas blong agrikalja long Sao. Long pep ia, mi bin raet se
mi bin plenem se mbae mi finisim klas tweelev mo afa mbae mi go long tija’s kolej blong
studi sekenderi edukesen. Mi no bin raet se mi bin planem se mbae mi kam bak long vilij
blong plenem yam long garen. Mi bin ting se naoia, mbae mi gat stat blong kam wan tija
or maet wan nas– mi bin ting se mbae mi gat wan job. Taem we yu go long skul, olgeta, oli ekspektem yu blong finisim mo gat wan job. I no gat wan we oli ekspektem yu blong kam bak long vilij. Mama mo Papa, tufala i save finis se i no gat enuf job blong evri wan, be oli bin ting se mbae i no olsem blong mi. Taswae tufala i bin wok had blong pem skulfi blong mi.

Plan blo mi, mbae mi difren. Mi bin pasem exams blong klas ten, mo mi bin go long klas leven long Sao. Fulap ol fren blong mi, oli no bin pasem exam blong olgeta mo oli bin fos blong go bak long vilij blong olgeta. Mi tingbaot se mi bin hapi tumas blong mi gat janis blong stap long skul. Taem we mi bin aot long haos blong kam long skul, fas taem, i bin had. Mi bin stap yet long aclan, Loketu, olsem famle blong mi, be from nomo olgeta truk, oli sas tumas blong kam lo haos. Taswea mi bin kam bak long vilij tri or fo taem long wan yia nomo. Be gogo, hemi isi lelebet blong stap aot, mo olgeta fren mo tija blo mi oli bin kam olsem famle blong mi. Taem mi wan studen, mi bin gat enuf taem blong studi from se mi no bin fos blong wok long garen. Mi bin wasem olgeta klos blong mi, mo sam klos blong wan kasen brota, be hemi no bin tekem tumas taem.

Long taem blo spel, mi bin go bak blong stap long vilij. Hemi no wan samting blo mi. Mama, i bin mekem mi wok had tumas, hemi no bin alawem mi blong stap nomo long haos, mo blo mi, hemia i bin oraet. Be taem we spel i finis, mi tingbaot se taem we mi bin go bak long skul olgeta fren blo mi, oli tokbaot se oli no hapi nating blong kam stap long vilij from se oli no wantem wok long garen o spenem ful dei blong wasem olgeta klos. Olgeta parens blo olgeta, oli bin talem olgeta se oli gat “sof han” blong skul. Long fas spel blong mi we mi bin kam bak long vilij afta long klas seven, mi bin traem
blong talem long Mama se mi no bin wantem blong wok long garen from se hemi had tumas, be hemi no alawem. Hemi las taem we mi tokbaot samting ia.

Mi traem blong digemap wan pis yam we hemi fas gud long graon. Skit blong mi, hemi fas long lek blong mi taem we mi wantem muvem mi, mo mi harem se mi hot tumas from se mi putum sot traoses aninit. Nao, mi luk raon blong mek sua se i no gat man we oli stap wokbaot long rod mo mi tekem of sket ia. Papa, hemi bin tok long mi fulap taem blong mi putum sket taem we mi wokbaot long vilij. Long skul, mi bin save putum sot traosa taem we klas i finis long sava. Naoia, mi no laekem nating blong putum sket mo aelan dres. Hemi no isi tumas taem we mi mas wok. Nao, long haos mo long garen mi traem blong putum sot traosa. Blo mi, hemi no wan samting. Olgeta lo vilij, oli ting se mi krangke. Taem we mi bin kam bak long skul long taemia, hemi blo stap, mo evri wan, oli bin save se from wanem. Hemi no klia gud long mi. Mi save tingbaot sam smol samting nomo, mo mi mas save nomo from wanem we olgeta i bin talem long mi. Studi blong mi hemi bin gud, mo mi no bin gat bel olsem sam gel long skul blong mi. Mi bin aot long skul from se wan man, hemi jalus.

Long taemia, hemi bin fas yia blong mi long Sao, mo mi bin gat fulap fren finis. Papa, hemi bin harem se long not, olgeta vilij, oli gat fulap blak majik, mo hemi bin harem no gud lelebet blong sendem mi blo go lo wei. Be afa, hemi bin ting se mbae i sef nomo blo mi go. Long aelan ia, long Loketu, famle blo mi, ol man oli gat respek blong famle, mo Papa, hemi wok had mo hemi wan kastom juj. Hu mbae i wantem mekem trabol long hem? Long fas pat long yia blong skul, oli jusum mi olsem wan top studen long skul from se mak blong mid-tem exam, i hae bitim ol narafula long klas blong mi. Mama mo Papa, oli bin harem nius ia, mo tufala i bin sendem wan basket kumala mo
yam long truk. Mi tingbaot se mi bin talem wan fren blong mi, Delfina, se mitufala i
save rusum yam long faea long sava. Mitufala i bin jusum blong go daon long riva blong
swim, be ol boe, oli bin stap finis. San i bin stat blo go daon, nao mitufala i bin jus blong
go antop lelebet long riva we i no gat man i save luk. Taem we mifala i bin kam bak long
domatri, i bin gat wan basket aranis long bed blong mi. I bin gud tumas blong kasem
hemia from se mifala ol studen, mifala i no bin save kakaе tumas aelan kakaе, speseli
olgeta frut.

Long taemia, mi wetem Delfina, mitufala i bin sidaon long faea blong lukluk long
yam we oli stap rus, mo mitufala i bin sarem wan aranis. Mitufala i bin stap laf from se
wan boe i bin raetem Delfina wan pis not blong askem se hemi save givim hem wan pen
blong hem. Mitufala i stap toktok, be i no long taem we evri samting i olsem se i
muvmuv olbaot. Mi bin save harem Delfina taem we hemi toktok, be olgeta wod blong
hem, mi harem se oli olbaot mo mi no save andastanem. Mi bin filim han blong hem
long han blong mi we hemi traem blong pulum mi antop, be mi bin fal daon. Evri
samting i bin stap blak nomo–ae blo mi i dak. Long nekis taem we mi rememba, mi bin
stap slip long bed long haos blong mi wetem net blo mostik i stap kavremp mi. Oli bin
talem mi se hemi bin tu wik finis we mi bin aot long skul, mo mi bin spendem fo dei long
tu wik ia long hospital. Oli bin talem mi se mi bin lusem tingting blo mi, mo mi bin
traem blong ronem sam man lo vilij wetem bus naef mo swea long olgeta we i bin stap
kam klosap long mi, tu. Mama i bin talem se Papa hemi bin pem wan kastom man long
vilij narasaed blong mekem wan lif blong mi. Hemi bin talem se lif ia, hemi wan samting
nomo we i bin wok, mo hemi bin mekem mi we mi gud bakagen.
Hemi bin wan manis finis bifo mi bin harem gud bakegen. Long taem ia, mi bin askem Papa blong talem se wanem taem mbae mi save go bak long skul. Mi bin krae we long taem we hemi bin talem lo mi se mi nomo save go bak from se hemi fraet tumas blong sendem mi bakbakegen, mo hemi bin talem long mi se mbae mi stap nomo long vili. Hemi bin tu yia nao, mo mi askem hem yet blong alawem mi blong go bak. Evri taem, hemi talem no gat long mi, be mi stap hop se atlis mi save go long wan woksop or spesel trening blo mekem se mi save faenem wan job. . I gat sam gud samting long vili blong mekem mi, mi wantem stap. Be mi no harem se mi gat pis long hed blong mi long plesia. Mi harem se i gat wan samting we hemi lus. Long skul, mi bin gat fulap fren, be lo plesia, mi gat famle blong mi nomo. Mi save aot long vili nomo blong go long jos, mo spos we mi laki, mi save go long wan miting blong ogeta yut. Mi no rili hapi blong stap long vili, be mi no gat enuf trening blong gat wan job. Mama, hemi gat wan laef we hemi had, mo hemi no hapi nating long ol wok we hemi mas mekem. Mbae mi gat wan laef olsem ia?

"Elsi O!" Mama i singaot long garen blong hem. Mi go lo garen blong hem, mo hemi luk long wan bandel blong drae kokonas. Mi pusum bak raes long baksaed blong mi, karem lif laplap aninit long han blong mi, mo mi karem kokonas ia. Mi save luk Mama, hemi karem faeawud finis, mo hemi holem bandel long hem long baksaed blong hem. Wetem tufala bag raes, faeawud, kokonas, mo lif laplap long han blong mitufala, mitufala, i wokbaot slo slo blong go bak long vili blong helpem Fredlen blong finisim was mo mekem laplap bifo Jon wetem Papa, tufala i kam bak long haos.

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The sound of the rooster wakes me. In Vanuatu, morning seems to revolve around the sound of roosters. They begin to sing out before the sun has even thought about lifting its sleepy head to the sky. The roosters in Vanuatu don't have the same cock-a-doodle-doo sound as the roosters in other places like France and Australia. Our roosters' songs are piercing and followed by a series of flaps. “Cock-a-ra-a-raaaaar!” Flap, flap, flap, flap! I hear the rooster who has chosen to nest right above my window. He sends out his song into the morning darkness and wakes fellow roosters all across the island. I can hear them each sending out their song, their message, “Women! Wake up! There’s work to be done!”

I don’t have time to lie in bed and try to remember my dreams or feel the cool morning air on my face. Mama is already up. I can hear her in the kitchen building the fire for morning tea. She’s waiting for me to scratch the coconuts and peel the kumala for our breakfast. I can hear Diana moaning next to me. She was sick last night, but she knows that she, too, has to get up and take the iron off the kava so that it can dry in the morning sun. John, my youngest brother, is still asleep. He has another good hour or so of sleep left before Mama calls him to breakfast. Papa has already gone to Lemip to help Uncle François with his boat service. He’s been trying to work more jobs here and there and sell kava so that he can pay for Diana’s, Mariann’s, and John’s school fees.

“Cock-a-ra-a-raaaaar!” Flap, flap, flap, flap! “Women! You should be up by now!” I let out a sigh, raise my head first, and then sit up fully in bed. I stretch my arms out, pushing my mosquito net to the side. Time to start another day—a day filled with working in the garden, planting yams, and digging up manioc for dinner, maybe looking for mud crabs on the walk back home. A day filled with doing the wash for the
whole family, fetching water from the river. A day filled with cooking breakfast, lunch, and dinner, feeding the pigs the leftovers. I don’t mind working in the garden. It gives me time to think. I need to think about what has happened over the past two years, of where I thought my life would lead me, of where it has led me.

I walk into the kitchen. Mama is there in her work dress squatting down by the fire, fanning the smoke that is rising from the kindling. She looks up at me, and I can see in her eyes a tiredness that reaches deep inside. She nods her head and lifts her eyebrows towards the dry coconuts piled in the corner. I pull them over near me and pick up the coconut scratcher leaning against the wall. Mama has already moved the wooden stool over by the fire. I sit on it and begin cracking the coconuts open with my knife. Mama slides a bowl over the dirt floor, and I let the coconut’s water fall into it. When I have opened five coconuts, I begin to scratch out their flesh. We don’t speak. Mama is too tired to speak. I can see that she nods off every now and then, the fan almost slipping out of her hand. She’s always the last to go to bed, and I often wonder if she even sleeps then. Many times I hear her tossing and turning, and I imagine her mind continuing to work in her sleep. We don’t speak, and that’s fine with me. Instead, I think. I think about how my life is going to be just like hers. I’m like her apprentice. She’s teaching me how to take care of my family just like she has taken care of hers. My older sister, Fredlyn, is getting married in two months. Papa finally convinced her that she should marry Ronol, who has been waiting for her decision for over a year! I know she doesn’t want to marry him. She doesn’t even know him. But, what else is she going to do? She finished school at class six, and besides going to youth conferences and her involvement in the church, she’s been biding her time around the house until papa says she has to get
married. He tried to tease me about it the other day. He said that a boy came around asking about me, and he said that he would think about it. I said no way. I’m only eighteen. There’s still a chance for me to get out of the village.

Mama starts to peel the kumala, and I go out behind the house to pick some island cabbage. I can see now— the sun is beginning to rise over the hill. John will be getting up soon. He has a long walk to school. He walks with the other children in the village, that is, those whose parents have paid their school fees. They have to stay after school and study until it is dark. Then they come home for dinner. This year he’s in class six. He’ll take the class six exams in November, and Papa said that if he passes, he can go to class seven in Tekamb or Ransit. I worry that he won’t pass. He’s not at the top of his class, and Mama and Papa can’t help him with his school work because it’s in French. Of course, I help him when I can, but I was away during his first years of school. And he has a lot of catching up to do. I take the island cabbage leaves in to Mama, and she puts them in the pot with the kumala and coconut milk. This is our breakfast most mornings, but sometimes Mama uses manioc. If John does go to junior secondary school, he won’t be eating island food. It will be rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

John walks into the kitchen. I can tell he’s sleepy and grumpy because he’s not ready to be up yet. Mama makes him a plate and brings it to him. She pours his tea into a glass and puts in two spoonfuls of sugar. I dip a plate for Fredlyn. She’s been out feeding the pigs and moving one of our two cows to another tree. By now, Mama is awake and joking with John about his messy hair. She hands him the pick and tells him to comb it before he leaves for school. I get my plate and tea, climb up to our raised bamboo floor, and sit down with everyone. As we eat, Joseph and David, two men who
work for the cooperative in Tisvil, cutting trees near our village, stick their head in the kitchen door. Mama says, “You come”, and motions for me to dip them a plate of food and pour them some tea. They’ve been staying in our village for three months now. Mama and we girls in the house look after them by washing their clothes and cooking for them. There are four, and they usually come by for dinner after they have finished drinking kava for the night. It’s nice having them around. Our family is always ready to accept anyone visiting. Mama always makes sure that any visitors are fed and have a place to sleep. She takes pride in being the one in the village who knows how to look after guests.

Mama is in the middle of telling them a story about how a wild pig scared John the last time the boys were hunting in the woods, when little Bong from next door comes by to get John for school. John chugs his tea, combs his hair, grabs his books, and is off with Bong and the other children of the village. Seeing them run off together, carrying their book bags made from leftover calico and stuffed with their lunches and homework, reminds me of when I was a student at Ondui School. I was at the top of my class in science, agriculture, and French. I remember that Papa was happy when I passed the class six exams. He and Mama sent me to Tekamb for junior secondary school.

“Elsie O!” I hear Mama calling from the kitchen. She wants me to wash up the dishes before we go to the garden. Joseph and David have left, so it’s just us women at the house, ready to get started on our daily chores. When I lived in Tekamb, we students were allowed to go to the store to buy sweets or Twisties if we were hungry. And we were hungry most of the time because Chief Cook Thomson usually skimped on the island food and just gave us rice. In the village it’s nice because we get to eat island food
every day, but it’s so much hard work. We have to go to the garden each day and get our food. Then we have to stay there and replace what we’ve dug up. I go back into the kitchen and grab my bush knife and large rice sack. In Redsands we don’t go to the garden with a basket or a truck. We walk, and we carry all of our harvest back with us. That’s why we need the large rice sacks. Mama grabs her sack and knife, too, and we begin to walk along the river to the top of the dirt road. When we reach the coconut plantation, she tells me to cut down some green coconuts for us to drink along the way. I don’t really know exactly how far the gardens are from the village, but it takes us until mid-morning to get there. It’s been raining, so the ground is nice and soft for us to dig in. I have my own garden not too far from Mama’s. She helped me plant it when I came back to the village two years ago, and I’ve been working in it every day but Sunday. I have my own laplap leaves, island cabbage, kumala, yam, bananas, manioc, and taro plants. When it’s the right season, we can pick breadfruit, butter fruit, mango, guava, and oranges in the trees surrounding Mama’s garden.

When we reach the garden, Mama goes her way and I go mine. Her garden is further up the dirt road. Fredlyn stays back at the house to begin washing the clothes. I’m lucky that I get to go to the garden. If I had to wash clothes with Fredlyn, I would have to listen to her talk all morning about who was at the last youth conference she attended and how she doesn’t want to move to Tisvil when she gets married. I find my yam vine, get down on my knees, and begin digging the dirt out around it with my bush knife. I remember when my class nine teacher at Tekamb talked to us about planning our futures and asked us to write about the jobs that we would like to have when we finish class twelve or thirteen. Papa had already told me that if I passed my class ten exam, I
could go to class eleven and twelve at Sao. At that time, I was beginning to think that I would like to be a secondary agriculture teacher. I've always loved agriculture, and I had talked to my teacher about taking agriculture classes at Sao. In my paper, I wrote that I planned to finish class twelve and then go to the teacher's college to study secondary education. I did not write that I planned to come back to the village and dig yams in the garden. I thought that by now I would be on my way to becoming a teacher, or maybe even a nurse—I thought I would have a job. When you're in school, everyone expects you to finish and get a job. No one expects you to come back to the village. Even though Mama and Papa know there aren't enough jobs for everyone, they thought that I would be different. That's why they worked so hard to pay my school fees.

I was going to be different. I passed the class ten exams, and I went to Sao for class eleven. Most of my friends didn't pass the exams and had to go back to their villages. I remember thinking how glad I was that I had the chance to stay in school. Being away from home was hard at first. I was still on the island of Loketu like my family, but the trucks are so expensive that I could only come home three or four times a year. But after a while, it got easier to be away, and my friends and teachers became like my family. As a student, I had enough time to study because I didn't have to work in the garden. I did have to wash my own clothes, and maybe those of a cousin brother, but it didn't take me too long. During all the summer Holidays, I went home to the village. It wasn't so bad. Mama made me work hard, she didn't let me sit around the house, and that was okay with me. But I remember when I got back to school after the break, most of my friends complained about how much they hated going back to the village because they didn't want to work in the gardens or wash clothes all day. Their parents accused
them of having “soft hands” from school. My first summer back after I had left for class seven, I tried to complain to Mama that working in the garden was too difficult, and she wouldn’t have it. That was the last time I complained.

I try to dig up a piece of the yam that is stuck deep in the dirt. My skirt keeps getting caught between my knees when I move around, and I’m sweating because I have long shorts on underneath. So, I look around me to make sure no men are walking down the dirt road and take it off. Papa has had to give me several lectures about wearing a skirt when I walk around the village. At school, I could wear shorts after classes were finished. Now, I hate wearing skirts and island dresses. It’s so frustrating when I have to work. So, around the house and in the garden I wear shorts as much as I can. It doesn’t really matter much to me. People in the village think something is wrong with me anyway. After I came back from school this last time, it was for good, and everyone knew why. It’s all so blurry to me. I can only remember bits and pieces, and I have to go by what people tell me. I didn’t fail out of school or get pregnant like some girls at my school did. I had to leave school because someone was jealous.

It was my first year at Sao, and I had met so many friends. Papa had heard that the villages in the north are full of black magic, and he was a little nervous about sending me there, but in the end he thought it would be safe for me to go. Throughout Loketu, our family is much respected, and Papa is known as a hard worker and a fair custom judge. Who would want to hurt him? The first half of the school year, I was chosen as the top student because I had scored higher than everyone in my class on the mid-term exams. Mama and Papa had heard the news, and they sent up a basket of kurnaIa and yams. I remember that I had told my friend, Delfina, that I would roast the yams on the
As Delfina and I sat watching the yams roasting on the fire, we shared an orange. We were laughing about how a boy had written her a note and asked her to give him her pen when all of a sudden everything started to spin. I could hear Delfina talking, but her words were fuzzy and distorted. I felt her hand on my arm, trying to pull me up, but I fell over and blacked out. The next thing I remember, I was laying in my bed at home with the mosquito net all around me. I was told that it had been two weeks since I had been taken from school, and I had spent four of those days in the hospital. They told me that I had lost my mind, and that I had tried to attack people in the village with a knife, screaming out obscenities to anyone who came near me. Mama said that Papa had paid a medicine man in the next village to make me a drink from a special leaf. She said that the drink was the only thing that worked, and it had woken me from my spell.

It took me almost a month to recover, and I began asking Papa when I could go back to school. I cried when he told me that he was too scared to let me go back, and he had decided that I would have to stay in the village. It’s been two years, and I still beg him to go back. His answer is always no, but I keep hoping that I can at least go to a workshop or a special training so that I can find a job. There are things about the village that I like. But I don’t feel totally at peace here. I feel like something is missing. At school, I had so many friends, but here, it’s just my family. I only get to leave the village
to go to church and, if I’m lucky, a youth meeting every now and then. I’m not very happy living in the village, but I don’t have enough skills to get a job. Mama has had a hard life, and she’s always complaining about all the work that she has to do. Am I supposed to follow in her footsteps?

“Elsie O!” Mama calls out from her garden. I walk over and she nods to a bundle of dried coconuts. I swing my rice sack over my back, put my bundle of laplap leaves under my arm, and grab the coconuts. I can see that Mama has already gathered the firewood, and she’s holding it on her shoulder. With our rice sacks, firewood, coconuts and leaf laplap in tow, we walk slowly back to the village to help Fredlyn finish up the wash and make laplap before John and Papa come home.

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Oli Hang Lo Medel: Olgeta Studen [They Hang in the Middle: The Students]

Pacific Islander authors such as Epeli Hau‘ofa, the late Grace Mera Molisa, and Konai Thaman have chosen creative, fictional writing as a means to critique various social issues (such as development) in the Pacific. Similarly, through a fictional ethnography of sorts, I aim to draw attention to not only a Ni-Vanuatu student’s experiences with formal education, but also the disconnection of village life and formal school. “Elsie’s Story” is based upon the true experiences of a young Ni-Vanuatu woman who was in the middle of her class ten school year and experienced a most unfortunate and mysterious incident which resulted in her being sent away from school\(^\text{11}\).

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\(^\text{11}\) I have known the real Elsi for almost six years. During my last visit to Vanuatu, in the summer of 2007, her traumatic experience was related to me by a number of family members who were most concerned for her well-being. “Elsie” seems to be doing much better now, but I did sense she is both disappointed and frustrated that she could not complete her schooling. Elsie’s story is certainly a fictional story, as I have added, for the purpose of making a point, my own twists and turns and have, perhaps, over-dramatized her feelings towards living in the village. Furthermore, “Elsie’s” case is not unique. Five other very similar
She, like other Ni-Vanuatu students (some of the few who actually make it to the secondary level) is now finding it difficult to re-adjust to living full-time in the village after being away to boarding school for over five years, and she continues to struggle with the fact that her dreams of being a teacher or a nurse—fulfilling the expectations of her parents and teachers—are now far from coming true. The Vanuatu Ministry of Education (VMOE) 2001 statistics provide evidence that only four percent of approximately forty thousand primary students are admitted to secondary school, and of these, only one percent continue their studies at the tertiary level (VMOE 2004 and Sumbe 2007, 8). According to Tensly Sumbe of the Vanuatu Daily Post, these high drop-out rates are contributing to the growing unemployment rate, as students are not acquiring the skills necessary for gainful employment. Additionally, for those who do finish some higher level of formal schooling, there are not enough jobs available (Sumbe 2007, 8).

Although “Elsie” was given the opportunity to continue her education to class ten, there are many students who continue no higher than class six, yet they too find themselves stuck in the middle of Vanuatu’s western-style education system and village cases were reported to me by teachers, students, and parents. Through informal discussions with expatriates working in the region, I have discovered these experiences (for students who go away to boarding school) are not that uncommon. Thus, this story is a compilation of these various experiences combined with my own interpretations and teaching experiences in the Vanuatu formal education system. For more information regarding similar issues, see: Micael Poltorak (2007) Nemisis, Speaking, and Tauhi Vaha’a: Interdisciplinarity and the Truth of “Mental Illness” in Vava’u, Tonga in The Contemporary Pacific, Vol. 19, No. 1.

12 In Malampa Province, out of 7,391 primary students, only 159 were enrolled in secondary schools during the year 2001 (Vanuatu Ministry of Education 2001). Interestingly, Konai Thaman argues that students do not fail the education system, but rather, the education system fails them (Thaman 2002, 23).

13 The Vanuatu Tourism Education and Training Project (VTET) aims to train these youth to work in the tourism industry; however, there are not enough resources available for trainings. Furthermore, those few students who are trained in tourism do not have the required resources to begin a tourism business (Sumbe 2007, 8). On a similar note, in 1996, only 500 out of 3,500 school leavers were able to find jobs (McCartyney 2000, 125). Thaman writes that, of those Pacific Islander students who do find jobs, most are placed in low paying positions (Thaman 2002, 23).
life, especially when it comes to making connections with skills they will need to survive in the village and skills they learn at school. Reaching secondary and even tertiary levels is an arduous task for Ni-Vanuatu students, as they are typically given only one chance to further their education, meaning they either fail the national exams, parents are unable to pay school fees, or an unfortunate event occurs. During an interview that took place in her kitchen, “Dorin” mother of six (two of whom attend school) and member of Ronevie Village, discusses the struggles students face when attempting to complete their schooling.

1. T: Samtaem, ol students, oli faenem i had blong finisim skul blong olgeta. Spos yu no pasem exam, o spos we samting i happen lo yu, yu aot long skul, hemi finis nao. Yu ting se hemi tru? Olsem blo students blo go kasem klas twelev or tatin, yu ting se hemi had blong olgeta?


3. T: Spos hemi no pasem exam, hemi no gat wan janis blong mekem bakegen?

4. D: No gat.

5. T: Be yu ting se hemi olsem wanem blong ol student we hemi no finisim afta oli kam bak lo vilij?

6. D: Oli kam bak long vilij, be oli stap nomo.

7. T: Oli hapi blong kam bak?

8. D: Samtaem, be mi save talem se, oli no hapi.

9. T: Yu ting se hemia from wanem?

10. D: From olgeta oli wantem skul mo yet blong edukesun blong olgeta. Be olsem we ol parens oli no gat enuf vatu, mekem se oli kam blong stap long haos.
1. [T: Sometimes, the students find it hard to finish school. If you don’t pass the exam, or if something happens to you where you have to leave school, it’s finished. Do you think this is true? For example, for students to reach class twelve or thirteen, do you think this is hard?

2. D: Sometimes, it’s just because of sickness. She gets sick, she can’t finish her schooling. Sometimes it’s because of school fees. It makes the parents unable to pay the school fees, and children can’t go to school.

3. T: If she doesn’t pass the exam, does she have a chance to do it again?

4. D: There isn’t another chance.

5. T: But what do you think it is like for all the students who don’t finish and then have to come back to the village?

6. D: They come back to the village, but they don’t do anything.

7. T: Are they happy to come back?

8. D: Sometimes, but I can tell you that they are not happy.

9. T: What is your opinion about why this is?

10. D: Because they want to continue with their schooling. But when the parents don’t have enough vatu (Ni-Vanuatu currency), it makes it so that they come to stay at home] (interview with “Dorin” 2007).

It must be said that many (parents and students alike) would agree that a student’s return to the village is not necessarily negative. Village life is perceived as being less stressful and expensive than living in town, and more than a few parents see the value of having an educated population in the village to further rural development. On the other hand, it is the years spent at school that, perhaps, worries some Ni-Vanuatu educators and community members, who believe that students are building a solid foundation in neither western nor local knowledge. During an interview which took place at his Malampa Provincial Education office in Norsup, Malekula, Pierre Gambetta, Vanuatu Ministry of Education Director of Primary and acting Malampa Provincial Education Officer, relates
an anecdote that was told to him by a man from New Caledonia and provides an example of how students “hang lo medel” [hang in the middle] between formal schools and their local communities.

I gat wan olfala lo Niu Kaledonia. Hemi talem wan toktok. Hemi talem se, yufala, yu no makem olsem bol blong buluk. Bol blo buluk, hemi hang ia? Taem buluk i muv, i go from narafala lek, i go from narafala lek, i kam bak, i hang lo medel. It’s a funny story, be hemi minim se, hemi wantem talem se olgeta, ol yangfala blo olgeta, taem we oli skull go go go, oli go kasem Franis lo University lo France. So, taem i go kasem Franis, i talem lo ol Franis man se, mi mi wan Kanak. “Mi save lanwis blo mi, mi save kalja blo mi, mi save kastom blo mi. Mi talem lo Franis man.”


There’s an old fellow in New Caledonia. He shared a story with me. He said, “You all don’t become like the balls of a bull. The balls of a bull, they hang, right? Now, when the bull moves, they hit one leg, they hit the other leg, and then they come back to hang in the middle. It’s a funny story, but it means that, for example, a youth, when he continues with his schooling, and he even goes all the way to France, to the University of France, he can say to the Frenchmen, ‘I’m a Kanak. I know my language, I know my culture, I know my custom.’

But when he completes his schooling, he comes back. He goes down to his village. He tells the old fellows who are living in the village, “I was in France, you see. I can speak French, I know French culture, I know French custom.” But, in fact, he is in the middle like the balls of a bull. He doesn’t know his own culture and he doesn’t know the French culture. Now when he’s hanging in the middle, it’s very risky because he doesn’t have a foundation with which to base himself and to understand what is right and wrong. Many times the youth do not have a solid foundation because they are lost in the middle] (interview with Gambetta 2007).

Although this anecdote is about a youth who leaves his country to study in France, which many Ni-Vanuatu students will never have the opportunity to do, Gambetta’s words resonate with the current social situation in Vanuatu. Ni-Vanuatu students who attend
formal schools are taught, for the most part, in a way that is not relative to indigenous epistemologies, and, according to Gambetta's story, they are receiving only a surface level education. Consequently, students are struggling to find an "acceptable place within their communities" (Silverstone 2002, 85).

Oli Hang From Wanem? [Why Do They Hang?]

Attempting to prepare the youth for the labor force, Vanuatu's formal education system creates a highly unattainable dream of employment for these youth who expect and assume they will be able to use the skills they have learned in school to become participants in the nation's cash economy (Jourdan 1998, 139, Thaman 2002, 24 and Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 2002). Illustrating the effects of formal education on Vanuatu's self-sustaining communities, the pamphlet, "No Lusum Kastom Ekonomi" [Don't Lose the Custom Economy] created by the Vanuatu National Cultural Council, reads, "Samfala ni-Vanuatu oli laekem laefwe vatu i save pem—wan risal blong edukesen sistem we i promotem ekonomi blong vatu nomo" [Some ni-Vanuatu like the life that needs cash— one result of the education system that promotes a cash economy] (Vanuatu National Cultural Council 2007). On the one hand, Ni-Vanuatu students are

14 Spirim rod [literally, spearing the road, meaning, wandering the road], stap nating nomo [doing nothing], or a more recent term, waet pej [literally, white page, meaning, nothing to do or having no plans] are Bislama terms used to describe a significant number of youth living in more urban areas (Silverstone 2002, 85). Granted, it is the young men who are the most visible, roaming the streets in Port Vila. Perhaps young women, such as "Elsie", see education as a way to further their social status and gain freedom from what they view to be an oppressive way of life. Where a number of unemployed young men can be found at nakamals or bars drinking kava and alcohol or hanging around the streets, young women are usually expected to work at home, taking care of children or working as a house girl (Cattoni 1998). The late Grace Mera Molisa, the first Ni-Vanuatu woman to obtain her college degree, promoted equality in education as a valuable tool, which can provide more opportunities (Molisa 2002, 5).

15 The Vanuatu Cultural Council deemed 2007 to be the year of custom economy, where the exchange of traditional goods, as opposed to cash currency, for weddings, school fees, and other ceremonies is encouraged (Vanuatu Cultural Council 2007).

16 The pamphlet also states more than 90 percent of the cash flow in Vanuatu is confined to Port Vila (Vanuatu National Cultural Council 2007).
faced with the challenge of maintaining their local identities, which are connected to their heritage languages and customs, yet, on the other hand, through formal education, they are encouraged to learn western concepts, values, and languages and partake in Vanuatu’s growing cash economy (particularly in the urban areas). Gambetta, speaking at the Vanuatu National Reading Symposium in 2005, summarizes this point, “There is a conflict between local custom and western culture, and students get lost in the system.” (Gambetta 2005). Students become lost because, for most beginning the formal school program, it is an essentially foreign experience. For example, while at school, Ni-Vanuatu students (with the except of those who attend a school with a vernacular education program) are taught every subject in English and French, two languages which are remnants of Vanuatu’s colonial past, grammatically dissimilar from indigenous languages, and have no real connection to the lives of students living in rural villages (Niroa 2002, 107). Likewise, many students throughout the Pacific are facing the same scenario. Dr. John Roughan, long-time resident of Solomon Islands who has worked extensively in rural development, describes a Solomon Islander student’s first formal schooling experience (which is similar to that of a Ni-Vanuatu student) in this way:

When a young island child enters her first classroom, she enters a world fundamentally different from her village life. In other words, what she begins to experience from the very first day of formal education is more than a simple leaf classroom, a new teacher, different children and sometimes even a new language. What she experiences from the very first day of school is a strangely, deeply different way of viewing the world. It is a world she has scarcely been prepared

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17 A significant number of youth are leaving their villages for taon [town, meaning Port Vila or Luganville] with expectations of utilizing the skills they learned either in school or at a training workshop. Rebecca Silverstone, in her 2002 thesis, Harem Vanuatu: The Liminality and Communitas of Port Vila and Its Young People, writes Vanuatu has an urban growth rate of approximately 7 percent, ranked in the top international statistics. She argues “one of the biggest problems facing youth in town is their lack of hope. With little education most are unable to qualify for the jobs they want” (Silverstone 2002, 84).

18 See also Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992.
to interact with. Little in her village life has prepared her to handle a way of life so alien and so different from what she lives in the village (Roughan 2002, 48).

Indeed, rural village life in Vanuatu, centered on self-sustainability and where approximately 80 percent of the population resides, offers little in the way of building a western educational foundation for Ni-Vanuatu students. Some Ni-Vanuatu believe, as a result, these students are neither receiving a quality western-style education nor access to valuable local knowledge (Regenvanu 2002 and Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992, 20). To illustrate, I draw upon an article, written by professors Karen Watson-Gegeo, University of California Davis, and David Welchman Gegeo, University of Canterbury, entitled “Whose Knowledge? Epistemological Collisions in Solomon Islands Community Development”. In this article, Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo describe a youth project which, when it was in operation, was comprised of several youth, living in Oka Village, Solomon Islands, who had very little formal schooling and were, therefore, more likely to rely on their own indigenous epistemologies for constructing “new knowledge.” Yet for those students who spend less time in the village
and more time at school, even until class six, there is a greater chance that they will be excluded from learning vital aspects of indigenous knowledge and epistemology because of the significant amount of time spent away from the village at school19. At the same time, because of the state of Vanuatu’s formal education system, students are not given the opportunity to build a solid foundation in western knowledge and epistemology (Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 2002, 387).

Oli Stap Long Aotsaed: Communities and Disjuncture

Formal education can have negative impacts on how school leavers [students who have either chosen or have been forced to abandon their studies] interact with members of their communities. Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo elaborate on this point, “But those who fail and those who succeed in school often feel alienated or at least uncomfortable in relation to their village of origin.” Therefore, after returning to the village, many school leavers find it difficult to “integrate” back into their communities and often times feel “a strong sense of defeat” (Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992, 20). According to Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo, the goal of formal schooling is to “create and reproduce the social order” (1992). Therefore it could be said that, at this time, formal schooling in Vanuatu is training students to become citizens of a westernized society, as the curricula is produced in either English or French, and much of the content is founded on educational concepts and influenced by educational “advisors” from western countries. Conceivably, the VMOE, with the pressure of donor agencies

19 This is not to say children who attend formal schools do not establish an indigenous epistemological way of constructing knowledge. In fact, a few parents suggest that when the children are home (during the evenings, on weekends, and school breaks), they are learning valuable aspects of the culture and language. However, the point I am trying to make focuses on the amount of time children spend in the village as opposed to the time allotted to learning in the context of indigenous epistemology.
and other stakeholders, aspires to create, through formal schooling, a population of Ni-Vanuatu who can participate in the labor force in Port Vila and Luganville, assisting in building the nation-state. Yet despite increasing urban drift, the societies where most Ni-Vanuatu students live, or will eventually return, are removed from the national agenda both geographically, socially, and to an extent, culturally and linguistically (10 and 16). This continues to have considerable effects on local communities, which are currently coping with the increase of educated, or at least partially educated, youth, who are either returning to the village or migrating to taon [town; urban area]. I began this chapter focusing on Ni-Vanuatu students struggling through Vanuatu’s formal education system because their disjuncture is what was most apparent during my time working with the VMOE and teaching in community schools. However, local communities have also been given the responsibility of adjusting to the outcomes of the formal school system. Initiatives, such as Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together, speak to the fact that education in Vanuatu is not producing results complementary to educational goals. Many Ni-Vanuatu educators call for change within the system that is more focused on the needs of local community members and grounded in indigenous knowledge and languages, and it has been assumed by the VMOE that community members will take responsibility for assisting with the implementation of such programs. Nevertheless, these initiatives continue to be top-down and directive because local Ni-Vanuatu community members have not been invited to participate in the planning process. A comment made at the Vanuatu National Reading Symposium in 2005 proves this point, “We can’t do the work of the community to make materials. We have to hand over the responsibility to them, and then give them a time limit to implement it. If local language does not get
implemented by the deadline, the school will have to make Bislama the vernacular language” (from the suggestions of educators at the Vanuatu National Reading Symposium 2005). This statement, which leaves little room for community voice, suggests there is an assumption that most communities desire to maintain their indigenous languages by incorporating them into the formal school program and that these community members have the capacity to do so. Furthermore, Bislama is used as a way to motivate community members to act quickly in establishing an indigenous language vernacular education program. This statement proves that in urban areas such as Port Vila, Luganville, and other provincial centers, Bislama has become a first language for some children and is seen by a number of educators to be the best choice for an early primary vernacular program. On the other hand, in the more rural areas, Bislama would not be the first choice of many communities.

Essentially, Vanuatu’s western-style education system is one of the foremost institutions which continue to separate students and communities from their heritage languages and local epistemologies (Regenvanu 2002). According to Welchman-Gegeo, independent Pacific Island countries continue to operate in relation to their past colonial systems, and, to provide a somewhat simplistic description, a number of educational leaders, especially in the urban centers, are somewhat detached from local epistemology because they were educated in western style systems and continue to live western lifestyles (Gegeo 2001, 492 and 493). On some levels, these leaders are capable of disempowering community members by continuing to value western scholarship over local knowledge and by not recognizing local community voice when it comes to
educational decision-making\textsuperscript{20} (Thaman 2003, 2). On a local level, a similar situation occurs. Regularly, local community members are not given the opportunity to express their concerns and desires regarding the education of their children. For example, on the island of Malekula, and possibly throughout Vanuatu, teachers live on the school campus and, because they are transferred every few years or so, it is difficult for them to make strong connections with local communities surrounding the schools. Therefore, many rarely venture into the community to discuss educational issues with parents and other community members (interviews with various community members of Ronevie and Tautu Villages 2007 and Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992, 16). Neither are Ni-Vanuatu parents confident in their abilities to assist their children in their educational processes. Highlighting this issue, John Niroa, Director of Secondary, Vanuatu Ministry of Education, writes, “School and the schooling process are unfamiliar to Ni-Vanuatu parents, and this inhibits their full participation.” He suggests “the nature of the school system limits the extent to which Ni-Vanuatu parents can be involved in the education of their children” (Niroa 2002, 108). Not only is the formal school system not relevant to the daily lives of Ni-Vanuatu students, it is somewhat intimidating and excluding to parents.

On the national level, when discussions regarding such programs as vernacular and cultural education take place, community involvement is continually a key topic, and community members are expected to take the responsibility of implementing such programs on a community level. Yet, as mentioned, these initiatives are usually top-down and directive, which maintains the gap between local communities and schools.

\textsuperscript{20} Yet, as Unaisi Nabobo writes, because resources are significantly limited, most education officials in the Pacific must succumb to global and regional initiatives and funding (Nabobo 2002, 38).
During a group interview with the Freswota Council of Chiefs, which took place in the Port Vila suburb of Freswota, outside a council member's house, the chiefs expressed their frustration with the lack of community involvement not only in education initiatives, but also in other national development projects. They claim the VMOE does not solicit their input, and because most Ni-Vanuatu community members are not assertive, this leaves the door open for "experts", both local and foreign, to dictate where funding goes and direct educational initiatives (group interview Freswota Council of Chiefs 2007).

Traditionally and today, community members in Vanuatu are involved in education mainly through providing labor and materials to build and maintain schools. Educational project leaders have, in many cases, failed to invite community members to share local knowledge and ideas. Consequently, local knowledge is undervalued and the gap between planning, which takes place in Port Vila, and implementation, which, according to the VMOE, should take place in the communities, is widened even further.

Currently, the government of Vanuatu is finding it increasingly difficult to successfully maintain its formal national education system and is now turning to local communities for support. However, Laan argues that communities in Vanuatu must offer more than assistance with school infrastructure. He suggests they must be given the opportunity to provide the VMOE with valuable local knowledge for the development of curriculum and literacy materials and become directors of vernacular education programs implemented in their community schools (interview with Laan 2007). Yet, as of now, the VMOE has not been able to fully obtain the support of local communities. Dr. Robert Early, Senior Lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, Port Vila, provides some

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21 The Vanuatu Government established chiefly councils in communities throughout the country. These councils deal with local matters and act as a local court (interview with Chief Edward 2007).
insight into this dilemma: “Right now in Vanuatu many schools have difficulty gaining community support for the schools. School and the culture of Vanuatu are separate and very different. School life is foreign to the people of the community. It doesn’t relate to their real life; and therefore it is not as meaningful” (Early 2005).

At least in the primary level, formal schools in Vanuatu are placed in or near local communities, therefore, promoting a sort of rural or community development. However, policies that affect these schools are mandated from Port Vila. Vanuatu has a mainly centralized government with Port Vila being the head and hub of decision-making, which, in turn, shapes formal education. While seemingly effective strategies and policies may work in Port Vila or Luganville (at least for a short period of time), they somehow become lost in the process of implementation at the local village level. Perhaps this is because, traditionally, local community members, especially in rural areas, have not been given a voice when it comes to making national, political decisions, and, therefore, do not feel as though they have ownership over programs and policies influencing their children. Furthermore, because Vanuatu is a young and, according to the United Nations, “developing” country, national interests, particularly in the field of formal education, are regularly out of sync with local needs and desires. For example, because of Vanuatu’s colonial heritage, English and French have become both official languages and languages of instruction. In fact, today, there is a push by the VMOE and other government leaders to ensure an equal status for both languages in formal education, which could lead to policies which will require students to learn both
languages\textsuperscript{22} (interview with Gambetta 2007 and Laan 2007). Indeed, a population of truly bilingual Ni-Vanuatu, fluent in both English and French, would possibly provide Vanuatu with more international opportunities, and it would, as some government leaders and VMOE officials have stated, maintain a part of Vanuatu’s national identity. Yet, for the most part, Ni-Vanuatu living outside of Port Vila, Luganville, and a small number of provincial centers, rarely use English and French as a means of communication (Miles 1998, 121). Certainly, in local villages they are used even less. Nevertheless, contemporary VMOE policies and initiatives are geared towards maintaining a balance between these two former colonial languages, while local languages are becoming increasingly threatened (Crowley 1989a and 2000). Indeed, French and English have the potential to divide the population, while Bislama is a unifying language. On the national level where people from a variety of language groups make up a community, Bislama has a function, and many believe it should be taught both as a subject in the upper levels and incorporated into a vernacular education at the lower levels of education. On the local level, however, the use of Bislama, or suggestion of its use in the formal school program, becomes a somewhat slippery, problematic topic that does not always receive positive responses. For example, students from the island of Pentecost may not learn to speak Bislama until after class six, while students in Tautu Village, Malekula, learn to speak it before they even enter kindergarten. In the case of language and education, many aspects of the national agenda are disconnected from the diverse needs and interests of local communities and largely irrelevant to their daily lives.

\textsuperscript{22}There have even been discussions regarding the teaching of every subject in French the first few years of primary then switching to English in classes three and four, and then eventually returning to French in junior primary (interview with Laan 2007 and Gambetta 2007).
The focus of the VMOE on establishing universal education\textsuperscript{23}, or basic education, through a program called Top Up\textsuperscript{24}, is yet another example of this disjuncture. During its first attempt to implement basic education, the VMOE requested the assistance of community members to build classrooms, teachers’ houses, and gardens and, in many cases, provide funds for a portion of the teachers’ salaries. Although, in theory, the Top Up program was structured to be free-compulsory education, the schools required parents to pay school fees for their children. When the program dissipated (due to poor teacher training, irrelevant curriculum, and insufficient resources), a new basic education program called Center Schools (with the exception of the new dormitories, interestingly resembles Top Up schools) was implemented in 2004, and community members were called upon again to assist with the implementation. As a result of this, there were more than a few negative responses. I recall a number of Ni-Vanuatu parents in Malekula complaining about not only their frustration with contributing more time and effort into a second program, but with the fact that they had invested hard-earned resources into their children’s education only to find there is a very small chance for these students to

\textsuperscript{23} Universal education, or basic education, is part of the Education for All (EFA) goals initiated globally by UNESCO and has resulted in two attempts to establish a compulsory and supposedly, free education through class eight. The first attempt was in 2002 with the project, Top Up Community Schools, literally meaning the top students went up to the junior secondary schools and the lower achieving students stayed (down) at community schools and were given a second chance to pass the national exam and continue their education to class nine. However, Top Up teachers were given only roughly one month of training before being sent out into the field to teach a curriculum designed for the students in junior secondary school (which was essentially too difficult). Perhaps, this haste was influenced by a global push to reach EFA goals by the year 2000 (and now 2016) (Dutcher 2003) and the fact that Vanuatu was falling behind that goal. In 2004, the program was deemed a failure and dismissed in light of a new form of basic education, which interestingly enough, very much resembles the Top Up Program. Nevertheless, various aid agencies were pressuring the ministry to implement classes seven and eight by 2006, and they were basically placing the majority of their funding towards this initiative.

\textsuperscript{24} Top Up students who completed class eight were given a chance to either re-take the class eight exam (and their chances for passing were almost slim to none) or continue on in a technical school. Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo use a similar example for Solomon Islands, arguing students who attend rural schools have less of an opportunity to continue academic studies than do students who attend more urban schools. Quite often, these students are placed on a more technical track (Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992, 20).
continue their education past class eight\textsuperscript{25}. In this case, global initiatives such as Education for All, which aims to essentially lower poverty rates by improving education that is focused on the creation of a skilled workforce, have become part of the Pacific regional agenda (apparent in the PRIDE Project\textsuperscript{26}) and have eventually made their way into the Vanuatu Ministry of Education 2006 Sector Strategy\textsuperscript{27} (Nabobo-Baba 2002, 40 and 41). On a local level, these initiatives have little relevancy. For rural self-sustaining communities, the idea of poverty, in global terms, is somewhat irrelevant (UNESCO 2007). And as for the creation of a skilled workforce, most communities throughout the country are dealing with the effects of school leavers who “stap nomo” in the village, unable to use their skills. In some villages, this has created serious social issues as youth involvement in criminal activities, promiscuity, and kava and alcohol drinking have increased. In other villages, however, community members are optimistic that these skilled youth will assist in rural development (interview with Elder Malsets 2007). Still, as Watson-Gegeo and Welchman Gegeo have written, “…rural village-level development has a better chance of being sustainable, meaningful, and directly pertinent to people’s immediate needs if it is grounded in their knowledge systems” (Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 2002, 400). How, then, does a country like Vanuatu, with a vast

\textsuperscript{25} In relation to this, Unaisi Nabobo writes (in the context of Fiji), “Often in the face of economic hardship and adversity communities raise and devote significant human, physical and financial resources to the education of young people” (Nabobo 2002, 42).

\textsuperscript{26} PRIDE, Pacific Regional Initiative for the Delivery of Basic Education, aims to assist ministries of education in Pacific Island countries in the implementation of basic education and support a form of education which provides students with opportunities both globally and locally (Puamau 2005, 10). Much of PRIDE’s mission is based upon Jacques Delors’s report for UNESCO and his “four pillars of learning,” which aim to promote a “balance” between “tradition and modernity,” “cooperation and competition”, “spiritual and temporal”, and “universal and individual” (Teasdale 2005).

\textsuperscript{27} Nabobo and Thaman suggest many educational initiatives in Pacific Islands Countries, funded or promoted by the outside, “…mirror the reforms and education ideas of metropolitan countries” (Nabobo 2002, 44).
number of languages and customs and limited resources, incorporate local needs into the national agenda?

Hao Maet Oli Bildim Wan Brij [How Might They Build a Bridge?]

*How can we bridge the gap between the community with its values and aspirations and the intellectual growth and skills development promoted by the schools? (Mel 2002, 92).*

Despite the negative effects that formal schooling can have on Ni-Vanuatu students and local community members, Ralph Regenvanu, Director of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council, is optimistic that education is one conduit through which indigenous languages, cultures, kastoms, and traditions can flow and be sustained. In his paper, “A New Vision of Education in Vanuatu”, presented at the Vanuatu National Education Conference in Port Vila, he proposes, “...the formal education system is perhaps the single biggest contributing factor to the erosion of our tradition-based culture today. Accordingly, the education system is also the area in which changes can be made which have the most significant positive impact on the maintenance of our cultures” (Regenvanu 2002). He goes on further to suggest that the way in which communities and schools can bridge the gap is through incorporating indigenous languages, knowledge, epistemologies, traditions and community development into the formal school curriculum (Regenvanu 2002).
Nevertheless, the owners of these languages, knowledge, epistemologies, and traditions have not been given sufficient opportunities to speak about and direct how these aspects of their societies should be incorporated into the formal school system. In their book, *Tree of Opportunity: Re-thinking Pacific Education*, particular Pacific educators such as John Niroa, 'Ana Maui Taufe‘uluangaki, Konai Helu Thaman, Unaisi Nobobo Baba, Kabini F. Sanga, and others write that it is essential for Pacific Islanders to take “ownership” of the formal educations which their children are receiving. Furthermore, they confirm community members from communities throughout the Pacific have not been included in “the formal education process” (University of the South Pacific 2002, 2). According to these educators, education officials in the Pacific must consider the “survival, transformation and sustainability of Pacific peoples and societies” when developing educational policies and programs (University of the South Pacific 2002, 3).
Vanuatu Ministry of Education officials acknowledge that indigenous languages and kastoms are valuable and should be included in formal education. There has even been discussion regarding the need to incorporate indigenous language and traditional community knowledge into the formal school program. However, there have been few steps taken to actually do so. Although many of these educators are aware that vernacular education in Vanuatu would be beneficial, as it would assist in protecting and maintaining indigenous languages, the end goal remains— for students to better learn English and French. In fact, the success or failure of the few vernacular education programs operating today is based partly upon how well students fare on the class six exams, which are in French or English. Also, as Crowley has written, many programs sponsored by outside agencies promote vernacular education in order to ultimately improve English or French language skills (Crowley 2000b, 370). The notion of including *local* kastom and indigenous epistemology as content for subjects taught in vernacular has not been thoroughly discussed. Of course, the inclusion of a national view of kastom has been somewhat incorporated into aspects of the curriculum and a particular storybook series. Yet, to assume that there is a national, unified view of kastom and language in a country such as Vanuatu would be problematic (Miles 1998 and Jourdan

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28 This is partly due to limited resources. Yet, there is considerable funding given to the VMOE by outside donor agencies such as New Zealand Aid (which donates approximately three million New Zealand dollars each year), Australian Aid, European Union, France, and Japan. Despite the fact that one of the student outcomes mentioned in the working draft version of the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy 2007-2016 is for students to become literate in vernacular (the document does not define vernacular) and trained in “traditional knowledge and skills”, there are seemingly no programs funded by donor agencies which focus on these outcomes (VMOE 2006 and Book Flood 2007). On the other hand, a recent advertisement for an education language policy team leader, who would investigate the benefits of introducing vernacular, proves the VMOE is beginning to take steps to investigate the possibility of implementing vernacular education (Network of Pacific Educators List Serve, accessed 4 March 2008). Furthermore, the Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy 2007-2016 document states that community members were involved in the process of constructing education program strategies. The question is, to what extent were they involved? Via email, I asked a VMOE official, who has been involved heavily in the initiative to reform Vanuatu education, to provide some feedback regarding this question, and as of yet, I have not received a response.
1998, 138). For example, “Kati”, during a group interview with the Tautu Women’s Group, mentioned that although the VMOE has translated some kastom stories into select vernacular languages (which could be defined as either lanwis or Bislama) these stories do not necessarily relate to the communities’ own local kastoms and languages. She concludes, “Be ating i gat sam kastom stori lo buklet, be ating hemi blo wan narafala ples. Be blo own ples blo hem, ating mbae gud spos wan i save go givimaot ol stori blo hem we hem tu i save aware lo hem” [But I think there are some custom story books, but I think they are about another place. But as for a child’s own place, I think it would be good if someone can go and tell him his stories so that he can know about them] (“Kati”, group interview with Tautu Women’s Group 2007).

Indigenous languages and kastoms have been deemed by the Vanuatu government (in the constitution) as valuable aspects of Ni-Vanuatu identity, in both local and national contexts (Crowley 2000a, 5). However, the voices of local community members, owners of these particular languages and customs, have been and continue to be omitted from educational decision-making, project planning and implementation. Janet Stahl, former VMOE vernacular education contact and Summer Institute of Linguistics training coordinator, suggests that for local vernacular and cultural education to be successful, community members must be involved in the process. There is still much work to be done to increase community involvement, and foremost, educators must take the necessary steps to gather local community input regarding teacher training, developing vernacular literacy materials, and determining relevant educational content (personal communication with Stahl 22 Sept 2006). Attitudes from a number of educators throughout the Pacific reflect the notion that community members must be “re-
educated" regarding the purpose of education, which according to them, should not revolve around obtaining gainful employment (Mel 2002). Yet the reality is that community members have quite a significant amount of knowledge and perspectives to offer ministries of education throughout the Pacific and must be provided a venue with which to voice their concerns and ideas regarding educational issues.

Professor Christine Jourdan, Australian National University, suggests that nation-making is very much reliant on formal education, a common language such as Bislama and "the development of pop culture" (Jourdan 1998, 127). Yet she problematizes this formula by adding that, in Melanesian countries, loyalties tend to lie with specific language groups and cultures instead of or more than the nation-state. The fact that the state and its institutions, which according to Jourdan, assist in promoting the ideology of the nation, offers very little to benefit rural communities, exacerbates this gap even further. Of course, formal education is forefront in the process of nation-building, and this aspect of the state reaches beyond Port Vila and Luganville (135). Perhaps, community members would agree that they both bear the brunt and reap the benefits of formal education. In spite of this, the majority of the needs of local communities are not being met, and the formal education system continues to be disconnected from local communities. Building a bridge requires creating a balance between indigenous and formal educational knowledge. In order to accomplish this, community members, local and urban alike, must be involved with the building process. Therefore, this project aims to provide a medium for community members living in two villages, Ronevie and Tautu.
to voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas regarding the place of indigenous language, Bislama, English and French, custom, and culture in the formal school system.
Chapter Two
School, Life, and Language in Ronevie and Tautu

Figure 12: Malekula Language Map (Lynch and Crowley 2001, 71).

Ronevie

Layers of foliage drape the hills bordering both sides of the road. American and
big leaf vines camouflage banana trees, yams, taro, and manioc growing in the gardens
dotted across the land. As the truck drives by small bamboo-thatched villages, children
chase us down the deeply scarred dirt road. Every so often, a man or woman from one of
these villages runs out to stop the driver and hand him an envelope full of money,
persuading him to pick up some rice or gasoline on his next trip to town. It has been four
hours since the truck left Lakatoro, and we are nearing Ronevie Village. There are a total

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of twenty of us riding in the back, sitting on anything from a bag of yams to a wild chicken, from mounds of fresh kava to a bag filled with a very frightened pig. Luckily, I have managed to secure a place on top of the cab where I have been sitting for the past two hours ducking tree branches hanging over the road. Reggae blasts from the front of the truck, while two of the driver’s cronies, smashed into the front seat, sing the words of the song in their high falsetto voices.

The last leg of the trip is a bit tricky for the driver because the road was washed out during the cyclone of two years ago. The province has yet to fix it, and the trucks have dug out deep grooves. As the driver shifts the truck into low gear and coaxes it up the deeply gouged hill, I have a sudden feeling that I want to jump out and watch safely from the side. Nevertheless, I sit quietly, trying my hardest not to reveal my fear. So, I resort to studying the faces of the other passengers sitting in the back. The woman holding a baby has a definite worried look on her face, while the young men are laughing. Finally, one of the young men jumps off the tailgate and helps push the truck up the hill. My heart is beating loudly through my chest when we finally make it up to the top. Laughing, someone hits my foot while he relates to me the events of the week before when the driver almost sent the truck and its entire contents over the hill and into the ocean. He pointed to a hole on the side of the road that, luckily for the passengers, happened to catch the truck’s wheel and, therefore, saved their lives. I try not to look too shaken as we make our way around Banam Bay and down the hill to Ronevie.

As we pull up to the edge of the road leading down to Blacksands (the name used to describe Ronevie and the surrounding villages), stillness creeps over the land in salute to the setting sun. Tonight the driver is in a hurry, so instead of driving directly to the
edge of the river, he drops me off at the top of the road. Sophie and Chief Dalley are already there to greet me and catch my bags as I throw them off the back of the truck. I pay the driver 2,000 vatu (about twenty U.S. dollars), and the three of us walk roughly 400 meters to the Libansese River. The tide is up, so Chief Dalley puts my bags on the top of his head, while Sophie and I hike up our dresses, and the three of us wade through the rushing river to the other side. The black sand beach is deserted — everyone has gone to their bamboo-thatched houses for dinner. The sun has just dipped down under the ocean, and there is barely enough light to walk down the path. As we walk through the village, I am surprised to see that the soccer field, situated at the base of the village nearest to the ocean, is grown over and deserted. There are abandoned houses falling down on both sides of the paths, and I notice there are lights lit in only a few bamboo kitchen doorways. Sophie opens the wooden door to the iron bungalow where I will be staying, while Chief Dalley places my bags on the dirt floor. I can see the family has prepared for my visit, as there is already a mattress laid out on the raised bamboo floor, and a pink mosquito net is hanging from the wooden rafters. I step out of the bungalow and take a deep breath. Wafting through the air are the smells of coconut milk and yam baking in the lap lap oven. A comforting feeling washes over me, and I am happy.

Olsem wanem long tufala komuniti ia: what are these two communities like?

What is like to be a teacher or a student in Vanuatu? This chapter provides a particularly brief description of Ronevie and Tautu Villages and schools. Without going into too much detail, as to not take away from the main theme of the thesis, it also aims to discuss aspects of the formal school program.
Ronevie Village, established in 1969, is located in the southeast part of Malekula and was, at one time, home to approximately ninety-eight people. However, within the past two years, approximately thirty-nine community members moved back to their original village, Levetbau, due to disagreements among particular families (interview with anonymous community member 2007). In the village, there is neither running water nor electricity, and villagers are mostly subsistence farmers—although, most parents grow cacao, kava and vanilla and sellout [shell out] copra to pay school fees. The Presbyterian Church is a vital part of the community, while at the same time, kastom is valued and many kastom seremonis [custom ceremonies] are practiced. According to Chief Philip Dalley, the kastom, in Ronevie, is used to describe a behavior or way of life, an object which has a spirit, and particular dances, songs, and masks. Kastom objects are made

29 In 2003, there was a Namangki Kastom (grade-taking ceremony, or way in which men and women could elevate their status (and men could obtain more kastom knowledge and power) by purchasing and killing tusked pigs), and the village practices other customs, such as those relating to the death of Big Men (Jolly 1994, 178). Also, the custom chief, Chief Sumbleas Mal, states he continues to train young men in song and dance. Furthermore, young boys are encouraged to participate in the circumcision ceremony (interview with Chief Mal 2007).
(mostly by men) in the nakamal [a men's house] which is located just outside the village. In regards to community leadership, men mostly hold leadership positions. However, women have their own women's group at church for which they elect leaders. This group organizes community projects and working sessions.

Community members were unable to tell me the exact name of the dominant indigenous language (which has not yet been documented), but Chief Philip Dalley offered this name- Nganauchin Ganiank (he also provided the spelling) (interview with Chief Dalley 2007). However, information provided by John Lynch and Michael Lameier provides strong evidence that the language is also called Nisvai (personal communication with Lynch and Lameier 9 Dec 2007 and Lynch and Crowley 2001, 47). From the information I have gathered, I suspect that Nisvai speakers originally lived in villages surrounding Levetbau Village, located in the southwest interior of Malekula, but during the late 1960s, they dispersed to Vetbong, Ronevie, and Farun Villages (Lynch and Crowley 2001, 77). As for the status of the language, Sophie Dalley, a youth in the village, assisted me with determining that, out of approximately twenty-five children, fifteen speak mainly Bislama but understand Nganauchin Ganiank or Nisvai when it is spoken to them (collaborative research with S. Dalley 2007).

30 Through her own library research, Emily Bartelson suggested to me the language might be called Nisvai. When I asked Michael Lameier, my fiancé who lived in the village for two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer, if Nisvai could be the name of the language, he stated the meaning of Nisvai in local language is 'what'. John Lynch provided more information, stating Nisvai does, in fact, mean 'what' in local language. He also mentioned that the speakers migrated from "inland" to the villages of Vetbong and Levetbau. Lameier confirms, from his trips with village members to old villages and discussions with village leaders, the people of Ronevie did migrate to Ronevie village from Vetbong and Levetbau. Early studies by Charpentier (1983) suggest the language is moribund (with only 20 speakers left); however, if Nisvai is the language of Ronevie, there are most likely, more than 100 speakers (personal communication with Lynch, Bartelson and Lameier 9 December 2007 and Lynch and Crowley 2001, 47).
Although Kamai School is Francophone, French is used for neither written nor spoken communication in the village. Church services are typically held in Bislama, and Bislama is used for writing personal messages and letters. Nisvai, although spoken by most adults, is rarely used as a form of written communication. However, it may be used when writing greetings in a letter to a fellow speaker. Additionally, string band, Vanuatu’s contemporary style of music consisting of a guitar, ukulele, and box drum, is a medium through which indigenous language and Bislama is used to write songs. As for English, few community members own English-medium books, and many own either an English or Bislama Bible (combined interviews with Ronevie community members and Michael Lameier).

**Tautu**

![Family kitchen, Tautu. 2007. Photo by Ashley Vaughan.](image)
Tautu Village has a population of between 400 to 600\textsuperscript{31} people, mostly descendents of refugees who fled to the former mission station in the 1800s, and is located in the northwestern part of the island. Most community members belong to two different language groups; Tape, from the north of Malekula and close to extinction (see Crowley 2006), and Uripiv, a dialect of Northeast Malekula\textsuperscript{32} which, of the two, has become the dominant indigenous language (personal communication with John Lynch 9 Dec 2007). Roughly half of the population originates from the Tape speakers who fled to Tautu when a group of Big Nambas attacked their northern-interior, Malekulan village in the 1920s (Crowley 2006, 4). Additionally, community members stem from four nasaras [family groups and connected to heritage land] which, according to Chief Edward Gordan, have their own individual heritage languages. For village maintenance, prayer groups, and fundraising, the people of Tautu are divided into their separate nasaras. When a particular function or job needs to be organized or completed, community members convene within their particular nasaras to complete the task on a village level (interview with Chief Gordan 2007). However, much of the social structure within the village is centered on Tautu’s three main Christian churches, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God, and Seventh Day Adventist, where Bislama and English are predominately used during services and Bible readings. Similar to Ronevie Village, the women of Tautu belong to women’s groups associated with the church. Furthermore, there are at least two women who old positions of leadership, alongside men as elders, in the church.

\textsuperscript{31} This population statistic was given to me by the paramount chief of the village. Accurate, detailed population statistics are either non-existent or difficult to obtain.

\textsuperscript{32} Uripiv, Uripiv-Walo-Rano-Atchin, has an orthography and literacy materials that are used in the primary school on Uripiv Island (Stahl 2005).
Because the village is located near the provincial center, Lakatoro, and less than five minutes by truck from the provincial airport, community members’ lifestyles are becoming more “westernized” (DVD players and televisions are common household items). Thus, many adults complain that kastom is being lost. Additionally, although many community members are self-sustaining farmers, a large percentage work in government offices or shops in Lakatoro. As for language, many community members complain that Bislama is taking over indigenous language. English is used for writing notes and sermons related to church, while Bislama is used for writing letters or messages. Most community members own English-medium Bibles because they are either cheaper to purchase than Bislama Bibles or they are given away by The Gideon’s International.

Skul [School]  

A typical school day in Malekula begins at half past seven in the morning (or when the bells, made of old compressed gas tanks, cease to ring), with a school-wide performance of the national anthem. Upon returning to their classrooms, students place flowers, cut from their yards or gathered on the way to school, in rugged plastic vases and decorate their desks and tables. The teacher takes the

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Skul is a Bislama word meaning church or the act of learning about God and the Bible. It is used today to refer to one’s religion and going to church as well as formal school. For example, “Yu skul we?” means “What religion are you, or where do you go to church?” And, “Hemi wan tija long skul” means, “She’s a teacher at the school.”
first few minutes of class to check attendance and complete the required student records. Usually, students promptly begin the morning work, already written on the battered chalkboard. They take out their weathered notebooks, scraps of pencils, and wooden rulers, and after making perfect borders around the page, they begin the assignment. Language arts and maths [mathematics] lessons take place in the morning, with the teacher typically directing and students reciting. Depending on the school, students either return home for lunch or bring a piece of leftover laplap [traditional pudding made from root crops] wrapped in a banana leaf to eat out in the school field. Rotating each day, afternoons are filled with religion, social studies, science, art, music, sports, or school maintenance. Bells ring to end school at half past three in the afternoon, and students are allowed free time until the evening, when they will return to the school for tutoring and homework.

Malampa Province, including the islands of Malekula, Ambrym, and Paama, has approximately seventy formal schools, categorized as: Anglophone-government (forty-two schools), Francophone-government (fifteen schools), and Catholic (thirteen schools) (VMOE 2004).
Kamai School, offering education through class six to approximately 158 students from four different language groups, is a government operated Francophone school, which depending on the tide of the river, is close to a thirty minute walk from Ronevie village (VMOE 2004).

Tautu School, located in the heart of the village, is an Anglophone primary school which offers education through class eight to over one hundred children belonging to the same language group (VMOE 2004).
Like most students throughout the country, students of Kamai and Tautu schools take an exam in class six to determine whether or not they will continue their education at a junior secondary or community center school\textsuperscript{34}. Technically, the class six exams no longer exist, as the Vanuatu Education for All initiative allows students to continue their education through class eight in community center boarding schools as opposed to being selected for junior secondary boarding schools. However, I was informed that some schools are continuing to administer the exams. At the completion of classes eight, ten, eleven, and twelve, students must pass an exam to further their education.

Goals of the Vanuatu Education for All Action Plan aim to offer Ni-Vanuatu students free-compulsory education from class one through class eight. In fact, government schools are prohibited from charging school fees in exchange for educational services. Yet the presence of children in the village during the school day signifies that parents are, in fact, forced to pay school fees. How do schools get away with this? They require parents to make a set donation to the school, and students whose parents cannot afford the donation are dismissed. Both Tautu and Kamai schools require parents to use vatu [Vanuatu currency] as payment for school fees, which, at the primary level, are approximately fifteen U.S. dollars per year per child. The exchange of education for crops, animals, or mats is not accepted. Copra, coconut meat that has been dried by either the sun or smoke, is the main source of income for parents. However, because many community members are self-sufficient agriculturalists, there is little time in the day to generate income. Therefore, money to pay for school fees is hard to come by, especially if a parent has a child in secondary school (requiring fees of roughly 600 U.S. dollars per

\textsuperscript{34} Here, I am going by my own memory. I admit, by now, the class six exam may no longer exist in Kamai and Tautu Schools.
year per child). Furthermore, in more than a few instances, the ships which carry copra to either Luganville or Port Vila fail to dock at the villages, and as a result, the copra spoils and is unable to be sold (combined interviews with members of Tautu and Ronevie Villages 2007). Other parents grow kava or bake bread to win money. This past summer, I heard about an extreme case of hardship on parents trying to find enough funds to pay school fees. When community members living in a village in southeast Malekula were unable to raise enough money, they resorted to growing marijuana, which resulted in approximately half the village being taken to prison. This situation illustrates the difficulty parents face when trying to find money to pay for school fees.

Curriculum

In 1991, the Vanuatu Ministry of Education published the *Unified Primary Curriculum*, a national approach to integrate the Anglophone and Francophone government primary level schools. Through the medium of either French or English, (chosen by the parents; however, the location of the school in relation to the village usually determines the medium of instruction) subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, art, and music are taught. Recently, a foreign language class (English for Francophone schools and French for Anglophone schools) has been added to the formal school curriculum. In the early primary level, language arts is based upon such relevant themes as the ocean and the bush, and Vanuatu Readers are designed to offer a general culturally sensitive literature series. As part of the Education for All initiative, basic education has been extended to class eight, and foreign advisors were brought in by the European Union to assist with the creation of a revised curriculum, as the previous class seven and eight curricula had been based upon the assumption that all
students had passed the class six exams and was deemed by educators as too rigorous. When I had finished my assignment at the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education, the curriculum was definitely a revised product, but the amount of revision that was done is to be debated. As for the vernacular education programs operating in seven or so primary schools, utilize the Summer Institute of Linguistics phonics primer track and story track (which teaches comprehension and encourages creative writing) – ideally, both tracks are created by community members. At this time, vernacular education, in these schools, takes place in kindergarten, class one, and class two. Bridging from vernacular to either English or French takes place in classes two and three (Vanuatu National Reading Symposium 2005).

**Teachers**

![Figure 18: Malampa Province head teachers, head teachers' conference, Norsup, Malekula. 2003. Photo by author.](image)

Vanuatu has a total of roughly 2,000 teachers, 648 of whom are untrained, meaning they have not attended the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education. According

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35 The terms Northern Vanuatu, Central Vanuatu, and Southern Vanuatu categorize the country’s languages into three subgroups. Malekulan languages, part of the Central Vanuatu subgroup, number approximately twenty-six (for a population of approximately 30,000), making Malekula the most linguistically diverse island in Vanuatu’s archipelago and one of the most linguistically diverse places in the world (Lynch and Crowley 2001, 19 and Ethnologue 2008). Yet, despite Malekula’s rich linguistic heritage, its languages are among the most under-documented in the country (Lynch and Crowley 2001, 67).
to educational policy, teachers are to be transferred to a different school every three years. Also, teacher performance is to be monitored by the provincial education offices and the VMOE inspectors. In Port Vila and Luganville, these policies are somewhat effective. Outside the urban areas, however, educational policies rarely go beyond the printed word. According to the VMOE 2004 statistics, 116 of the 325 Malampa Province teachers either held probationary, temporary, or voluntary status, which has resulted in decreased pay and opportunities for promotion (VMOE 2004). Many of these teachers have been working with decreased pay for more than the required amount of time because proper administrators have failed to take the necessary steps to change their statuses. In several instances, teachers have gone without their monthly pay due to mismanagement or lack of government funds. As for classroom supplies and teaching materials, most teachers have very little. Consequently, much of the teacher moral is low, and this, in turn, has significant influence on their teaching performance and attendance, as many teachers take longer to return from school breaks and spend class time working in their gardens. Additionally, Ni-Vanuatu teachers are teaching in a language that is not only foreign, but also rarely used in their lives outside of the classroom. It could be argued that a number of teachers do not feel confident in their teaching abilities and are less vocal and animated in the classroom. With that said, there are a number of teachers who are thoroughly dedicated to the education of their students and donate after-school hours for tutoring, correcting student work, and planning lessons, despite the fact that they earn very little in pay and other benefits.
Community Involvement

Particular community members in Vanuatu are affiliated with school committees in their communities and are provided an opportunity to be part of the formal school process. In my own experiences teaching and working with teachers in village schools, most committees were given the responsibility of making decisions regarding school infrastructure, maintenance, and fundraising. However, I am unaware of any committees which directed or advised such matters as the school curriculum and education programs (personal communication with Regenvanu 24 March 2008). In both Tautu and Ronevie Villages, community members assist the school by holding fundraisers throughout the year. In the interview below, “Dorin”, from Ronevie Village, describes fundraising at Kamai School.

1. T: Mi luk se ol parens oli wok had. Be afta oli pem skulfi, oli mas giv han long skul?


1. [T: I see that the parents work hard. But after they pay for school fees, they have to help at school?

2. D: Yes, they hold fundraisers at school. Every term, we have fundraisers. For the fundraisers, we bring the food up there to sell it. We bring it to the school, and then we buy it back again] (interview with “Dorin” 2007).

Elder Malsetts, ofTautu Village, confides that community members are less than interested in assisting with the maintenance of Tautu School and with the exception of fundraising, rarely venture onto school grounds. On the other hand, Kamai School requires the surrounding communities to dedicate one day each week for the upkeep of
the school. Formal schooling in Malekula, like the rest of Vanuatu, began with missionary education, and as the section below illustrates, community members have traditionally been active in spreading formal education throughout the island. However, they have not invited to participate in the formal school program outside of offering material or labor assistance. This has contributed to their exclusion and unwillingness to take more assertive roles.

**Taem Skul I Kam Long Tautu [When School Came to Tautu]**

![Figure 19: Tautu Presbyterian Church. 2007 Photo by author.](image)

On a wooden bench under the thatch roof covering the outside of his house, Babu Man [Grandfather] sat in a gray wool sweater, watching the ocean and drinking his morning tea. When I walked up with my tape recorder and notepad in hand, he looked up at me and giggled, “Gud moning long yu. Mbae yumi stat nao?” [Good morning to you. Will we start now?] Babu had agreed to allow me to record a brief version of his life history for his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. I had not planned to use Babu’s interview for this research project. However, he was a significant influence in improving formal education throughout Malekula, Ambrym, and Paama, and he witnessed, first-hand, formal education coming to Tautu. As Babu spoke, I realized that
his story, as first a student and then an educator, provides insight into missionary schooling during the early 20th century and illustrates how community members participated in spreading western education and Christianity throughout Malekula. This interview with Babu describes how skul [school] first came to Tautu and Babu’s training as a teacher sometime during the 1920s and 1930s.


2. T: Hemi tok long lanwis?


4. Mi danis wan taem nomo long dakness. Finis nao mi kam ia.

5. T: Yu talem dakness, yu minim wanem?


8. T: Be taem we yufala i aot long wei blong kam stap long plesia- fastem yufala faenem hemi isi o hemi wan bigfala jenj?


11. T: Lo lanwis o lo Inglis?

12. B: Lo lanwis nomo. No Inglis yet.

13. T: Yufala lenem hao blong rid mo raet?


1. [B: When school came, it came here to Tautu. Now, all the teachers were holding school. They traveled all over. They were preaching God’s word. They wanted everyone to come to school at the church to hear about Jesus. Now, one teacher lived here, his name was Sam. He always came to visit us, over there in the darkness, in the hidden place where we lived. He organized the school. He told Mama, he said, “You come. You all come. Let’s go down to the school over there. Let’s go to where the school is.”

2. T: He spoke in language?

3. B: He spoke in language- just language, it wasn’t Bislama. He was just a man from Uripiv. He lived here- he held school. I mean, the missionaries came to Uripiv first. The missionary had his teachers travel all over. Now, he came and convinced us. Now, Mama went - their hearts were glad to come here. Now, at this time, I think I was around five or six years old, I think six years. Now, Mama and we came.

4. I danced only one time during the darkness. When it was finished, I came here.

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36 Here Babu is talking about dancing for a step in namangki, or a grade taking ceremony, where he was given his custom name.
5. T: You mention darkness, what do you mean?

6. B: I mean the place that is like hidden. Hidden- no one knew about (Christianity) yet. They worshiped idols- all things like this. Like the tam tams (drums) of before. I mean, the time before, we called it darkness. Like a place where there is no daylight – they didn’t know about this yet.

7. We came now. We had lived in our home for a long time, and then we came. We went away from the darkness. We left our village. They came and took our houses. They carried our houses and walked along the saltwater. They put our houses here. That was it. We came here to the mission at Tautu.

8. T: But when you left your home to come here, at first did you find it easy or was it a big change?

9. B: Yes, we saw some changes... like before. It wasn’t very easy. Before, they didn’t eat female pigs. They only ate male pigs. When we came here, all things changed now. They made it so that everything was free. It was no longer like before. Before there were all the laws.

10. When we came here, we went to school now. There was a teacher living here. He rang the bell. We went to worship now. This is how we went to school. For example, at school we just learned the alphabet.

11. T: In language (indigenous language) or in English?


13. T: Did you learn how to read and write?

14. B: We just learned a little. Now, I saw that it (missionary education) wasn’t progressing very well. Now, I thought that I must go to a school where I could learn this (reading and writing). Now, I went to Litz Litz. I stayed there one year and seven months. There was a teacher there who taught a little bit of English- the Bible and numbers, small things like this. A few numbers. I came back to Tautu. I began to think that I would go to a bigger school somewhere. An English school. At the Presbyterian (school) over there on the island of Santo- on one small island- Tongoa] (interview with Babu 2007).

Babu’s words provide evidence that Ni-Vanuatu converts were actively spreading Christianity and missionary education throughout Malekula and even Vanuatu. In many
cases, these teachers convinced fellow Ni-Vanuatu to leave their traditional villages and settle in missionary-created Christian villages or missions such as Tautu. Many, but not all, traditions were left behind in the “darkness”\(^{37}\) and as Babu mentions, a number of Ni-Vanuatu were “glad” to take up the missionaries’ teachings. Possibly, they saw school as an opportunity to obtain what the missionaries had (material goods), gain prestige, and access western knowledge (White 1991, 94).

Indeed in the early days, missionaries and local Ni-Vanuatu converts used local indigenous language, something familiar, to reach the people of Vanuatu, and this could have contributed to the significant number who eventually accepted Christianity\(^ {38}\). However, as Babu confirms, the access into western knowledge that Ni-Vanuatu so desired was limited. Village schools provided the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the lowest levels, which was hardly equivalent to the “western” education that the missionaries themselves received (albeit, in many cases, it was quite limited) (Bonnemaaison 1994, 53). Furthermore, although Ni-Vanuatu community members were actively spreading Christianity and missionary education to other villages, therefore winning converts, they were not directing the operation. Nor was much of their knowledge and traditional ways of living incorporated into the missionary education curriculum or agenda. Historically, Ni-Vanuatu community members have been

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\(^{37}\) Darkness, or taem blong tudak, is a concept first introduced by missionaries and eventually used by Ni-Vanuatu converts to describe traditional or, as the missionaries called them, “heathen” pre-Christian societies. Vilsoni Hereniko, professor and editor of the Contemporary Pacific, Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai’i Mānoa, writes, “With their backs to the old ways, Islanders focused on a new identity based on Christian values...In time, Islanders came to think of their history in terms of “the time of darkness” and “the time of enlightenment” (Hereniko 1999, 142).

\(^{38}\) Here I am not implying the people of Vanuatu fully abandoned their own traditions and wholly accepted Christianity. Even today, Ni-Vanuatu have imported traditional beliefs, particularly related to ancestor worship and black magic, into their own version of Christianity, therefore indigenizing it.
excluded from the planning process, and they have not been invited to share their knowledge and ideas regarding the formal education.
Chapter Three
Ples blong Lanwis, Bislama, Franis, mo Inglls

Each morning, while the Vanuatu flag is being raised, the students of a local community school stand in the open field outside their classrooms and sing the national anthem:

Yumi, yumi, yumi i glat [sic] blong talem se,
Yumi, yumi, yumi i man blong Vanuatu!
God i givim ples ia blong yumi,
Yumi glat tumas long hem,
Yumi strong mo yumi fri long hem,
Yumi brata evri wani

Voices from 158 students bellow through the school grounds, confirming Ni-Vanuatu nationality in a language most familiar to them, Bislama. At the close of the song, teachers dismiss the students to their classrooms and begin the mathematics lesson in a language rather unfamiliar, French. Language classes begin after lunch, and students are required to practice conversations in a foreign language, English. When classes are finished, students race back to their homes for dinner where they will explain to their parents the events of the day in a mixture of two languages, lanwis and Bislama (see also Jourdan 1998, 140).

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The spaces in a Ni-Vanuatu student’s life—school, village, home, church—are negotiated through the use of a different language—English, French, Bislama, lanwis (Lindstrom 2007). While this maneuvering is not necessarily negative, it does have an

39 [We are happy to proclaim/ We are the People of Vanuatu/ God has given us this land/ This gives us great cause for rejoicing/ We are strong, we are free in this land/ We are all brothers!] (Lyrics on Demand 2008).
effect on both the academic progress and success of students and their ability to maintain lanwis, as at least two of these spaces, home and school, seldom overlap. Vanuatu's linguistic heritage is represented by over one hundred languages, each having a particular place within Ni-Vanuatu society. In the political realm, English and French become dominate players, essentially dividing the population into two entities, Anglophone and Francophone; while locally, lanwis fractures the nation into pieces of identities belonging to individual societies. And Bislama is the unifying force which connects the people of Vanuatu on an island, provincial, and national level (Lindstrom 1983, 3 and Lindstrom 2007). In the course of their lives, many Ni-Vanuatu circulate through a variety of spaces, be it educational, political, or social, where they are forced to negotiate identities relating to the local, provincial, national, and even regional levels (1983, 6). As mentioned, rarely do all of these spaces interact, and for a number of students, the languages of education have little or no place at home or in the community where lanwis or Bislama are the dominant mediums of communication. This chapter, “Ples Blong Lanwis, Bislama, Franis, mo Inglis”, meaning the place of indigenous language, Bislama, French and English, briefly addresses Vanuatu's unique and complex language situation, in terms of education, and attempts to provide a venue through which community members voice their concerns and provide perspectives regarding the use and the place of each language within the space of education.

40 This idea came about through a discussion with Dawn Lovig, ethnomusicology graduate student, University of Hawai'i Mānoa, at the School of Pacific and Asian Studies Conference in March of 2008.
Language and Formal Education

"Language is like a door. It unlocks your opportunities to see what is actually behind the scene. When you go through a door to a house, you can find out what is inside— a table, chair, freezer, etc. For any particular country or island, language is the door to the customs and culture" (Chief Willie Bongmatur: National Council of Chiefs President 1998, 146).

Paviour-Smith argues that the increase of English and French use in the social space has placed a threat on Vanuatu’s indigenous languages, as more Ni-Vanuatu are beginning to view these two languages as superior to their own traditional languages (Massey 2003). Crowley furthers this argument by writing that because indigenous languages have been labeled, "village languages" and English and French, "government languages," this has had significant influence on the amount of documents recorded in these two post-colonial languages as compared to languages more familiar to the general public, thereby alienating the people of Vanuatu from vital information regarding their wellbeing (Crowley 1989a, 122). Although there has been an increase of government and public documents printed in Bislama, therefore, allowing them more accessibility to the general public, little has been recorded in indigenous languages, and Crowley’s argument proves that lanwisi has been labeled as inferior compared to more prominent “government” and instructional languages such as English, French, and in some cases, Bislama. Indeed, the struggle of the Vanuatu Ministry of Education to maintain a balance between English and French— official languages and languages of instruction— has taken both funding and attention from vernacular education programs, therefore hindering the revitalization and maintenance of indigenous languages and possibly contributing to their endangerment (Miles 1998, 148, VMOE 2006 and Crowley 1989a

41 The push for maintaining French has been particularly heightened since English- medium schools have become a dominant choice for parents (Miles 1998 and Interview with Laan 2007).
and 2000, 132). This, coupled with a home environment that does not have a tradition in literacy, has also contributed to the academic struggles of most Ni-Vanuatu students, as most are unable to build a solid foundation in any one language, meaning they are not highly literate (able to read and write) and fluent in an indigenous language, English, French, or Bislama. To illustrate, many of my class eight students, whom I taught during my second year as a Peace Corps Volunteer, were not able to comprehend primary-level literature nor were they taught to read and write in lanwis (although, they are fluent in both lanwis and Bislama). Furthermore, these students spent approximately forty hours each week studying at school, which, aside from the weekend and school Holidays, left them with limited time in the village. Because communities throughout Vanuatu do not have a tradition of literacy, there are few tools in the homes of students to assist them with gaining higher levels of literacy (personal communication with Salai 28 March 2008). Although the VMOE and individual schools have chosen to use English and French as mediums of instruction, parents are indirectly and perhaps, subconsciously, contributing to the value placed on French and English by sending their children to schools where these languages are the sole mediums of instruction. Where traditionally children spent time in the village each day engaged in such things as working with their families in the garden (where there was an exchange of cultural knowledge and lanwis), a vast majority of their time is now spent at school learning western languages and concepts.

In many cases, Ni-Vanuatu children learn as a first language not only their "mother tongue", but also the language of either of their parents. As second, third, fourth or even fifth and sixth languages, a number of children could possibly learn Bislama, the languages of neighboring villages, a regional language for church (such as Mota, Aulus, Efate-Shepards and West Ambrym (Crowley 2000a, 61), and now, both English and French (Miles1998,149).
The VMOE has placed much attention on promoting bilingualism in English and French; however, aside from a select few, Ni-Vanuatu are not truly “bilingual” (in these two post-colonial languages) because outside of school, government and work, Bislama, the lingua franca, or lanwis is spoken extensively (Miles 1998, 128 and 129). In reality, English and French are rarely spoken in rural Vanuatu. Despite this, the use of these two languages is enforced in schools, while the use of indigenous languages and Bislama is discouraged and even punished (Crowley 1989a, 126 and Miles 1998, 121, 128 and 129). The minutes from a school committee meeting at Rensarie Junior Secondary School, located on central Malekula, provide evidence of the value placed on maintaining these languages within the school system, even at the cost of indigenous languages and Bislama. (Although, it is important to note that the meeting was conducted through the medium of Bislama.)

Yes, mi wantem spos yumi gat wan “LANGUAGE EXCHANGE” between Anglophone students mo Francophone students. Aim blong hem hemi blong promotem “BILINGUALISM” insaed long RJSS.

Mi ting se igud blong stopem lanwis mo Bislama long skul wantaem.

[Yes, I am in favor of a language exchange between Anglophone and Francophone students for the purpose of promoting bilingualism inside the high school.

I think we ought right away to forbid the use of indigenous languages and Bislama at the school] (Miles 1998, 136).

43 Crowley provides a historical perspective on this issue. He writes the Franco-Anglo condominium officers, who previously governed Vanuatu, “placed primary importance on their own respective national languages over any Vanuatu language, including also Bislama.” Furthermore, he states, “The means by which this was achieved was, of course, the formal education system, and the acquisition of prestigious and well paid jobs with either administration was made dependent upon a knowledge of one of these two languages” (Crowley 1989, 117).

44 However, in my experiences teaching and training teachers throughout Malekula, I found Bislama continues to be used as a teaching tool in almost all classrooms.
Although within school policies, the use of indigenous languages and Bislama is forbidden, education and government documents support the contrary. The fifth draft of the Vanuatu National Language Policy encourages the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction for early primary (Vanuatu Cultural Centre 2005). Likewise, during Vanuatu's early years of independence, the implementation of vernacular education was considered by educators and politicians to be a priority, and this was recognized in both the First National Development Plan of 1982-1986 and in the Malfatumauri's constitution. In fact, the preamble to the national constitution refers to the significance of Vanuatu's linguistic and cultural diversity. However, these recommendations and goals have not led to the implementation of a policy in education to protect Vanuatu's vast number of languages and cultures (Crowley 2000a, 5, Early 1999 and Miles 1998, 122). In his report to the VMOE, "Vernaculars in Education in Vanuatu", Crowley places this argument into perspective, "Vanuatu finds itself in the anomalous position of being possibly the only country in the world in which both its national language and one of its official languages have so far been completely excluded from the education system; in that it has not been taught as a subject, officially recognized as a medium of instruction, or even permitted informally in the classroom or on the playground by school rules in most— if not all— schools in the country" (Crowley 2000b, 41). Although here Crowley is speaking of Bislama, his argument holds true for

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45 It must be noted that prior to independence, Vanuatu's colonial government discouraged any discussions regarding the issue of language, not only in the country, but also in the region (Pacific Churches Research Centre 1981, 1).
46 Malfatumauri is the Vanuatu Council of Chiefs based in Port Vila (Crowley 1989, 122).
47 Encouragingly, the phrase, "Sustainability and the Vanuatu Way: respect for language, culture, history and indigenous knowledge" is written as a goal in the 'Vision, Mission, Goals and Values' section of the 2007-2016 Vanuatu Education Sector Strategy draft (VMOE 2006). This is an indication that the VMOE is attempting to move toward incorporating indigenous knowledge and epistemologies into the formal school program.
indigenous languages, as in most cases, few of the languages which represent either Ni-Vanuatu national or local identity have been given a place in formal education.

Prior to independence, Vanuatu’s condo-colonial government stifled discussions revolving around the establishment of a language policy. It was not until 1981 that a language planning conference was held where educated Ni-Vanuatu, working for both government and non-government organizations, and a team of linguists were given an opportunity to begin a dialogue regarding the place of each of Vanuatu’s languages. From this dialogue, it was determined that Bislama should be given higher status than the two post-colonial languages, English and French, and indigenous languages should be maintained because of their strong connection to local identity. Bilingualism was deemed as essential to the economic growth of the country, and participants suggested Ni-Vanuatu students be required to learn both English and French. Although incorporating the use of indigenous languages into formal education at the primary level was seen as an arduous task, educators at the conference agreed that it must be done as not only a way to maintain local identities, but also to allow students the opportunity to learn in a familiar language. It was recommended that indigenous language be used as the main medium of instruction until class four, Bislama be incorporated as a language class, and English and French be introduced in classes five and six. In the end, the committee decided that not enough research had been conducted regarding the implementation of vernacular education.

Twenty-seven years later, Vanuatu continues to face similar linguistic and educational issues, and community members remain marginalized when it comes to discussing language policy within education. Dr. Robert Early suggests that “elite”
political or government officials, who are “highly articulate in English and French”, are the decision-makers. Although government officials speak to the value of protecting indigenous languages, their words are resonating louder than their actions, which at this time are focused on promoting bilingualism (in French and English) in Vanuatu’s schools (Lotherington 1993 and interview with Early 2007). In November of 2006, Vanuatu held a National Education Summit at the University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, where issues such as language policy and vernacular education were discussed, and community members from throughout the country were invited to attend. According to Early, these community members, unfortunately, “adopted a low profile and gave the voice to the ‘big men’” [politicians, educators, and businessmen]. This proves the possibility that elites are “driving the language policy” and possibly other educational initiatives, and local community members have, again, been left out of a vital decision-making process that will, in the end, affect their languages and ultimately their livelihoods (interview with Early 2007). However, if VMOE officials were to ask the community members of Tautu and Ronevie Villages to contribute to the development of a language policy in regards to education, what might they have to say about the place of lanwis, Bislama, French, and English?

Ples blong Lanwis

When discussing issues of lanwis with community members, I received unanimous responses filled with concern for what many perceive as imminent indigenous language loss due to the rise of Bislama use among young children. A comment made
during a group interview with members of Ronevie Village illustrates this point.48 “From oli yusum tumas Bislama, mekem oli lusum lanwis blo yumi. So, naoia, yu go long evri praemer skul, yu harem nomo se Bislama hemi fulap. Be oli no save toktok lo lanwis” [Because they use too much Bislama, they are losing our language. So, now, when you go to all the primary schools, you really notice that Bislama is used much. But they can’t speak in language] (group interview with Ronevie women 2007). Chief Edward Gordan, of Tautu Village, speaks to the importance of maintaining indigenous languages and provides evidence of the negative impacts of Bislama. His quote represents the unanimous responses provided by other community members in both villages:

Hemi no wan smol problem, mbae hemi wan bigfala problem... from spos i wan waet man or difren man i kam, be mi wantem talem wan samting we mi haedem, we man mbae i no save, mbae mi talem--bambae hemi save nao from Bislama i fulap tumas. Spos we mi toktok long lanwis blo mi, mbae man ia mbae i no save. Be lanwis hemi veri impoten from mbae ol man oli save se yu, yu wan man ples ia.

[It’s not a small problem, it will be a big problem... because if an outsider comes, and I want to say something where I hide it-- where the man can’t understand-- I will say it, but he will understand because there is too much Bislama. If I speak in my language, he will not understand. But language is also very important to show to everyone that you are a man who belongs to this place] (interview with Chief Gordan 2007).

48 The interviews, which took place in Burbar Village (about a forty minute walk from Ronevie), were with men and women from or related to people living in Ronevie Village. They were conducted here because Chief Dalley had arranged for them to take place during a fundraiser, which he knew several people from Ronevie would attend.
Chief Gordon’s words point out an interesting issue in regards to language sustainability. It could be argued that the use of indigenous language in Ronevie and Tautu, both traditionally and today, is mainly for both pragmatic purposes and maintaining identity, or separateness. Certainly, this was the case with the Tape language speakers who chose to reserve their language for use only when confidential information needed to be exchanged while members of other villages were present. In fact, the practical uses of the language eventually led to its “demise”, as the young children were not allowed to learn it (Crowley 2006).

Other responses that I frequently received in relation to indigenous language loss were filled with concern that most children “no save...kaonem ol numa long saet blong lanwis. Mo saet blo ol nem blo wud, oli no save” [are unable to count numbers in language. And when it comes to the names of trees, they don’t know] (group interview with Ronevie women 2007). Again, this provides evidence of the practical uses of language in the village, as the names of plants and trees provide not only identifying terms, but also information for usage, such as for medicinal purposes (see Harrison 2007, 25). Therefore, many of these community members, based on their concerns for language loss, practical uses, and identity, agreed that language should play an important part in their community schools because it would encourage parents to teach lanwis to their children. “Nedi”, a woman from Ronevie Village, confirms, “Be naoia, mifala, wanem se mbae lanwis i mas gohed lo praemeri skul” [But now, we want language to be used in the primary school] (“Nedi”, group interview with the woman of Ronevie 2007).

In Tautu Village, it was brought to my attention that an indigenous language education program would not be successful because most of the students only speak the
indigenous language as a second language (mainly because of intermarriage among different language speakers\(^{49}\)). Therefore, a truly vernacular education program would operate through the medium of Bislama, even though vernacular education materials have been developed for Uripiv School and could possibly be used in Tautu School. In an interview, which took place outside of his kitchen, Elder Malsetts, from Tautu Village, reiterates:

1. T: Yu ting se venakula i save wok lo ples ia?


1. T: Do you think that vernacular could work here?

2. [E.M.: Here? No, because here many children are using too much Bislama. It will become like a foreign language to them] (interview with Elder Malsetts 2007).

On the other hand, the women from the Tautu Women’s Group believe lanwis should play a vital part in the lives of their children. They admit, however, that the use of

\(^{49}\) On the other hand, Crowley argues local languages have continued to remain strong on Malekula despite intermarriage (Crowley 2001, 199).
Bislama is becoming more predominated and suggest that the most effective way to sustain, or even, at this point, revive, the use of lanwis within the community would be to introduce lanwis as a class subject. In the following interview, conducted with seventeen members of the Tautu Women’s Group, “Kati” and “Jaklen”, elaborate on this point.

1. T: Ministri Blo Edukesen, i gat wan niu strateji we i bin kamaot lo Ministri, ating lo 2007, 2006, oli putum se lanwis i mas go insaed lo skul. Venakula. Olsem lo Uripiv. Be wanem tingting blo yufala, yu ting se i save wok lo ples ia? Olsem lanwis blo kindi, i save go insaed lo kindi witem klas wan mo tu. Afta, oli yusum lanwis nomo, afta oli jas go lo Inglis. Yu ting se i save wok lo ples ia?


3. J: Mi ting se lo tija spos oli tij lo skul, be mi ting se lo hom fastaem. Lo hom nao, oli mas toktok witem ol pikinini witem lanwis blo oli save. Afta, i jas go lo klas.

1. [T: The Ministry of Education has a new strategy that they have come out with, I think in 2007 or 2006, where they aim to incorporate language into the school. Vernacular. Like at Uripiv. But what do you think about this? Like the language used in kindergarten, language can be incorporated into kindergarten with classes one and two. Then, they will use only language, and then they will go to English. Do you think this could work here?]

2. K: It will be like a subject. They will choose someone to just teach language. Like the French teacher, she’ll be just like a language teacher.

3. J: I think that the teachers should teach at school, but I think that it should happen at home first. At home, now, parents must speak to the children in language so they’ll know. Then, it can just go to the class] (“Kati” and “Jaklen”, group interview with the Tautu Women’s Group 2007).

All nine community members, who participated in individual interviews, also agreed that an indigenous language class should be offered at the school as a way to revitalize the language. This would, possibly, encourage parents to increase the amount of language
use at home, which could, in turn, lead to the implementation of an indigenous language vernacular education program.

Out of the six community members of Ronevie, who participated in individual interviews, four strongly agreed that a vernacular education program should be implemented at Kamai School. One member of Ronevie, who participated in a women’s group interview during a fundraiser at Burbar Village, “Edlin”, concedes, “Mifala i mas holem taet lanwis blo mifala. Long saet blong edukesen, tu, mifala wantem se ol tija, oli mas tijim ol pikinini blo mifala long saet blong lanwis” [We must hold on tight to our language. When it comes to education, we want the teachers to teach our children in language] (“Edlin”, group interview with Ronevie women 2007). Taking a more conservative stance, however, Chief Philip Dalley, of Ronevie Village, suggests, “...lanwis i gat ples blong hem. Olsem ol pikinini blo yumi, yumi tijim olgeta lo hom nao. Be taem we hemi go aot long skul, hemia nao, hemi ples blong Bislama witem French mo English. So, mi ting se bes ples lo kindi, hemia nao. Mbae yumi gohed witem edukesen lo lanwis” [...language has its place. For example, our children, we will teach them at home now. But when they go to school, well, this is the place for Bislama with French and English. So, I think that the best place to implement language is in the kindergarten] (interview with Chief Dalley 2007). Yet, he later expressed his desire for the language to be properly documented so that an effective vernacular education program could be implemented in the primary school (interview with Chief Dalley 2007).

Certainly, these parents, although extremely interested in the maintenance of their languages, are also concerned with the quality of education their children receive. This coupled with the fact that many of the programs and projects implemented by the VMOE
have been less than successful imbues caution on the part of community members who would be more likely to support a well-planned, properly monitored program. In regards to implementing a second national vernacular education program, Crowley warns that if the program is not properly planned, “it is likely that local communities will be completely turned off any possibility for vernacular early education for some generations to come” (Crowley 2006).

**Ples blong Bislama**

Discussions regarding the place of Bislama in Vanuatu have sparked some controversy. The late Dr. Terry Crowley, a linguist who dedicated many years to documenting Vanuatu’s indigenous languages and Bislama, was a proponent for the incorporation of Bislama into the school system, and many educators agree that Bislama must be provided a place in education. Laan states, “It is growing and no one can stop it, and it’s our national language” (interview with Laan 2007). On the other hand, others such as Gambetta and Linda George, Kindergarten Director, Malampa Province, claim that “Bislama, hemi skin nomo” [Bislama is only the surface] compared to lanwis; which they say has much deeper meaning to the people of Vanuatu (interview with Gambetta and George 2007). In an interview that took place in the dining area of the village guest house, Chief Sumbleas Mal, kastom chief of Ronevie Village, provides this example:

1. C.M. — Yu luk, ol faol ia— waet man, oli kalem faol. Be lanwis, hemi talem se, Ngemen (woman we i bin raetem samting ia, i raetem wod ia)...be i gat wan wan nem blong olgeta i stap... Be ol pikinini naoia we oli lenem edukesen, oli talem se pijn (Bislama). Mbae i go sutem wan pijin i kam, be wanem nem blo hem?

2. T— Yu talem se ol wod blong Bislama, i no enuf blong kavremap ol wod blong lanwis?

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50 Laan also points out the fact that there are several literacy materials available in Bislama- newspapers, hymn books, Bibles, posters and other documents (interview with Laan 2007).
3. C.M. – Mifala i yusum tumas Bislama, taswea, i kavremap lanwis blong mifala. Hemia we mi bin talem long yu ye...
wei bakegen, from Bislama hemi related lo Inglis. Ating blo oli ting se mbae oli toktok Bislama nao, pikinini i save kasap lo skul” [I think another way is because Bislama is related to English. I think that they (parents) believe that if they speak Bislama to their children, they will catch up in school] (“Kati”, group interview with the Tautu Women’s Group 2007). However, many parents are beginning to realize this technique is actually hindering their children’s ability to use English correctly, as Bislama becomes a model for English. Elder Malsetts explains, “Blo mi, mi luk se hemi no helpem pikinini. Bislama, i no helpem pikinini blo kasem lanwis lo skul from we, taem yu tok tumas Bislama, i mekem Inglis, i kam olsem Bislama. Yu mixem tufala” [To me, I see that it doesn’t help the children. Using too much Bislama doesn’t help the children learn language because it makes English become like Bislama. You mix the two] (interview with Elder Malsetts 2007). Yet, if the goal of vernacular education is to improve literacy skills instead of language maintenance, Bislama would be the choice for Tautu because it is the first language of most of the younger students. In fact, Elder Malsetts confides that if one were to “yusum lanwis naoia lo kindi, mbae oli laf lo yu from Bislama hemi wan lanwis we oli tok lo hem plenti” [use language now in the kindergarten, the children will laugh at you because Bislama is a language that they use a lot] (interview with Elder Malsetts 2007). Proving that Bislama has become the dominant language among the young children of Tautu, “Kati” describes the language situation in her own home as well as that of others in the village.

51 Also, Miles writes, “As Bislama becomes the language of choice, schoolchildren in English-medium schools suffer from a linguistic interference that impairs their ability to master standard English.” Although the effect is not as dramatic, Bislama does change the structure of French (Miles 1998, 144).
1. T: Mi harem fulap se lanwis hemi stap go lus lo vilij. Be wanem tingting blong yufala ol mama? Yufala i harem ol totok we i stap go raon long vilij blong ol pikinini blong yu.

2. K: Mi ting se wan bes samting blong mekem lanwis i kam bak, hemi blo ol parens i mas tijim lanwis lo pikinini lo hom. From plenti taem, ol parens oli yusum Bislama. Hemi no naterol lanwis blo mifala lo plesia. So, i gud blo ol parens oli i mas tijim lanwis lo ol pikinini. From plenti samting ol pikinini...oli yusum Bislama nomo. Be i gud blong tijim ol pikinini lo lanwis blo lanwis i save kam bak lo komuniti insaed long wan wan hom.

3. T: Yes, mi harem fulap oli talem olsemlia, be yu ting se from you talem—Bislama, fulap paren oli yusum plenti lo plesia witem ol pikinini?

4. K: Yes, plenti. Even spos se mitufala i kamaot long plesia nomo, be mifala yusum Bislama insaed lo hom. Be i gud, lanwis hemi wan gudfala samting, be from nomo olsem ol parens nomo oli yusum Bislama, oli ting se hemi wan gufala lanwis blo oli...toktok lo ol pikinini lo Bislama.

5. T: Be yu save from wanem oli jusum Bislama?

6. K: Hemia from se, samtaem, sam woman oli kam lo wan narafta aelan, be i mekem se i save totok Bislama insaed lo hom. Olsem mi, mi kam long wan narafta aelan, be i mekem se mi totok Bislama lo hom, be taem mi save lanwis, mi totok lanwis lo plesia lo ol pikinini blo mi. Mi totok lanwis blo mi tu lo ol pikinini blo mi.

7. T: Yu gat haomas pikinini?

8. K: Fo

9. T: So, ol pikinini blo yu, oli yusum lanwis plenti o oli yusum Bislama?

10. K: Fas bon nomo hemi yusum lanwis, be sekon, numa tri, numba foia, olgeta, Bislama nomo nao.

11. T: Be wanem tingting we tufala i kam lo wan sem ples we tufala i gat sem lanwis, be tufala i jusum Bislama?


[T: I’ve heard quite a few times that language is being lost in the village. But what do you all think? Because all of you mamas, you hear how the children are speaking around the village.}
2. K: I think that the best thing for maintaining language would be for all the parents to teach their children language at home. Because many times, they use Bislama. It is not the natural language of this place...But it would be good to teach the children language so that language could be maintained in the community and in each home.

3. T: Yes, I’ve heard many say the same thing as this, but do you think that this is because, like what you said, many parents here are using Bislama a lot with their children?

4. K: Yes, plenty. Even if the two of us are just from here, we use Bislama inside the home. But it’s good. Language is something good, but just because the parents use Bislama, they think that it is a good language for them...to speak to the children in Bislama.

5. T: But do you know why they choose to use Bislama?

6. K: It is because, sometimes, some women come from another island, but it makes it so that they speak Bislama inside the home. Like me, I come from a different island, but it made me talk Bislama in the home, but when I learned language, I spoke this language to all of my children. I speak my language as well to my children.

7. T: How many children do you have?


9. T: So, all of your children can speak the language well, or they use Bislama?

10. K: My first born is the only one who can use the language, the second, third, and fourth born use only Bislama.

11. T: But what do you think about the parents who both come from here and choose to use Bislama?

12. K: I think I don’t know. I will say that it is only their business. They don’t want to use language. They prefer Bislama...better than their own language] (“Kati”, group interview with the Tautu Women’s Group 2007).

In Ronevie, all nine community members who participated in individual interviews raised concern over Bislama becoming like an invasive species which has little connection to local identity. According to Chief Mal, “Mifala i no lukum save se
Bislama, stampa blong hem, i kam we” [We don’t know where Bislama originated from] (interview with Chief Mal 2007). Reiterating this point, “Kati”, who is in her mid-thirties to early forties, describes her first experiences with Bislama, “Ating hemi wan lanwis blo aotsaed. Hemi jas kam nomo. From taem we mi smol, mi neva save Bislama ia. Ating lo 1970s mi jas save Bislama ia. Fastaem mi toktok lanwis nomo, mi jas harem olgeta we oli kam lo ol famle blo mi we oli stap lo Santo. Oli kam, oli jas stap tok Bislama lo mi I think it is a language from outside. It just came. Because when I was small, I never learned Bislama. I think in the 1970s I just learned Bislama. The first time I spoke it, I had just heard my family who had just come from Santo. They came; they just spoke Bislama to me (“Kati”, group interview with the Tautu Women’s Group 2007).

Furthermore, a woman from Ronevie Village states, “…samtaem ol pikinini, taem we oli wantem blo telem samting, oli mas talem nimo long nem blong Bislama… Oli no save talem lo lanwis” […]sometimes when the children want to say something, they must use only Bislama…They don’t know how to say it in language] (interview with Ronevie women 2007). Despite these negative sentiments, most community members in both villages either positively recognize, or unwillingly accept that Bislama, “hemi gat ples blong hem” [it has its own place] as the lingua franca; perhaps not within the community, but in town, around the island, and at school (interviews with Chief Dalley, Elder Malsetts and Ronevie women and men 2007). Bislama, which was utilized by Father Walter Lini and the Vanu’aku Pati as a device to communicate cultural revitalization, or kastom, has become a medium for national unity, connected more to identity in urban areas, especially Port Vila and Lugarville, than in rural villages, as both the comments made by “Kati” (“Hemi no naterol lanwis blo mifala lo plesia” [Its not the natural
language of this place]) and Chief Mal, ("Mifala i no lukim save se Bislama, stampa blong hem, i kam we" [We don’t know where Bislama originated from]) confirm (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982,312). Many parents in Ronevie, who obviously see the value in teaching Bislama to their children, would not go as far as supporting it being taught in school (Watson 2007). On the other hand, Bislama is currently being used as the medium of instruction in Tautu Kindergarten. However, as mentioned, Tautu is located near the provincial center where people from all over the island and even the country have migrated for work.

**Pies blong Inglis mo Franis**

English and French also hold national status; however, their use is relevant only in more urban areas. Apart from work, church and taon [urban areas], English is almost never spoken. French, however, is more frequently spoken by Ni-Vanuatu who were schooled in Francophone schools (see also Crowley 2000a). On a social level, the use of these two languages, especially English, is at times even discouraged. In reply to a question regarding the use of English in the village, Chief Gordan states, "Oli fraet blong totok toktok Inglis. Oli save jikim yu from yu ting se yu wan man we yu save Inglis, be Inglis blong yu i no gud, mo tu yu stap mekem flas" [They are afraid to speak English. People can make fun of you because you think that you know English, but really your English isn’t any good, and too, you are showing off] (interview with Chief Gordan 2007).

Furthermore, parents in these two communities choose to send their children to either an Anglophone or Francophone school based on convenience (the school is in the community and there may not be transport to another school), as opposed to allegiance to
one language or the other. Like many parents, Chief Gordan decided to send one of his three grandchildren to a Francophone school in hopes that at least one of them will graduate and find gainful employment (interview with Chief Gordan 2007; see also Miles, 128 1998 and Lindstrom 1983, 6). It is apparent that English and French play only a small part in the lives of community members; therefore, is it beneficial for students to learn these two languages in school? Many community members maintain that it is, in fact, important for students to learn at least one of these two languages in order to find a job or to speak with foreigners, but a more difficult question to answer is to what extent?

Chief Mal suggests that learning English (or French) is beneficial; however, it has little meaning to the students. He states that the purpose for a student to learn English is, "from hemia nao: from hemi raet ia, long saet blong Inglis;" however, "hemi save lenem long saet long Inglis, hem skul Inglis, be lo lanwis blong mi, hemi no save. Spos (hemi) raetem long lanwis blong mifala, from hemi bon witem, taem we yu talem samsamting, mbae (hemi) save finis" [for this reason: so that he can write in English. (However), he has been taught in English. He can write in English. But he doesn't know my language. If he writes in our language— the one he's been born with— then when you tell him something, he will already know] (interview with Chief Mal 2007). In fact, many parents agreed that, of the children who attend school, almost none are fluent or even novice speakers of English or French. As well, most of the community members themselves admit that they are not fluent in either language. As a result, the women of Ronevie 52

52 In regards to the schools, it could be said, however, the people of Tautu Village view themselves as more Anglophone than the people of Ronevie view themselves as Francophone. As for politics, Lindstrom writes that one's political affiliation can, at times, determine one's loyalty to either Anglophone or Francophone (Lindstrom 1983, 6). On another note, parents are now leaning more towards Anglophone schools because of financial opportunities, especially in the tourist industry and because they offer more chances (albeit small) for students to further their education at a university than does French (Crowley 1989, 133).
Village are concerned that parents are unable to help their children with their homework in French because they themselves have little or no command of the language, and, consequently, their children are struggling academically (group interview with Ronevie women 2007). Furthermore, women of the village admit they are afraid to discuss the academic progress of their children with the teachers because they do not know how to speak French (informal conversation with the women of Ronevie 2007).

Nevertheless, for now, the inclusion of English and French, at least to some degree, will be seen by the people of Vanuatu as a necessary part of education and “development.” In fact, many parents agree that indigenous languages and French and/or English must wok tugeta [work together]. Chief Mal states, “Tufala i mas wok tugeta (lanwis witem Inglis mo Franis). Ples blong skul blo ol tijas i mas save se hemi mas tij long saet blong lanwis. Oraet, oli finis long plesia, oli mas go long Inglis nao blo hem mbae i save olgeta evri wan (lanwis) olsem we yu bin tokbaot ia” [The two must work together (language with English and French). It’s the place of school and the teachers to teach in (indigenous) language. Alright, when they finish teaching (indigenous) language, they must teach English so that they will know all (the languages) that we’ve talked about] (interview with Chief Mal 2007).

Dr. Early, strong proponent of vernacular education, also admits that the Vanuatu education system should develop leaders who are “literate and articulate” in English (interview with Early 2007). This partnership among the languages is idealistic; however, as Crowley has confirmed, the reality is that English and French are taking precedence over indigenous languages. For example, Gambetta suggests that “taem we ol pikinini, oli fesem ol difficulty lo literesi, blo kam literet long Inglis mo French, what do we do now? We try to solve the problem
inside lo tufala lanwis ia, English and French. I no gat even wan hemi tingting se maybe, wei blo solvem problem we hemi stap long lanwis blong hem” [when children face difficulties becoming literate in English and French, what do we do? We try to solve the problem inside of the two languages, English and French. There isn’t even one who thinks that maybe there is a way to solve this problem using her own language] (interview with Gambetta 2007). He goes on to say that students get confused at school because the language they must learn everything in is structured differently from the languages they speak at home. Moreover, there is no place in the village to use, or even practice using, French or English. Thus, as “Kati” claims, “Ol pikinini blo tadei, mbae yu talem ol klas wan, klas tu ia, klas tri ia, samtaem, oli no save rid yet. Oli no save rid mo toktok blo olgeta lo Inglis. Olsem oli no gud tumas [Today, the children, for example, classes one, two, and three, sometimes, they cannot read yet. They cannot read or speak in English. For example, they are not good at all] (“Kati”, group interview with the Tautu Women’s Group 2007). Gambetta provides this example, “Hao mani yias mi strive long skul blo lenem lanwis ia, be at the end of the day, mbae mi lusum? Mi ting se mi stap mekem had wok noting long laef blong mi!” [How many years have I strived at school to learn this language, but at the end of the day, I will lose it? I think that I am working hard in my life for nothing!] (interview with Gambetta 2007). Additionally, Chief Mal believes that students who are forced to learn English and French in school are also being influenced by a foreign culture, which is a somewhat destructive force against both “fasen blong olgeta” [their ways of living] and indigenous language. He elaborates, “...Sam fasen tadei, hemi nomo stret nao from mifala i tekem long fasin blong difren man. Mifala i kopi” [Some ways of living today, they aren’t right because we want to be
like someone else. We copy] (interview with Chief Mal 2007). Nevertheless, for now, many parents believe that learning English and French is the key to finding gainful employment. As Douglas Kibbee questions, “How can one ask parents to risk the economic future of their children if they feel that knowledge of an international language gives their children hope for a higher standard of living?” (Kibbee 2003, 56-57).

Why Vernacular Education?

Offering a somewhat opposing view regarding the threat of Bislama to indigenous languages, Lindstrom argues, for the Kwamera speakers living on the island of Tanna, Bislama has actually contributed positively to their language and has not been given a predominant status. He writes that although Kwamera may include some Bislama words, the basic structure of the language has not transformed (Lindstrom 2007). Certainly, I am not qualified to make a definite statement regarding the status of the indigenous languages of Tautu and Ronevie. However, from the perspective of the community members, a significant number of young children are beginning to speak entirely in Bislama, and parents are choosing to speak Bislama at home, even when they are both natives of the village. Therefore, can it be concluded that Bislama is in fact taking over lanwis in Tautu and Ronevie Villages? Lindstrom writes, to the Kwamera people, “Bislama both belongs and does not belong” (2007). Similarly, members of both Tautu and Ronevie Villages view Bislama as an outside force, yet they admit it is not only a part of communication within their societies but also more related to their local identities than either English or French. Despite this fact, many community members believe Bislama has become “too close for comfort” and is taking over lanwis. Indeed, one could view the attitudes of these community members as influenced by notions of language
purity (i.e., their responses regarding the names of wood, plants, and posts). However, does this indicate children are unable to speak the language entirely? Do they refer to Bislama only when particular words in lanwis are unknown? For example, the women of Ronevie disclosed that they are concerned about their inability to count past ten in lanwis, although a large portion of their conversations are seemingly in lanwis instead of Bislama. They claim these conversations are interspersed with Bislama because they are not as fluent in the language as was their ancestors. I did discuss this issue with parents in both villages and received similar responses—although many of the children, who speak mainly Bislama at home, can understand lanwis, they cannot provide a response in lanwis. Professor William Miles, Northeastern University, suggests intermarriage will result in the creation of “a new kind of ni-Vanuatu [sic] Melanesian” where Bislama will become the first language, and according to his bleak estimation, indigenous languages will die out (Miles 1998, 133). Certainly, intermarriage is a factor. However, it is not the sole purpose which compels parents to use Bislama at home, as many community members believe it is easier to speak and teach the children Bislama (interview with community members for Ronevie and Tautu and Lindstrom 2007). As Professor David K. Harrison, Swarthmore College, suggests, “Many factors can interrupt successful language transmission, but it is rarely the result of free will. The decision tends to be made by the very youngest speakers, 6- and 7-year olds, under duress or social pressure, and these children then influence the speech behavior of adults in the community” (Harrison 2007, 8). Yet referring to Vanuatu’s language situation, Crowley contends that “…in no case is any indigenous language in any obvious immediate danger of being replaced by Bislama or either of the metropolitan languages. Wherever language shift is
underway, it is always some other local language that is the replacing language, and not one of the national lingua francas” (Crowley 2000a, 125, quoted in Lindstrom 2007).

Indeed the case can be made that many of Vanuatu’s languages are not in the state of being what Stephen Wurm refers to as seriously endangered. In spite of this, I would argue that the language of Ronevie is either in the state of being potentially endangered or endangered because at least 20 percent of the children use Bislama heavily at home, proving that the community is “beginning to lose child speakers” (joint research with Sophie Dalley 2007 and Wurm 1998). Furthermore, it could be argued for both villages that there are influences from globalization which, because of economic reasons, encourages parents to teach their children Bislama in hopes that it will make an easier transition to English or French, therefore offering them more economic opportunities. Propelling their negative attitudes regarding lanwis onto students through their banning its use at school, educators are, in some cases, contributing to the decline of lanwis use at home (see also Otsuka’s (2007) description of the Hawaiian language and school policy in the late 1800s). Nevertheless, admitting that a number of their children speak only Bislama was not easy for these community members, especially in Ronevie where both kastom and lanwis are highly valued. In actuality, I was surprised to discover from the people of Ronevie that Bislama has become prevalent in the younger generation because the village is relatively isolated from urban influences, community members are self-sufficient agriculturalists, and traditional ceremonies continue to be practiced. Assuming the language of Ronevie is Nisvai, there are only approximately one hundred speakers left. This fact combined with concerns of the community members, places the language in a potentially endangered state (Otsuka 2007, 446 and Lynch and Crowley 2001, 77).
Indeed, the situation in Tautu appears to be more dire, as, according to Elder Malsetts and others, kindergarten students have little or no knowledge of lanwis. While one of the languages of Tautu, Tape, has been classified by Crowley as Moribund (having only a few speakers), Northeast-Malekula, the language of the remaining speakers, is seemingly in a healthy position, with over 9,000 speakers (88 and 68). Nevertheless, community members in Tautu are possibly more concerned with the status of the language within their specific community. Fortunately, language death is usually a "gradual" process, and time remains for potentially endangered or endangered languages to be maintained. Otsuka argues that in order for this to happen, however, individual communities must direct the process, and there must be "motivation" for using the language (Otsuka 2007, 463). As Reganvanu insists, formal schooling is possibly one venue where indigenous language and kastom can be maintained because it would encourage parents to use the language at home. Through education, literature (at least at the primary level) would most definitely be produced, providing community members with relevant reading materials.

If the maintenance of indigenous languages is the primary motive for vernacular education, then the quality of the formal school program should be considered as a secondary motive. Several Ni-Vanuatu educators consider Vanuatu to be in an educational crisis, and it can be argued the most significant aspect of the crisis involves literacy, meaning the ability to read and write. According to the VANSTA, Vanuatu Standardized Test of Achievement, 60 percent of class four students are considered to be
“illiterate”\textsuperscript{53}, functioning on the lowest levels of reading and writing (Vanuatu National Reading Symposium 2005). Even at the tertiary level, students are unable to critically analyze their class readings and contribute to in-class discussions (Tamtam 2005, 2 and Crowley 1989a). According to Pierre Gambetta, VMOE Director of Primary, student reading levels are at a record low, creating a “high risk” situation. He states, “Most students in Vanuatu are behind from the beginning because they don’t understand the language in which reading and other subjects are being taught” (Pierre Gambetta, Vanuatu National Reading Symposium 2005). It is apparent students are performing poorly on the VAPSHOT because they are not being taught to read and write in a language familiar to them before transitioning to English or French. Dr. Early suggests students perform unsuccessfully on the exam, not because they are incapable of reading, but because they do not understand the medium in which the exam is written. He proposes that acquiring the skill of reading is a one-time process. Students who learn to read and write in their first languages are able to “transfer” their knowledge when learning a second language such as English or French (Professor Robert Early, Vanuatu National Reading Symposium 2005).

Additionally, in most cases, the teachers themselves do not have a good command of either English or French, and this affects their teaching practices. To illustrate this, a class two teacher came to my office one morning disheartened and frustrated because, after several decades of teaching, she could not get her students to understand letter

\textsuperscript{53} This is the term given by the VAPSHOT team. However, I am not attempting to label Ni-Vanuatu students negatively, nor am I suggesting literacy is a solution to Vanuatu’s social issues. I do, however, wish to make the case that Ni-Vanuatu students are not receiving a quality western-style education, which is based on acquiring literacy skills. Further arguments regarding literacy issues in Pacific Islands Countries can be found in Crowley 2000, “The Consequences of Vernacular (I)literacy in the Pacific”.

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recognition and letter-sound relationships and recognize individual site words. However, when I observed her class, the students were able to choral read every word in the group story perfectly. This phenomenon is something that I found regularly when I observed classes throughout Malekula. Students could read the words of the stories because they were taught to memorize them, yet when individual words were taken out of context, the students were unable to read them. As a result, they had gained little or no reading comprehension skills, and they were, in all probability, not going to receive this training in their following years of school (see also Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992, 18). Additionally, a student’s ability to maintain focus when learning in a foreign language she does not understand is extremely difficult, and as a result, valuable learning is lost. For example, during my time on Malekula this past summer, I had the opportunity to accompany the kindergarten director, Linda George, on a visit to three kindergartens, located in the provincial area, one operating solely through the medium of French and the other two through a mixture of Bislama and English. What I found when I entered the classroom of the Francophone Kindergarten was sheer chaos. During story time, the students were running around the classroom, climbing on the tables, hitting other students with their backpacks, and pulling other students’ hair, while the teacher desperately shouted commands in French—so strong was her conviction to use French, she refused to resort to Bislama. The children understood not a word of what she was saying. Certainly, her teaching style was in large part to blame, however, language was definitely a factor. On the other hand, the students attending the Bislama-based kindergartens were attentive and responsive to the teacher because they understood the language which was being spoken (visit to kindergartens in Malampa Province 2007).
The above photo was taken during Vanuatu’s National Literacy Day where Ni-Vanuatu educators, parents, foreign volunteers, members of aid donor organizations, and government officials attended to rally the nation to support the improvement of literacy in the primary level. This particular sign was written in Bislama, and the participants were chanting Bislama phrases such as, “Olgeta pikinini, oli mas save hao blong rid mo raet!” [All the children must learn how to read and write!] Vernacular education was even promoted in some of the literacy information booths designed by educational specialists at the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Nevertheless, English and French remain the sole mediums of instruction in approximately 98.5 percent of Vanuatu’s primary schools (interview with Gambetta 2007 and VMOE 2004). Thus, the chances of students gaining high or even functioning levels of literacy through a language that has little or no relation to their daily lives are slim.
Chapter Four
Considering Vernacular Education from a Community Perspective

June 28, 2007 [Ronevie Village]

Today, Momma, Sophie, and I went to the bush behind the house to look for mud crabs. I don’t know how they saw them. They found twenty-one. I found zero. But they knew exactly where to look— they could see a crab in a hole or in a tree, where I couldn’t actually see anything. Sophie would dig them out with her bush knife. They knew exactly what to do, and I realized that there is a way for everything here— a special way to fold a bundle of laplap leaves, roast yams on the fire, and make laplap in the ground oven. It seems as though there is a particular method taught from generation to generation (journal entry 6-28-07).

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Because of Vanuatu’s complex language situation, more than a few educators suggest Bislama should become the language medium of vernacular education. Chief Sumbleas Mal’s words, highlighting the vagueness of Bislama compared to lanwis (especially in regards to house-building, food production, traditional stories, and kastom) however, offer an opposing view. Although Bislama is structurally Austronesian and essentially Melanesian, 90 percent of its lexicon is based on English (Crowley 1990, 110). In naming such things as months of the year, numbers, posts of houses, plants, trees, and animals, Bislama does not offer as much information in relation to the lives of the people of Ronevie and Tautu as does lanwis. Take Chief Mal’s comments referencing the posts of a house, for example. Each post of a house has a specific name in lanwis which tells one how it should be placed and its function within the house.
Because the names for each post in Bislama is “pos” (based on the English word, post), the traditional knowledge for house-building is lost. Harrison argues that language is created in relation to a society’s surrounding environment, and he confirms, “Languages package and structure knowledge in particular ways. You cannot merely substitute labels or names from another language and hold onto all of the implicit, hidden knowledge that resides in a taxonomy or naming system” (Harrison 2007, 53, 131 and 222). Likewise, it would be close to impossible for the formal education system to provide Ni-Vanuatu students with a locally relevant education, inclusive of traditional knowledge and indigenous epistemologies, through the medium of either English or French, and in some cases, Bislama. On the same note, vernacular education programs based on western concepts and approaches and aim to yield results contingent upon the acquisition of fluency in either English or French do not address the needs of local community members. Crowley argues that effective vernacular literacy projects “are relevant to the life-concerns” of the language owners (Crowley 2000b, 379). This chapter, “Considering Education from a Community Perspective”, aims to provide insight into the purpose, content, and implementation of a vernacular education program from a community perspective.

“There is now a realization that western education and traditional values must go hand in hand. And there is no better place for this to take place, except the schools. Communities must have a greater interest in questioning what goes on in the classroom” (interview with Laan 2007).

Tingting blong Komuniti: Ronevie[Perspective of the Community: Ronevie]

Although many community members were reluctant to critically question the
purpose and quality of Vanuatu’s current education system, they did maintain for them, education has less to do with mathematics, science, history, and language arts. At least in Ronevie, valuable education has more to do with kastom and traditional values, centered on respect (for family, leaders, community, church, and the surrounding environment), service, communal living, relationship building and maintenance, and self-sustainability. Many community members in Ronevie overwhelmingly, and with strong emotion, reported language cannot be taught in school divorced from kastom and traditional knowledge and values (see also Regenvanu 2004). As much as these community members are increasingly concerned with the loss of their heritage language, they are equally concerned with the loss of their kastom and traditional ways of living. And this valuable knowledge is “packaged” inside of lanwis (Gegeo and Watson Gegeo 1992 and Harrison 2007, 52). A vernacular education program which merely translates western educational concepts into vernacular language is, perhaps, not the type of program that would reflect the needs and concerns of Ronevie Village members. Furthermore, as Crowley writes, when English or French literature or curriculum is translated into lanwis, “there is a danger that the seed will be planted in the minds of speakers of Melanesian languages that grows into a connection that there is no such thing as a worthy Melanesian literature.” Thus, this inhibits the creation of literature which mirrors local knowledge and devalues indigenous epistemology (Crowley and Lynch 1985, 57).

Balance is the word most used to describe what community members perceive as essential for the success of their children in school and in the community and the maintenance of their languages and cultures. Chief Mal agrees, “Tadei, i gud nomo bambae ol man mbae i tij long saet long edukesen, long ol kastom mo ol forena” [Today,
it’s good to teach, in education, both our custom and the ways of the foreigner] (interview with Chief Mal 2007). For example, nakamals [traditionally, men’s houses where kastom objects were made and stored, meetings took place, and other kastom practices were learned; also referred to today as kava bars] were, primarily before missionary education arrived, an institution of formal education— a school where mainly boys were taught kastom, social structures, respect, genealogy, and language. Chief Mal, describes a boy’s experience in the nakamal in this way:

Hemi kam stap bigwan, ilego mama witem papa blo hem. Olsem hemi lenem finis samting respek we i stap. Taem hemi go long nakamal, olraet, bambae ol kastom man we oli stap long nakamal, ol big, big man, olgeta nao oli lenem long saet blong kastom... Samtaem, mbae i wan monis, tu manis olsem, mbae i stap long nakamal blo oli trenem hem long singsing, o blong mekem kastom. Hemi gat bigfala respek long plesia.

[When he becomes a young man, he leaves his mama and papa. For example, he’s already learned the required respect. When he goes into the nakamal, the custom men who are living in the nakamal, all the big men, are ready to teach him about custom...Sometimes it will be a month or two months that he will stay in the nakamal to train and learn how to sing or how to make custom. This place has a lot of respect] (interview with Chief Mal 2007).

Figure 23: Chief Sumble Mal, traditional nakamal, Ronevie Village. November 2003. Photo by Chief Philip Dalley.

54 Out of his thirteen children, Chief Mal chose for some of them to stay in the village and learn kastom as opposed to going to school. Those who went to school in order to learn to communicate with foreigners and find gainful employment— as an investment of sorts (see also Akin in Lindstrom and White 1994, 164).
According to Chief Mal, the people of Ronevie Village also have traditional ways of teaching young children about their language and heritage. He suggests the people of Vanuatu are inherently gifted in learning languages and have traditionally developed strategies such as numbwel [stories (spelling by author)], songs, and tongue twisters to teach their children lanwis, kastom, and traditional knowledge regarding family, the surrounding environment, food production, seasons, and life events (see also Harrison 2007, 59). In an interview he elaborates:

1. C.M.: Stori, taem we pikinini, oli no tok gud yet, oli mas lenem hemia fastaem. Hemi gat ol singsing mo stori blong ol pikinini no mo...

2. T: Ol stori oli baot wanem?


1. [C.M.: When children can’t speak well yet, they must learn stories first. There are all kinds of songs and stories that are only for children...

2. T: What are the stories about?

3. C.M.: All the stories are about the knowledge that people have about this place. We tell stories about family— who to marry and who not to marry because of family connections. This they must learn at home before going out into the community] (interview with Chief Mal 2007).

It has been said by members of Ronevie Village that because of his knowledge of lanwis, Chief Mal is the only community member who can relate these stories completely in lanwis. For some time, he shared them with the children of the village on Sunday afternoons. During my time visiting Ronevie, I had the opportunity to eat dinner with Chief Mal’s family. As we sat on woven mats under the stars, eating chicken and rice (as it was a special occasion), his children surrounded me and sang kastom songs. It was
amazingly beautiful to hear their voices and the language. Their eagerness to share this with me symbolizes a deep appreciation of and conviction for their heritage language and culture.

As for curriculum, when I asked community members the kind of education they want their children to receive, many from Ronevie replied, in addition to learning how to succeed in an ever-changing and “modernizing” country, they want their children to learn local traditional knowledge and village life skills (combined interviews with community members 2007). For example, Chief Mal offers, “Long bifo, oli lenem hao blong mekem kakaе, laplap, o lenem garen blo wok, o blo sutem pijin lo bonaro, o sutem fis. Oli mas lenem olgeta long ol samtia. Hao blong toktok witem man— oli mas lenem hemia. Oli luk save hemia we i no gud— yu nomo usem hemia, hemia i denja, yu no mo usem. Olsem edukesen i stat long plesia naо” [Before, they learned how to make food, laplap (traditional pudding); they learned how to garden, to work, or to shoot a pigeon with a bow and arrow, or to shoot fish. They must teach them all of this. How to talk with others— they have to learn this. They can see what is safe and what is not safe. Education begins here] (interview with Chief Mal 2007). In fact, children of Ronevie are taught how to survive in the village even before entering school. Making miniature laplaps, tending small gardens, playing with bush knives, fishing on the reef and in the river, hunting for mud crabs, and making small mats are activities in which, by the age of six, children are proficient (see also Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992). Thus, it could be said the people of Ronevie “live in intimate connection to their land” (Harrison 2007, 124). During my time there, I noticed community members have an uncanny knowledge of their surroundings (a few of which are their abilities to hear a ship
that has not yet appeared on the horizon, recognize another’s footprints on the beach, provide for their families with food from the ground and bush, and navigate their way through the bush in the pitch dark). However, Chief Mal claims today, this knowledge and way of life are being lost as a result of formal schooling (interview with Chief Mal 2007). Likewise, the people of Ronevie Village worry their children are losing interest in kastom, and they are fearful that if either language or culture is lost, “mbae i mekem se komuniti i no save wok gud. Mo oli no save joen togeta lo saet blo wok” [it will make it so that the community will not be able to work like it should. And they can not join together when it comes time to work]; in other words, community members will no longer be able to sustain the communalism and necessary skills their village needs to survive (group interview with Ronevie women 2007).

Conversely, when I asked community members from Ronevie to discuss their ideas regarding vernacular education, I detected some hesitation from a number of them, to overstep boundaries and become involved with what they perceive to be the role of the VMOE. The women of Ronevie Village illustrate this point:

Edukesen nao, spos we hemi talem se naonia mbae yumi bringem lanwis kam bak lo skul. Be mifala i no save talem. I stap lo yufala olsem ol man blong eduksen spos we yufala wantem se kastom i go insaed long skul, hemi streit. Mifala i save go insaed. Ol olfala i save go insaed blo tijim ol pikinini hao nao blo spik out long lanwis…Be i stap long yufalal ol Ministri Blo Edukesen.

[It’s up to education now to tell us to bring language back inside the school. But we can not say. We can help. All the elders can help teach the children how to speak language…But it’s up to you at the Ministry of Education] (interview with Ronevie women’s group 2007).

Furthermore, many of our discussions were not focused on detailed strategies for implementing a vernacular education program and creating materials. However,
community members were seemingly excited about and grateful for the opportunity to voice their concerns and frustrations over the endangerment of their languages and cultures. Members of Ronevie Village admit they are not necessarily relying on the government to assist with the implementation of a vernacular program. However, they agree assistance with language documentation, vernacular materials development, and instructional training is needed. Women of Ronevie Village suggest, “Mifala wantem wan tija bakegen, olsem mbae hemi go tren bakegen blong trenem ol pikinini long saet blong lanwis. I gud blo mifala go long wan woksop bakegen blo tren long saet blong lanwis” [We want a teacher to go again for trainings on how to teach vernacular education. It would be good for us to go to a workshop again to train in the language] (interview with Ronevie women’s group 2007). These women are confident that within the village there are the necessary resources to assist with creating curriculum materials based on local epistemologies and centered on life in the village. Moreover, they say there are young people who are both fluent in the language and willing to be trained as teachers (interview with Chief Dally 2007). However the men from Ronevie are concerned about choosing an indigenous language for vernacular education, as Kamai students are speakers from four different language groups.

**Tingting blong Komuniti: Tautu [Perspective of the Community: Tautu]**

Although community members in Tautu agreed language should have a place in the formal school program and that it is important for students to be taught how to live respectfully and sustainably in the village, they were not as forthcoming concerning their willingness to assist in implementing a vernacular education program. Firstly, the population of Tautu is significantly larger than that of Ronevie; therefore, it would take
more effort for a community consensus. Additionally, the village is, at this time, slightly
divided due to land disputes and the attempt by a few members to commodify local
culture\textsuperscript{55}. Secondly, when I discussed the possibility of introducing kastom or traditional
knowledge into the school curriculum, more than a few members remarked that kastom
songs and dances represent a time of tudak [darkness; meaning before Christianity (see
Hereniko 1999)], and because village life is centered on the church, implementing aspects
of kastom would not reflect their strong Christian beliefs. In discussing the possibility of
incorporating traditional knowledge and kastom into the formal school curriculum, Elder
Malsetts responds:

\begin{flushright}
Plenti westen laef i kam insaed long komuniti. Hemi gud. Yumi go bak long kastom, mi no laekem tumas. Mifala lo plesia, mifala i no save go bak long kastom. Samtingia, hemi fasin blong ol bubu blo yumi bifo. Taem we i kam long parens blong mifala, parens blong mifala, tu, oli no lev long kaen laef ia. Hao nao, mbae mifala mekem samting we mifala i no save, mo we mifala i no lev long hem. Mbae i had.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushleft}
\textbf{Figure 24:} Elder Nathan Malsetts. June 2007. Photo by author.
\end{flushleft}

\[55\] I was told that a man from Israel, no connection to the village, recently purchased a step in Namangki
(meaning he used pigs to buy a rank in the traditional ranking or grade-taking system which technically
gives him access to traditional knowledge, power, and spirituality). A sacred stone was constructed in his
honor because he had promised to build a running water system in the village (which, to date, has not
happened). Others were outraged by what they considered to be a devaluing of the Namangki system and
destroyed the stone (Interview with an anonymous community member 2007).
On the other hand, women from the Tautu Women’s Group agreed it would be beneficial for kastom (and culture) to be included in the formal school program. When asked about incorporating kastom stories into the school curriculum, “Kati” concurs, “Si, mi ting se mbae i gud from we ol pikinini oli save intres lo hem. Mbae oli finem hemi interesting mo from plenti pikinini oli no save ol kastom stori. Be oli wantem save” [Yes, I think that it will be good because it will interest the children. They will find it more interesting because many of them don’t know the custom stories. But they want to know] (“Kati”, group interview with Tautu Women’s Group 2007). In an interview which took place at his kitchen table, Chief Gordan rather gravely mentions “kastom i go lus” [custom is being lost], and he predicts that the result will be tragic for the village. For example, he states “Spos yu no save lanwis, mbae yu lusum graon blo yu. Lanwis i go witem kastom, i semok nomo. Naoia i gat fulup janis, kastom i lus” [If you don’t know your language, you’ll lose your land. Language is connected to custom— the two are just the same. Now there are many changes and custom is lost] (interview with Chief Gordan 2007). In the interview below, “Kati” and “Ales” reiterate the fact that kastom and lanwis are married.

1. T: Yu luk se Bislama hemi stap go antop lo lanwis. Yu luk se hemi wan gud samting?

2. K: Mbae i no gud, from i stap from mbae yumi lusum identiti blo yumi, tu. Taem we yu toktok lanwis, mbae wan nara man mbae hemi save se, ah, be mania, hemi kam lo plesia. Be taem yu toktok Bislama, mbae oli save se, be yu blo we? Mbae yu se, mi blo Vanuatu nomo, be mi no save se which aelan nomo mi kam lo hem.

3. A: Spos lanwis hemi lus, be yu save lusum kastom blo yu, graon blo yu. Mbae oli no trastem se yu blo plesia.
1. [T: You see that Bislama is taking over language. Do you think this is a good thing?

2. K: It will be no good because we will also lose our identity, too. When you speak in language, another man will think, ah, but this man, he is from this place. But when you speak in Bislama, they will think, but where are you from? You will say, but I'm just from Vanuatu, they will not know which island you come from.

3. A: Language might be lost, but you can also lose your custom and your ground. They will not trust that you belong to this place] ("Kati" and "Ales", group interview with Tautu Women's Group 2007).

"Deved", a member of Tautu Village and one of the last remaining Tape speakers, discusses the importance of lanwis becoming part of the school program.

1. T: Yu ting se lanwis i save kam insaed long sknl? Olsem oli lenem evri samting lo lanwis, o hemi jas olsem wan saed klas we oli lenem lanwis?

2. D: Ating mbae mi talem, lo wan saed nomo fastaem (blo entrodusem). Yu luk, tadei, oli talem olsem, se yu luk plenti pikinini ia tadei, spos we yumi stap tokbaot lo lanwis blo yumi, blo save blo mekem ol samting. Yu luk, ol pikinini blo mi, wan i go i stap sam ples lo we lo Litz Litz naoia. Spos yutufala i go lo garen, yu talem se, yu plenem yam, hemi no save hao blo planem. (Lo plesia, “Deved”, hemi stap tokbaot wan buk we Crowley i mekem we hemi bin raetem kastom stori (lo lanwis) long saet blong plenem yam.) Spos yu talem, yu kam, yumitu go soemap haos, putem taj i go antop, hemi no save hao blo mekem. Yu luk, i no gud...Ating from yumi no tijim gud lo lanwis blo hemi save olsem wanem.

1. [T: Do you think that language can be a part of school? For example, they would learn everything in language or just as a side class where they learn the language?

2. D: I'll tell you, only as a side class at first (to introduce it). You see, today, this is what they are saying, you see, plenty children here today, if we are talking about our language in order to make something, you see, my children, one lives somewhere down at Litz Litz now, if you two go to the garden, you say, you plant the yam, he will not know how to plant it. (At this point, “David” refers to the custom stories (in lanwis) that were documented by Crowley which explain the traditional way of planting yams.) If you say, come here, let’s go make a house, put the thatch on top, he doesn’t know how to make it. You see, it is no good...I think the reason is that we haven’t taught them very well in language] (interview with “Deved” 2007).
Responses given by community members regarding community involvement in a vernacular education program were mixed. Some suggest, because the loss of lanwis and culture is so dire, the community has a strong interest in establishing a program, while others worry disputes and apathy will stifle any involvement. Yet a few provide suggestions as to how a vernacular education program might work in Tautu Village. For instance, the Tautu Women’s Group recommend lanwis be incorporated as a class subject. In addition, in the following interview, “Deved” offers further recommendations regarding the implementation of vernacular education at Tautu School.

1. T: Be yu ting se blo kasem lanwis i kam bakegen, yu ting se i posebol blong yusum skul?

2. D: Yes, yes.

3. T: Be yu ting se hao?

4. D: Spos i olsem lo skul. Olsem lo Uripiv. Lo Uripiv, oli tijim lo kindi, lo kindergarten, oli usem lanwis nomo, klas wan, lanwis nomo, klas tu....Olsem nao, mbae yumi luk se olsem mbae i gud. Be yu luk, yumi lo plesia, yumi no gat ia.

5. T: Yu ting se spos oli emplementem, yu gat tingting blo hao blo emplementem lo plesia?


1. [T: But do you think that for language to have a come back, it is possible to use it at school?]

2. D: Yes, yes.

3. T: But how, do you think?

4. D: If, for example, at school. Like at Uripiv. At Uripiv, they teach it in the kindergarten, in the kindergarten, they use only language, class one, only
language, class two... Just like this, we will see that it will be good. But, you see, we don’t have this.

5. T: Do you think that if it is implemented, do you have any suggestions as to how it could be implemented here?

6. D: If it is like this, only the community will decide. For example, if it is just one of our teachers. Someone who is just from here. If it is one of ours who knows the language well, there you go, and she’ll start in the kindergarten] (interview with “Deved” 2007).

Moreover, “Deved” suggests the language used for a vernacular education program should be Northeast-Malekula rather than Tape because there are only a few speakers of Tape. He is optimistic that if lanwis were introduced as a vernacular education program in kindergarten and as a class subject in the primary school, a full vernacular education program could be implemented in the future.

Because Tautu is situated fairly close to Lakatoro, people in the village are participating in the cash economy much more than the people of Ronevie. Therefore, there is more emphasis on “western-style” education through the medium of English.

Tautu Village has changed tremendously during a span of approximately three years, and the pace at which community members are heading towards, what some might call, modernity is rapid indeed. This and an increase of youth who “stap nomo” [just hang out] in the village has caused some alarm, and may encourage community members to re-consider the purpose of education. “Deved” believes it is not too late to maintain lanwis and culture, “Hemi no let yet...Lo Edukesen, oli mas luku big wan insaed ia... Spos yu traem best blo putum i go long Ministri Blo Edukesen, se mi stori witem plenti man olsem, olsem [It’s not too late...the education department must really investigate this...
If you could try your best to take this to the Ministry of Education, and say, I've discussed with many people, and this is what they say (interview with "Deved" 2007).

Ol Samting blong Lukluk: Questions and Concerns

“What goes on in the classroom does not match with the values in the community, and there is no time in the community to teach traditional values. Community members are sitting on the sidelines and not seriously taking part in questioning what is happening in the schools. Education for what? We are losing our languages... the children are reading books about the outside” (interview with Laan 2007).

From the valuable information provided by members of Ronevie and Tautu, several questions can be raised which will hopefully, spark further investigation. For example, how will community members create materials when there is a possibility some are not literate in lanwis? It could be argued that a vernacular education program can only be successful if an adult vernacular literacy program is also implemented. In this way, students and parents can learn to read and write their language collaboratively. Furthermore, in order for community members to be involved in the process, they must have the proper tools, such as training, but they must also direct what the content of the materials will be. Moreover, who will teach the students? As Gambetta mentions, there are few teachers who are fluent in their own languages and have been trained in teaching vernacular education (there is, at this time, no program at the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education). Likewise, even if there were sufficient qualified teachers, not enough of them have a desire to teach vernacular education because they believe it is probable they will be “stuck” in a particular position for the duration of their teaching careers (interview with Gambetta 2007). Community members in Tautu and Ronevie make the point “blong mifala long we, i gat sam yangfala, ol boe mo ol gel we oli save tij long lanwis” [in our community, there are some youth, boys and girls, who can teach in
have been to class ten or eleven and are fluent in the indigenous language, those who stap
nomo, would be ideal candidates, as they would be able to stay in the community and
assist with rural “development” (group interview with Ronevie women 2007).

A crucial issue raised by the men of Ronevie Village is a most obvious
hindrance— their language has not been “written”\textsuperscript{56}. During a discussion regarding
language status, the importance of language and culture, and the possibility of
implementing a vernacular education program, one young man, “Rejad” remarks:

Yu stap tokbaot lanwis mo edukesen. Mifala stap lusum lanwis blong mifala, mo
mifala i wantem se mifala putum lanwis i go insaerd long skul. Be hao nao mbae
mifala save mekem spos we mifala i no bin raetem lanwis finis? Yu save tame
mifala hao mifala i save finem wan wei blong raetem lanwis blong mifala?

[You talk about language and education. We are losing our language, and we
want it to be used at school. But how will we be able to do this when we haven’t
already written our language? Can you tell us how we can find a way to write our
language?] (“Rejad” group interview with Ronevie men 2007).

Unlike schools located in other provinces (which, according to Gambetta, are nearly
ready to implement vernacular education programs because there are primers completed
for these languages), schools in Malampa Province are certainly going to face numerous
challenges if vernacular education is mandated by the VMOE because, out of the thirty-
two or so languages in the province, only five have been adequately, or at least semi-
adequately, documented (with at least a writing system based on “modern principles of
orthography design”) (Crowley 2000a, 69,70 and 71). Gambetta suggests, at some point,
a decision needs to be made about the number of languages the VMOE is going to utilize

\textsuperscript{56} This is not the case with Tautu because the language is very similar to Uripiv, which is adequately
documented— at least for a vernacular education program.  

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for vernacular education. He even makes the radical suggestion that only particular languages should be used for formal education. However, he admits reaching a consensus on this would be close to impossible, as Vanuatu does not have a language with enough of a population to become a "predominate" language (interview with Gambetta 2007 and Crowley 1989a, 118).

Another issue which must be considered, in developing a national or even local vernacular education program, is the use of custom as part of the school curriculum. Lindstrom writes, traditionally, knowledge was acquired by a price, usually with pigs, and was at times, given freely to particular family members. In the context of cultural education, educators must be aware of the fact that some information may be tambu [restricted] for school curriculum. Incorporating aspects of culture, tradition, and custom into the curriculum does not necessarily provide students and educators with permission to enact particular aspects of this knowledge in the public arena. Furthermore, elders or people with a solid knowledge of tradition may expect to be compensated for teaching traditional stories and customs at school (Lindstrom in Lindstrom and White 1994, 73 and 75). Nevertheless, community members agree that local, as opposed to national, notions of custom, or kastom, would be more relevant for the students. Interestingly, the Vanuatu Kaljural Senta [Vanuatu Cultural Centre] is currently designing a science curriculum based on indigenous knowledge. The project aims to both include local community input and encourage teachers to incorporate local indigenous knowledge into their lessons (personal communication with Regenvanu 24 March 2008).

While the idea of implementing vernacular education is, perhaps, an ideal solution to maintaining language and culture, there are several other questions which must be
addressed. Firstly, what is the purpose for implementing vernacular education? Is it for the improvement of literacy in English or French, language maintenance, or both?

Secondly, how will indigenous languages be incorporated into higher education? What language will be used? Would it be more beneficial for students in community schools to learn a common indigenous language which would also be used in higher education?

Lastly, does the Vanuatu Institute for Teacher Training have the resources or desire to create a vernacular education teacher training program focused on incorporating local culture into the curriculum? (Regenvanu discusses these issues in his 2004 article, “A New Vision of Education.”)

Nevertheless, in Malampa Province, the benefits of implementing a vernacular education program based on cultural knowledge would undoubtedly exceed these difficult challenges because the best place for maintaining indigenous languages and cultures may be within the formal school program. For example, many parents will continue to place value on formal education, yet children are missing out on learning lanwis and valuable local knowledge in the village due to the number of hours they spend at school (interview with Gambetta and Chief Dalley 2007). And as community members of Ronevie and Tautu state and Crowley writes, it is essential for Ni-Vanuatu to

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57 Although this is a very rough statistic, which needs further investigation, I found, of the twenty-five children living in Ronevie Village, eleven attend school and fifteen (according to parents) do not have a good command of the language. In the Levetbau Village (same language as Ronevie) no children attend school, and all are fluent in lanwis. Perhaps, there is a correlation with language loss and “western-style” schooling. On another note, I was able to obtain the class six exam results for Malampa Province. Looking at four schools, Tautu (Anglophone school), Kamai (Francophone school), Sangalai (vernacular/Anglophone school; however, the vernacular program is only in class one, and it is completely oral—students move from class one to class two and begin early in the year to learn to read and write solely in English), and Uripiv (vernacular/Anglophone school; which at the time of the exam, there was a vernacular program running which used vernacular education up until class six, but incorporated English in larger amounts each year), the results are interesting: percentage passing is as follows: Tautu, 53 percent, Kamai, 60 percent, Sangalai, 9 percent, and Uripiv, 69 percent (visit to Malampa Provincial Education Office, 4 July 2007).
both maintain their local identities in connection with lanwis and learn English and French, thereby creating a balance (Crowley 1989a, 138). Similar to Vanuatu, Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo suggest, in the Solomon Islands, parents are unable to assist their children in preparing for and succeeding in formal education because it is not relevant to their daily lives. As a result they are beginning to increasingly withdraw from teaching their children in the traditional way, and, compared with knowledge gained from formal schooling, traditional knowledge is losing status (Watson-Gegeo and Welchman-Gegeo 1992, 21). In regards to Ronevie, “Eslen” proposes, “Naoia taem we yumi kam lo edukesen, ol pikinini oli nomo save kastom we yu stap talem. Oli no save singsing lo kastom. Oli no respekt tem kastom we ol olfala oli talem lo olgeta [At this time, when we have education, the children no longer know the kastom that you’ve talked about. They can’t sing in kastom. They don’t respect the kastom that the elders talk to them about] (“Eslen”, group interview with Ronevie women 2007). Although her predictions are possibly in reference to the nearby Burbar Village where she resides, “Rebeka”, in response to a question regarding the revival of kastom, gravely remarks, “No save karem bak. From oli no lenem. Mifala no gat entres lo kastom blo mifala, mifala i gat entres nomo lo ol forena we i stap kam. Taem we mifala wantemmekem wan kastom; mifala luk se ol pikinini oli no intres noting blo luk ol kastom blo mifala. Mifala luk se ol pikinini blo fuja we mbae i kam, blo mifala mbae oli no save holem taet ol kastom [It can’t be brought back. Because they didn’t learn it. We don’t have an interest in our custom; we only have an interest in the foreigners who are coming here. When we want to make a custom, we see that the children have no interest in seeing our customs. We
see that, in the future, our children will not be able to hold on to our customs (interview with the women of Ronevie 2007).
Figure 25: Custom ceremony, Ronevie, Malekula. 2003.
Photo by Michael Lameier.
Conclusion
Edukesen blong Wanem? [Education for What?]

This project, highlighting the disjuncture of students and community members from the formal school program, is not the first of its kind. In 1972, the soon-to-be-independent-country, British Solomon Islands Protectorate, sent a committee of Solomon Islander educators, with their chair, Francis Bugotu, an indigenous educator who spoke and wrote against colonization, to interview and survey community members throughout the protectorate in order to seek a local perspective on educational issues and recommendations for improvement of the current formal education system. Due to their escalating discontentment\footnote{Prior to 1972, quality formal education and training was mainly for expatriate children and elites (British Solomon Islands Protectorate 1972, 1). This is indicated in the local resentment towards King George VI School, located in Honiara. The school serviced the children of local elites and, possibly, expatriates (39). Little was invested by the colonial government in formal education for the local population, as most, if not all, schools were maintained by churches (16).} with a school system which they viewed as “alien”, “imposed”, and “unsuited to the needs of the people of the islands”, Solomon Islander parents had refused to pay school fees. Alarmed, protectorate officials responded by providing community members with an opportunity to voice their concerns and perspectives regarding the purpose of education in the Solomon Islands. Their responses, discussed below, were compiled into a government report, Education For What?: A Report on the Findings of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Educational Policy Review Committee, one of the first of its kind in the region (Bugotu 1972, 2).

Because students spent much of their time at school, parents feared the disjuncture of the students from the village would eventually result in a loss of cultural knowledge and subsequently, decrease their ability to live self-sufficiently. Arguably, the most fundamental statement made by one of the community members is, “...four
years of primary education in the present system probably did more harm to the village child than no formal education at all, and because the content of the present primary course does little to prepare the child for life in the village, the pupil who leaves after completing the full primary course is of little value to the village” (31).

Although this statement is significant in that it expresses a deep discontentment with the current education system, community members communicated a desire for both school graduates and leavers to return to the village and assist with community development. Interestingly, the report also states that parents often utilized education as a means for improving their living situation and were keen to “invest” their resources as long as it provided gainful employment for their children. In fact, it was reported by the committee that parents essentially believed that compulsory education, until as far as the secondary or even tertiary level, would most certainly result in gainful employment (30).

Solomon Islands community members were especially concerned with the improvement of village schools, involvement of communities in rural development and education, enhancement of teacher training, and establishment of pre-schools, kindergartens and adult training centers. Furthermore, they desired for the current curriculum to be enriched with local customs, religion, agriculture and environmental education, as well as for the current English-medium instruction to be replaced by the local vernacular59 (50). Concluding, in response to the recommendations of community members, the committee wrote a statement answering their question,

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59 At the time of the *Education for What?* report, Solomon Islands had approximately forty languages and a population of around 161,000 people (10). In the case of schools in urban areas, it was recommended Solomon Islands pidgin be used as the medium of instruction (50). At that time, English was the only medium of instruction throughout the country (12).
‘Education for What?’: “It is concerned with far deeper issues, it is concerned with the development of the whole man, with his ability and efficiency most certainly, but also with his awareness of the needs of others, his values, his happiness and his fullness of life, in other words, education is concerned with living, rather than with the narrower concept of making a living” (30).

Although I have been unable to locate such a report for Vanuatu, much of the information provided by community members from Ronevie and Tautu mirrors that of the perspectives of Solomon Islanders in this 1972 report. Yet the important question is: have there been significant changes in the formal school program which meet the needs of local community members? Gaining independence shortly after Solomon Islands, Vanuatu was also faced with the challenge of creating a skilled labor force in the years leading up to 1980. Twenty-six years after independence, the formal education system, perhaps, driven by a national agenda influenced by global initiatives and outside funding, continues to focus on training students for jobs in the government and urban economy (Regenvanu 2004)60. Not unlike the Solomon Islands community members of the 1970s, community members of Ronevie and Tautu express their concerns for the loss of their indigenous languages and cultures, the disjuncture of students, the lack of community involvement, and the loss of their self-sustaining lifestyles. Furthermore, these Ni-Vanuatu parents, similar to the parents who participated in the Solomon Islands Report surveys, continue to work arduously to pay school fees for the education of their children, expecting, as a result, students will find gainful employment. While facing

60 The history of formal education in Vanuatu is long and complicated, and although I do not go into significant detail here, I have included a brief history of government education in Melanesia, particularly Vanuatu in Appendix A.
what they perceive as inevitable language and cultural loss, these community members realize that learning English and French is the ticket to access in the cash economy. With this said, why do the parents of Ronevie and Tautu Villages continue to send their children to school? Furthermore, what are the returns on their investments? In the following interviews, mothers of Tautu and Ronevie provide some insight into this question.

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Tautu Women’s Group, 7-10-2007—“Jaklen” and “Sara”

1. T: Taem we yu pem ol skulli blo ol pikenini blo yu blo go lo skull, yu wantem ol pikenini blo yu blo kasem wanem blo edukesen blo olgeta? Taem we oli go lo skull, yu wantem olgeta blo lenem wanem?

2. J: Mifala i wantem ol pikenini we oli gat edukesen we oli save mo. Mbae i kasap long ol wok blo olgeta.

3. S: Wan samting we yumi wantem ol pikenini go lo skull blo oli save lenem rid mo raet, mo tadei plenti developem i stap kam antop. Mbae oli nidim ol pikenini we oli gat save we oli save mekem wok blo developem ol kantri o land blo olgeta.

1. [T: When you pay the school fees for your children to go to school, what kind of education do you want them to receive? When they go to school, what do you want them to learn?

2. J: We want them to have an education where they learn more. They will catch up on their work.

3. S: One reason why we want them to go to school is so that they can learn to read and write, and today, there is much increase in development. They will need children who have knowledge where they can work to develop the country or their land] (“Jaklen” and “Sara”, group interview with Tautu Women’s Group 2007).

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Ronevie Village, 6-28-2007—“Lili”
1. T: When you send your children to school, what do you want them to learn and what do you want them to do with their lives?

2. L: When I send my children to school, I am very happy that they are in school. Sometime, when they grow up, their education will help me rest—I think I will be old... They can find work... I am not lazy when it comes to my children. Because of this, I don’t sleep well. When the roosters crow, before it reaches daylight, I’m already in the kitchen. I am really glad to see the children go to school. When they are at home and I tell them something, they can understand it... But when they go to school, for example, the teacher teaches them, when they return, we parents can also talk with them] (interview with Mama “Lili” 2007).

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Ronevie Women, 6-26-2007—“Nedi” and “Meri”

1. T: Yu putem pikinini blo yu blo go lo skul...taem we hemi finis, yu wantem hem blo mekem wanem?

2. N: Olsem we oli stat lo praemeri skul, afta oli go lo...mifala spendem moni blo mifala i go lo sekonderi, be mifala i wantem se oli mas stap lo wan gudfala job blo mekem se moni blo mifala i kam bak. From mifala i no wantem se mifala i spendem moni, afta hemi go stap spendem taem nomo lo, olsem lo praemeri skul o lo sekonderi skul, oslemia, mifala no wantem, from mifala wantem se mifala spendem moni, mifala wantem se pikinini blo mifala hemi save gud, hemi kasap gud from hemi kam blo giv han lo mifala, mo i helpem mifala lo hom. Hemia nao, mifala stap had wok from se pikinini i pas i go ia, afta moni blo mifala, i givem bak bakegen.

3. M: Blo mi, mi pem skul fi blong tufala, tufala i go lo Vila, lo INTV (Institut National de Technologie de Vanuatu), tufala i kam bak, nao, tufala i stap karem wok lo vilij blo mifala. From edukessen ia nao. Wan hemi stap lo mekanek, ale, nao tufala i stap runem wok blo jas.

1. [T: You send your children to school...when they finish, what do you want them to do?

2. N: Like when they begin in primary, then they go...we spend our money for them to go to secondary, but we want them to work at a good job so that our money will come back. Because we don't want to spend money, then she goes and just spends time in, like in primary school or in secondary school, like this. We don't want this, because we want it so that we spend our money, we want our children to learn much. They catch up, so that they can come and help us, and help us at home. There it is, we are working hard so that the children can pass and go to school, then our money will come back again.

3. M: Mine, I paid for two of mine, they went to Vila to INTV (Institut National de Technologie de Vanuatu). They came back, and now they work in our village. Because of this education, now. One works as a mechanic. Okay, now both of them run work at the church.

4. N: For example, one of our girls, she currently lives in Vila. She is working at a very good job. At this time, her father, he is glad that all the money that he gave for her is now coming back because he spent much. But he is seeing that now he is starting to receive his fruit. Now, he just stays here. When he wants something, he calls over there, and our daughter sends it here] (“Nedi” and “Meri”, group interview with Ronevie women 2007).

**Olgeta Frut blong Olgeta [TheirFruits]**

Ronevie Village, 6-28-2007—“Lili”

1. T: Be yu luk taem we ol pikinini oli aot lo skul, fulup oli faenem job?

2. L: Mi luk se lo mifala lo plesia, ating wan wan nomo. Fulup pikinini oli stap wes nomo.

3. T: Spos we yu luk lo vilij lo plesia, spos ol pikinini i go long skul, i aot long skul, i no kasem job, oli mekem wanem?

4. L: Sam i stap go western hem nomo lo olsem lo haos.
5. T: I no mekem gud wok lo haos?


7. T: Yu ting se hem from wanem?

8. L: From les blo hem nomo. Be spos we hemi kam, i tingting lo skul blo hem, mbae mi traem mekem wan wok we i helpem mi. Sam oli mekem wok.

9. T: Edukesen blo Vanuatu, spos i gat janis blo hem, mbae i olsem wanem, janis? We i save helpem ol pikinini we oli no finemjob.

10. L: Olsemia, mi no save talem gud, be olsem taem we i stap kam, hem nomo mbae i luk. Mbae i luk se i stap trabol olsem wanem. Be spos we i gat graon, i save mekem wok nomo long graon blo hem. Be taem we yu no gat graon, mo hemi no save stap lo wan wok olsem, blo westem noting nomo.

1. [T: But do you see that when the children are finished with school, do many of them find jobs?

2. L: I see that, for us here, I think just a few. Many of the children are just wasting their lives.

3. T: Take this village, if the children go to school and they don’t find a job, what do they do?

4. L: Some just waste their lives at home.

5. T: They don’t work well at home?

6. L: They don’t.

7. T: Why, do you think, does this happen?

8. L: Just because of his laziness. But if he returns and he considers his schooling, I will try to help him work at something where he will help me. Some do find work.

9. T: In Vanuatu’s education system, if there are changes, what would be the changes—where it could help the children who can not find a job?

10. L: About this… I can’t really tell you, but like when he comes home to stay, only he will find out. He will find out what kind of troubles he might face. But if he has ground, he can just find work on his ground. But when he
doesn’t have ground, and he is not working, he’ll just waste his life] (interview with “Lili” 2007).

Tautu Village, 7-8-2007 – Salote Ray

1. S: Ol boe oli skal ia we, be from nomo ... oli aot lo skal, oli kam blo stap nomo lo plesia.

2. T: Ol parens oli harem olsem wanem spos oli pem skal afta oli kam blo stap nomo?

3. S: Ol parens oli trae had, be mi talem se ... i mas gat wan strong samting we i stap spolem olgeta...

4. T: Oli (ol boe) no gat job, be oli no save hao blo beldem haos?

5. S: Blo kasem hao blo beldem haos, lo tingtingia, no ... oli wes no mo blo mekem wan samting.

1. [S: The boys do go to school, but it’s just...they leave school, they come and just stay here.

2. T: How do the parents feel when they pay school fees and then the children just come back to the village?

3. S: The parents try hard, but I’ll tell you that... I think there is something strong that spoils them...

4. T: They (the boys) don’t have a job, but can they build a house?

5. S: To learn how to build a house, thinking of this, no...they just waste time] (interview with Ray 2007).

Tautu Women’s Group, 7-10-2007 – “Jaklen”, “Kati”, and “Rajel”

1. T: Taem we oli finis lo yia ten, oli aot lo skal, oli save finem job? Fulap oli save finem job?

2. J: Spos we oli finis we oli no save finem job blo karem moni, oli save wok lo jas.

3. T: Yu ting se i gat fulap lo plesia we oli no mekem wan samting?

4. J: Lo saet blong sam pikinini oli go lo haeskul. Oli kam stap noting – i no gat wok. Be mi, lo tingting blo mi, spos i we mama i gat konsen lo pikinini blo
hem...i mo gud, parens blo pikinini tufala i mas helpem pikinini blo hemi faenem wan wei we hemi save mekem wan bisnis blo hem. Olsem taem we i gan sam mama we oili no gat tumas konsen lo pikinini jas lego pikinini- hemi stap hemi fri. I had blo hemi faenem wok.

5. K: Mi ting se edukesen hemi gud, be from nomo taem oli skul be i no gat wok. I no gat wok enuf blo gavmen. Mekem se oli stap nomo. Be taem we oili go long wan trening senta, oili save kasek wok.

6. T: Be yu ting se hemi wan west, spos we hemi no finem job?


1. [T: When they finish class ten, they leave school, do they find a job? Can very many find a job?]

2. J: If, when they finish and they cannot find a job, they can work in the church.

3. T: Do you think there are many here who do not work?

4. J: There are some children who go to high school. They came back and do nothing- they don’t have work. But, to me, I think that if parents are concerned for their children...it is better for the child’s parents to help her find a way to start her own business. For example, when a mother has no concern for her child, she just lets her have freedom. It is hard for her to find work.

5. K: I think that education is good, but it’s just because, when they school, they can’t find work. The government doesn’t have enough work, so they just don’t have any opportunities. But when they go to a training center, they can find work.

6. T: But do you think it is a waste if she or he does not find a job?

7. R: For example, my daughter, she finished class twelve. She is applying to all the schools (to be a teacher), but they won’t accept her. So, now she has no opportunities. She can’t work] (“Jaklen”, “Kati”, and “Rajel”, group interview with Tautu Women’s Group 2007).

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These interviews illustrate the fact that Vanuatu's formal education system is meeting the expectations of very few parents of Ronevie and Tautu Villages and, arguably, the country over. Formal schooling has contributed to an increase of urban drift, as most of the country's job market is in either Port Vila or Luganville, and the formal education system creates the illusion that students will be able to use their learned skills to make money. At this point, reaching the tertiary level is an accomplishment of an extreme minority—less than one percent of the student population. Yet the curriculum is aimed at preparing students for the next level of schooling and eventual employment. Although unemployment rates are close to impossible to obtain, a tour of Port Vila is sufficient to prove too many youth are not using their education to support themselves (Silverstone 2002, 126).

Discourse regarding how to design curriculum that is relevant to students' lives, while meeting the needs of both local communities and the nation as whole, has been taking place for some time. The Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together conference (2002), which took place in Port Vila, which allowed Ni-Vanuatu educators to come together and discuss the national education crisis, is just one example. Watson-Gegeo, in her critique of the volume, Re-thinking Vanuatu Education Together, writes that the conference yielded two significant conclusions: "in spite of decades of educational development, Pacific peoples have not owned the formal education process but have instead viewed it as alien and imposed from outside"; and "Pacific peoples have failed to develop clearly articulated visions for their educational and developmental pathways" (Sanga in Watson-Gegeo 2005). She suggests, "Obviously, the two are interconnected, but it is difficult to see how Pacific peoples could have felt they "owned" education when
(as the editors and several authors in the volume point out) schooling over the past 100 years has been largely shaped by outside consultants from the "developed" world—where, ironically, the economically and socially privileged benefit most from schooling” (Watson-Gegeo 2005, 502). Although the initiative focuses on the irrelevance of education to the daily lives of most Ni-Vanuatu, recommendations to incorporate indigenous epistemology, knowledge, and language into the formal school program are missing (503). Furthermore, local community members were not invited to partake in the discussion. This only serves to perpetuate current social issues which are beginning to have destructive results (such as an increase of crime and land alienation) on both urban and rural communities.

For example, reports suggest the crime rate in Vanuatu will eventually reach that of Papua New Guinea. Marc Neil-Jones, editor and publisher of the Vanuatu Daily Post, writes, in an article written for the Vanuatu Daily Post, “Vanuatu’s Port Vila Has Become a Hot Bed of Crime”, “Crime is now getting seriously out of control in and around Port Vila and the Minister of Internal Affairs must take action before it is too late and Vanuatu descends into the same problems of lawlessness facing Papua New Guinea”. Increased rates of sexual assault, murder, theft, and violence are listed as consequences of urban drift and under-resourced authorities, both of which have become an extreme nuisance to the expatriate community. Neil-Jones goes on to suggest this dire situation can be solved by increasing the amount of police support from Australia and implementing such things as gated communities in more affluent areas (Neil-Jones 2008). Ni-Vanuatu are also concerned with the crime increase in their country and liken it to the situation in Papua New Guinea. In the interview below, Salote Ray, a woman of Tautu Village, who spent
seven months in Papua New Guinea working with a peace keeping team, discusses these similarities, yet she highlights the fact that it is the lack of opportunities for youth that is escalating social issues.

(Her words are in reference to the Papua New Guinean youth.)

1. S: Oli waes, oli waes, be wan samting nomo, ating job i no enuf.

2. T: Oli bin kasem edukesen? Oli bin go lo yunevseti?


4. T: Afta?

5. S: Be i stap nomo lo haos ia. Hemi stapia, be evri dei lo laef blo hem, hemi stap mekem fasen blo raskol. I go lo haos blo ol waet man, i finem wan we i pas daon we i gat moni blo hem. Hemi stilim ol ting blo hem. Mo i gat ol sekereti fens...hemia raskol ia.

6. T: Be hemi no gat job?

7. S: No gat job. Stil nomo.

8. T: Lo saet blo raskol, yu luk se Vanuatu i save gat samting olsemia, i no long taem?

9. S: Mi ting se, ating mbae i go go spos we i no gat enuf job blo ol yangfala, mbae i gat ol fasen olsemia i kam antop. From laef stael naoia we man hemi karem westen laef. Mbae mi talem se lo naoia mbae i no long taem mbae yumi save kasem ol samtingia. I no gud.

1. [S: They are wise, they are wise, but it’s just that, I think, there are not enough jobs.

2. T: They received an education? They went to university?
3. S: Yes, some received a good education. You will hear them speak— their English is like that of a white man's.

4. T: Then?

5. S: But they just stay at home. He's at home, but every day of his life, he acts like a raskol. He goes to the foreigner's house, he sees someone walking down who has money. He steals everything of this person's. And there are security fences...because of the raskol.

6. T: But they don't have a job?

7. S: They don't have one. They just steal.

8. T: In regards to the raskol, do you see that Vanuatu could, in the near future, have something like this?

9. S: I think that if it continues like it has been, where there are not enough jobs for the young people, this kind of behavior will increase. Because people take on the western lifestyle. I will tell you that it won't be long before we have something like this. It's not good) (interview with Salote 2007).

The critical, social issues of Vanuatu, in terms of the discontentment of youth, crime, and unemployment can not be solved simply by increasing security measures for the expatriate community. The problem runs much deeper and has much to do with the formal education system. As Jennifer Salai, a reading specialist and educator, who taught in Vanuatu schools for over four years, argues, "Students are failing to succeed in Vanuatu because they are not given the opportunity to be able to succeed." Her reasoning is that "it is hard to balance the tradition and modernity in Vanuatu's education when most schools teach in a curriculum that is out-of-context and irrelevant to tradition." She claims, "There is no balance, some students feel they need to break away or are forced to break away from the tradition in order to be successful in the modern job market", for which they are little prepared (personal communication with Salai 28 March
In her review of *Rethinking Vanuatu Education Together*, Watson-Gegeo urges the Vanuatu Ministry of Education to take action in regards to preparing the majority of students to not only function as self-sustaining residents of their local communities, but to also become “critical, reflective thinkers, voters, and decision makers” (Watson-Gegeo 2005). In an interview that took place in her Emalus Campus office, Helen TamTam, lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, also discusses the importance of creating students who have the ability think critically.

1. Critical thinking, hemi wan veri hae level blong tingting. To be critical, yu lukluk ol issues, o bifo yu takem ani decisions lo laef, yu luk luk lo hem lo wan particular wei ia. Nao wanem nao mbae decision hemi takem? Mbae i helpem mi lo fuja, or mbae hemi no helpem mi?

2. Mi raesem from we yumi ol Pacific Islands countries tadei. I gat so mani issues i stap happen– urbanization. I gat a lot of foreign influences i stap kam insaed. Mifala i no mo hidden nao. Mifala i fes long ol international things we hemi stap kam in nomo olsemia.

1. [Critical thinking is a very high level of thinking. To be critical, you look at all the issues, or before you make a decision in life, you look at the choices in a particular way. Now what decision am I going to make? In the future, will it help me or not?

2. I bring this up because of our Pacific Islands countries today. There are so many issues that are happening– urbanization. There are a lot of foreign influences coming inside. We aren’t hidden anymore. We are faced with the international things that are coming in, such as this] (interview with Tamtam 2007).

TamTam further explains that because things are changing so rapidly, and Vanuatu’s formal education system is not producing a highly literate population, few are able to contend with the growing numbers of outside influences. She provides an example as to how these influences are becoming destructive to the livelihoods of Ni-Vanuatu.
So, when we do not really prepare good for this, we see that it is not enough to cope with all the issues that are coming up. One example that we've talked about is land. Today, the people of Vanuatu no longer see the importance of land in the cultural way. Because the cultural way to look at the importance of land is left aside, and now, they look more to the cash economy. So, when a foreigner comes in, he wants to buy a piece of ground for himself, he says the amount of money, the seller is all too happy to sell it because it is a big amount of money. He just accepts it. He never thinks—maybe in ten or twenty years time, where will my family live? And, too, the foreigners take advantage of the people of Vanuatu. (interview with Tamtam 2007).

During my visit to Malekula this past summer, I discovered, in some parts of the island, land is already being plotted for purchase by outside investors. Although most every conversation, taking place over a meal or kava, eventually led to the topic of land and the criticalness of avoiding a situation where over 75 percent of the land has been sold for outside investors, like the island of Efate. Although community members agree that the selling of land will result in the loss of one's identity, when particular members are offered a large sum of cash for a piece of their gardens, it is difficult for them to see the value of maintaining their land for future generations. Within the past three years, Tautu village has acquired running water and electricity, which has resulted in individually billed households. In addition to this, parents must pay high school fees. And some would like to have what they believe to be the luxuries of America—a truck,

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61 Of course, foreigners are not the only ones taking advantage of Ni-Vanuatu. Some of the investors buying land are elite Ni-Vanuatu.
In the same way, these community members of Ronevie and Tautu are striving to maintain their languages and cultures, while at the same time, they desire access to outside goods and social services. Therefore, how does formal education assist in maintaining a balance? Furthermore, what is the purpose of education in a place such as Vanuatu? Quite certainly, formal education in Vanuatu has contributed to social issues such as urban drift, crime, and the discontentment youth, who have been unable to find an “acceptable” place in society; however, lack of education has contributed to the selling of land and the increase of foreign business owners and investors. At the same time, as Laan has so deftly pointed out, the youth are disconnected from their heritage languages, customs, traditions, knowledge, and epistemologies, and this has resulted in their detachment from the land.

This project has made a case for both the inclusion of indigenous languages, epistemologies, knowledge, custom and culture in the formal school program and the criticalness of including local community input in educational decision-making and planning. Furthermore, community members from Ronevie and Tautu Villages have been provided a forum in which to express their perspectives regarding vernacular and cultural education. In many ways, their responses have raised more questions and complicated the issues even further. For example, why would it not be possible to maintain language and custom at home as opposed to school? In fact, as much as they petition the Vanuatu Ministry of Education to consider vernacular and cultural education for the maintenance of indigenous languages and ways of living, these community members, in some regards, take partial blame for the loss of lanwis and kastom. Would a
vernacular education program based on indigenous languages truly assist in maintaining and/or reviving lanwis? Is it a positive step to institutionalize custom? Should it have a place in the formal school program? These are just a few of the issues which must be addressed through a much larger project, gathering input from community members throughout the country. The findings from this project only heighten the notion that formal education in Vanuatu is complex. Yet, I do not believe this is negative. Over the past five decades, since the implementation of government education, formal schooling in Vanuatu has not changed significantly (Niroa 2002). It is time to not just re-think education, but to re-think the approach to education, and questions, critiques, confusion, and complexities are all part of the process. As the above section has highlighted, the exclusion of a local community perspective and curriculum that is truly relevant to the daily lives of students will continue to exacerbate the critical social issues of the country.

Matters of the Heart and the Head

During the spring semester of 2008, I had an opportunity to attend a conference focused on issues of language and education in the Pacific. Despite a plethora of insightful discussions, regarding language, culture, and identity, the session concluded with a recommendation that a model for implementing vernacular education within the Pacific be produced. I cannot help but wonder—how far did we actually come in our discussions, and, at the end of the day, who would actually own such programs? The point of this project is not to present a list of recommendations or attempt to create a model for how vernacular and cultural education should be implemented in Vanuatu. This would only perpetuate what is currently happening in a number of Pacific Islands countries: foreign advisors directing educational initiatives. If local communities are
expected to take ownership of vernacular education programs, as well as other aspects of the formal education system then a forum must be created, as in this project, where their voices are heard. With that said, I have several times, through the process of writing this thesis, asked myself, why am I doing this? Drawing from my past experiences working with the VMOE, I have wondered if the voice of these community members will fall on deaf ears. Moreover, I am an outsider writing about an education system, languages, and cultures which do not belong to me. I have often thought I should have chosen another less controversial topic. Disjuncture is the term I have chosen to describe the situation of Ni-Vanuatu students and community members, but I have also struggled with a bout of my own disjuncture. At times, academia has a way of severing the heart from the head. What was once a part of my heart — education, Vanuatu, Ni-Vanuatu students and community members — came to find a semi-permanent place in my head, and I have struggled to remember my purpose and motives. It took my trip back to Vanuatu this past summer to make that reconnection with my heart and reaffirm my commitment and conviction, which lies with the students of Vanuatu. Knowing the people of Tautu and Ronevie Villages are truly concerned with the loss of their languages and cultures and thoroughly dedicated to sending their children to school has remained an inspiration. My hope is for the VMOE and local communities to build a partnership in order to strengthen a formal education system based on the needs of Ni-Vanuatu. Indeed, this project only touches the surface of a much larger process of building the gap between communities and schools.
Appendix A: Government Education Reform and Independence

Few of us had been exposed to the outside world. We came back (from courses overseas) asking ourselves, "Why can't the New Hebrides get such a status, or some development, to bring us on to independence?" (Donald Kalpokas, former Prime Minister of Vanuatu and educator, in Bresnihan and Woodward 2002, 343).

In the years leading up to independence, many Pacific Islands countries were forced to evaluate their current western style systems of government and education. Development became one of the key focuses of Pacific Island leaders, and to some extent, former colonial powers such as Britain. British colonies in Melanesia were, in many cases, less "developed" than other Pacific Islands Countries because the British had little interest in its Melanesian colonial subjects and in Vanuatu, neither did the French. In his book, Colonialism, Development and Independence: The case of the Melanesian island in the South Pacific, Harold Brookfield, renowned geographer to the Pacific, illustrates how both Melanesians and their former colonizers were beginning to prepare for independence. He writes, "But three-fourths of the population of Melanesia is likely to be under independent governments by the middle of the 1970s and the manner in which the new countries will be able to respond to internal and external sources of stress is being determined now" (Brookfield 1972, 192). While it is problematic to present a generalized picture of the social situations in Melanesia during the time leading up to independence, Brookfield emphasizes the fact that the state of formal education was, with the exception of Fiji and New Caledonia, similar among the Melanesian countries. Apart from New Caledonia, Melanesian

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62 Unlike in other Melanesian countries, Fijians had been participating in the government and formal education for a number of years before Fiji’s independence in 1970. New Caledonia was considered by Brookfield to have a higher quality of formal education, perhaps because of France’s involvement (Brookfield 1972, 196).
political leaders were inevitably going to be faced with the task of building a nation with very little in the form of development. Compared to western standards, national infrastructure, economy, health, and education were gravely lacking, and both Melanesian leaders and colonial administrators began to worry that the formal education, currently being provided for the local indigenous population, was not adequate to create a new class of “educated elite” (192). In fact, throughout Melanesia, formal education was well below adequate. The description of the condition of many of the schools throughout Solomon Islands, provided by the British Solomon Islands Government, speaks to this point.

In a typical school there may be two to four classes housed in a church or leaf building, with few books, little equipment, and inadequate or non-existent seating and desk accommodation. The teachers are untrained and often barely literate; they are frequently unable to speak English adequately much less to teach it. Many such schools are almost wholly unsupervised. The curriculum comprises English, Arithmetic, Religious Instruction and very little else, and classes are normally held for four hours in the morning on five days a week. Most of the pupils are boarders, and in consequence much of the time is taken up by work in the school gardens, since the pupils must produce the bulk of their own food (British Solomon Islands Government White Paper 1962 quoted in Brookfield 1972, 193).

Although written for the British Solomon Islands, this description represents many formal schools throughout Melanesia. Likewise, a 1969 United Nations report on Vanuatu states that formal education was less than quality, as most teachers had little or no formal training and very few Ni-Vanuatu were allowed to attend school past the primary level. Additionally, churches, not the government, were responsible for all formal schools at this time (United Nations 1969, 17).
Soon-to-be independent Pacific Islands country leaders were concerned with both improving educational standards and maintaining local traditions. Regionalism and national unity were also on the agenda of reform. Development, meaning the improvement of rural areas, health care, education, infrastructure and the economy, was top priority of both indigenous and colonial leaders. Nevertheless, indigenous leaders, such as the late Walter Lini, Vanuatu’s first Prime Minister and leader of the Vanuaaku Pati, and Ati George Sokomanu, Vanuatu’s first president, initially visualized achieving this the “Pacific Way.” Sokomanu, illustrating this point, writes, “Let the Pacific region develop, in the way in which its people see fit and acceptable, and this is the only way in which it can be free from strains and influences from outside that are harmful” (Sokomanu in Lini 1980, 61). Likewise, Lini writes, “…I should prefer to see ‘custom’ and the traditional ways used as a force for development” (Lini 1980, 30). In fact, the New Hebrides National Party began as a result of the 1971 establishment of the New Hebrides Cultural Association (Kalpokas in Bresnihan and Woodward 2002, 344).

During the mid 1960’s and late 1970’s Pacific Islander leaders, including Ni-Vanuatu, began to look regionally for assistance in education, government and rural development. Spades, South Pacific Action for Development Strategy, a 1973 regional development conference, supported by the Pacific Conference of Churches, Christian Education and Communications Programme, was an indigenous initiative to facilitate development in a more “Pacific way.” Indigenous leaders from Fiji, Australia, British

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63 At this time, only Fiji and Western Samoa had gained independence. The years of independence for these Pacific Islands countries are as follows: Western Samoa (Samoa)- 1967, Nauru- 1968, Fiji- 1970, Niue- 1974, Papua New Guinea- 1975, Gilbert Islands (Kiribati)- 1975, New Hebrides (Vanuatu)- 1980. Cook Islands was granted Free Association with New Zealand in 1965. Tahiti and New Caledonia.
Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Gilbert Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tahiti, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, New Zealand and the New Hebrides convened in Port Vila, New Hebrides64, to plan for a type of development that would aid independence. Conference members promoted “regional co-operation” while vehemently opposing colonialism. Four areas of focus for development were identified; economic structure, tourism, urbanization and education (SPADES 1973, 1, 3 and 5), and conference sessions were centered on investigative reports drawn from previous field trips conducted in Apia, Western Samoa, Suva, Fiji and Tanna, New Hebrides. Educational development was considered by the participants to be the most crucial because of the considerable disconnection between traditional and western knowledge to approaches in development (21).

Resembling an earlier educational report presented by the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1972, members of the conference formulated two questions concerning education: “Education for what?” and “Education for whom?” As a result of continued colonial influence on formal education, conference participants concluded that it was imperative that Pacific Islanders become forefront in decisions made about education in the Pacific. At that time, they considered formal education systems to be irrelevant and inadequate to meet the needs of their newly developing nations, and these participants believed that individualistic approaches to education clashed with their “co-operative” communities. They drew attention and concern to an increasing gap, or disconnection, between the educated and non-educated.

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64 New Hebrides is used interchangeably with Vanuatu depending on the time period being discussed – before 1980, New Hebrides; 1980 and after, Vanuatu.
Furthermore, there was a growing dissatisfaction among students who, because of the formal education systems, were unable to find employment after completing school. Formal schooling was perceived by conference participants as not only a tool for incorporating traditional epistemology but also for unifying nations which were made up of largely disconnected populations (12).

The development of free compulsory education, relevant and culturally appropriate curriculum emphasizing community versus individuality, balances between traditional and western ways of living, approaches to knowledge and training and community based schools, were listed as priorities in education development which would, in turn, assist in the development of the new nations. The participants wrote, "The deficiencies of the existing education system are seen as the 'core' of the problem. The present education system is an imported one – unsuited to the local situations, in conflict with our indigenous cultures, instilling in its victims an alien system of values, a 'western' outlook" (22). However, it is also interesting to note that little attention was given to incorporating local languages into the curriculum. It was recommended that instruction and literacy should be in the "national language", which, for Vanuatu, is English, French, or Bislama. Furthermore, there were no clear implementation or improvement strategies established. At the close of the conference, it was decided by the participants that "communication" and discussion would continue on a regional and national basis (31). As for the purpose of education, SPADES participants wrote, "Education should serve the development of man. It should give him the ability to live his life to the fullest. It should help him to learn to
develop good relationships with others. It should help him find a place in his society and adapt to changes that take place in that society” (SPADES 1972, 11).

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