

Chapter Five

The Making of a Consultant/ Advisor in Curriculum and Staff Development at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) 1981-1986

Action research is a process.....the process involves understanding the system, defining solutions, or discoveries, applying or modifying these solutions, and assessing the results of the action. (Cunningham 1993, p. 9)

When I commenced this project I knew little about the roles of advisors/consultants/change agents employed by aid agencies. We still need to know more about the lives of consultants (Maxwell, 1991; May 1991; Linet et al 1996; Lieberman 2001; Czarniawska 2001). Chapters 5 and 6 provide useful insights into my professional life as an advisor employed by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) in two countries for almost a decade.

The two chapters present two case studies of international aid where I rejected my technician roles as an advisor to adopt a professional role as a change agent to solve the real educational problems with collaboration from the teachers and the management of the institutes. The processes used in these projects have the potential to improve international aid and international consultants in other contexts.

Chapter 5 offers my living educational theory as a change agent, in FIT. In this chapter I identified the real problem through research, developed and used a strategy based on research findings and solved the problem collaboratively with teachers and the management of the institute. Through my personal character (Covey 1992, Groberg 1993) and my technical competence I managed to create trust and collaboration amongst the participants of this project. I used action research (Cunningham 1993) as a learning strategy for the participants. However, the discursive consciousness of this strategy developed later.

The principal's testimonial of my contributions and character (**appendix 3**); lists of the specific interventions in staff development and curriculum development from my final report to CFTC (**appendix 4**) and principal's introduction to the seven booklets providing details of

the whole experience in **appendix 5** support the following narrative. Further information was available in many other documents including advisor's monthly reports to CFTC, contributions to the Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Institute, contributions to the FIT Journal, training materials, seven booklets with records of achievements and the MPhil dissertation at the University of Bath (Punia, 1992).

The Project Context

This section shows how little the participants to the project knew of the advisory role, the project problem and its solution at the beginning of this assignment. The aid agency had assumed that the host organisation was capable of identifying its problem. However, this and the next project will show that this assumption was unrealistic. The CFTC in London had provided me with a list of duties to perform under the principal of the institute as a technician carrying out other person's ideas. This section presents how I negotiated a new role as a change agent to work with, not under, the principal to identify and solve their real problem.

Recruitment as a Consultant

I had an offer from the Commonwealth Secretariat to go to Fiji Institute of Technology as a consultant. This job offer came as a surprise.

Some months earlier I had visited the Commonwealth Secretariat to enquire about work as a consultant. I gave my CV to a gentleman who showed me a few requests for aid from various overseas countries. These requests did not fit my experience. Then from underneath a pile of paperwork he fished out a request from Fiji. I suggested to him that this request fitted my background. He was not entirely convinced but agreed to send my CV with the CVs of three other candidates to the Fiji authorities to make the final selection.

I forgot all about this incident until I had a call from the Commonwealth Secretariat to inform me that the Government of Fiji had accepted me as their advisor. I transferred my registration from a full-time student of PhD at the University of Lancaster to a part-time student and left for Fiji hoping to pursue my studies from there. This registration led to occasional contacts with my supervisor. The continued contact with the University and my registration for PhD may have been one of the factors for the high success of this project. The following narrative shows how I intuitively practised skills expected of a consultant in (May 1991). These skills include *trust and rapport building, organisation diagnosis, dealing*

with the process, resource utilisation, managing the work and building skill and confidence in the client to continue the work (May 1991).

Making my Role in the Institute

At that time the aid agency, the host country and myself knew little about the work of consultants. My brief from the CFTC was to advise the heads of schools in mounting new courses in engineering and to be actively involved in staff development including teaching educational subjects to trainee teachers on a teacher training programme conducted by a few local staff in FIT. The advisor was to be responsible to the principal of the Institute. It was evident from the job description that I had been allocated a technician role to carry out the instruction from others assumed to know the problem and its solution.

I was surprised to find that the principal was not familiar with advisory roles either. For instance, during my first meeting with him he suggested to me that he would like me to teach a few building subjects in the school of Building and Civil Engineering and educational subjects on a teacher-training programme. He saw me as an additional teacher to fill vacancies in the school of building and civil engineering. I informed him of my brief from the commonwealth secretariat and indicated that I intended to follow it. He did not like my response and was hostile towards me for some time.

The principal, like me, had just joined the institute with long administrative experience but lacked technical ability and experience to lead a technical institute. He needed my technical competence to complement his administrative ability. Later during the project this principal and myself became friends and still keep in touch with each other. This friendship developed after I was able to demonstrate my technical ability with an integrated character to provide leadership in solving the problems of the institute. It took at least 6-9 months for this contact to develop naturally. I was not aware of the importance of this task at that time. The awareness of the need for cooperation and trust between an outsider and insider for the successful completion of aid projects developed later (Covey 1994).

In the light of Hoyle (1975), Bolam (1975), Eraut et al (1975), and my experience of managing construction projects in industry, I assumed a change agent role to understand and resolve the real problem. According to this literature external change agents solve educational problems in collaboration with the insiders. Contrary to the assumptions of my

employers I decided to find the real problem of the institute before making any serious move to intervene in the present practices of the institute.

The Development Problem

In this section I explore how I identified the real problem. I had to make a choice between imposing my ready-made solutions and taking a collaborative action to solve the real problem with the staff and the management of the institute. I took the second option presented below.

Organisation Diagnosis and Trust Building

Most problems are embedded in our previous actions. I found that it was government policy to localise curriculum and staff at the FIT who were responsible for designing, teaching and evaluating their own courses without any advisory staff from the Education Department. The training programs in FIT used imported curricula from overseas countries. The localisation process was already in progress. The institute had two long-term consultants from UNESCO who had left before my arrival. They had established the organisation structure, the examination system, and a training programme for teachers but left curriculum development without any change. Like me a new the principal had just joined the institute. The project evolved within this context.

In every country and in every project stakeholders tested me for my technical ability and character before placing their *trust in me*. “*Character is what we are; competence is what we can do. And both are necessary to create trustworthiness*” (Covey 1994). I understand trust as one’s willingness to rely on another’s actions in a situation involving the risk of opportunism (Williams 2001). So my first task was to generate this trust. It took several months to prove my ability to advise and to write my preliminary report on my conception of the problem of IVTB before the management and the staff of IVTB placed their trust in my ability to lead. This trust later proved to be the key to the success of this project.

Ready-made solutions for undefined problems can do harm than good. I had to ‘own’ and to ‘contextualise the problem and its solution’ in collaboration with the host institution. In a new project like this one I was anxious to generate a genuine learning situation for the participants (Obeng 1994). *The real opportunity for intervention* arose through a seminar on instruction planning with the senior lecturers who themselves suggested to me to guide them

in introducing a systematic approach for curriculum development within their institute. I took the matter to the principal of the Institute who relayed it to the Academic Board of the Institute, the highest decision-making body in FIT. I managed to convince the Board members of the need for a collaborative action by the staff and the management to improve the quality of curriculum development. Within this context I conducted nine studies of *teachers' planning* (Punia 1992; Yinger and Hendrick-lee 1995) to illuminate the real problem for the teachers and the management, develop and implement an appropriate strategy to solve the problem. These interventions are fully recorded in the seven booklets I produced at the end of the project (**appendix 5**) and my MPhil dissertation (Punia 1992). These booklets still have a transfer value in other contexts.

Creating a Vision of School-based Curriculum Development Problem

The nine studies of teachers' planning conducted as integral parts of teacher training at the FIT showed that there was a poor link between the planned curriculum and the operational curriculum enacted by the teachers without management support and control. The planned curriculum also had poor links with the students and social needs. I conceptualised curriculum development in achieving adequate congruence between the needs, the planned curriculum and the operational curriculum as illustrated in **Figure 3**. This theoretical model, proved useful in this and subsequent curriculum development work elsewhere.

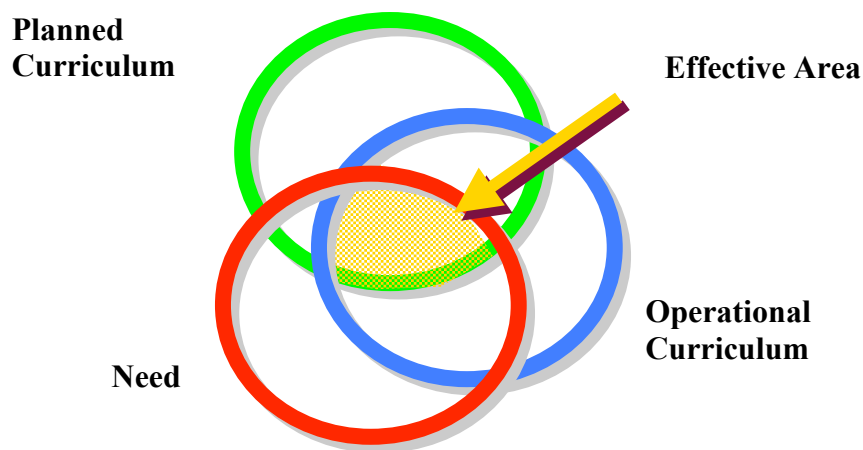


Figure 3- THE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROBLEM

Using the above framework the management, teachers and myself decided to focus on matching the planned curriculum with the operational curriculum but there was no suitable model for school-based curriculum development at that time. The Tyler model (1949) used at that time did not take into consideration teacher ability and the context. I developed the

following model from teachers' and employers' perspectives to alleviate the drawbacks of the Tyler model (1949) representing the curriculum planners' perspective.

Generating a New Model of School-based Curriculum Development

The following theoretical model of school-based curriculum development is based on the findings from research on senior lecturers' classroom teaching practices (Punia 1992) comprised of preactive planning, interactive teaching and postactive reflections (Jackson 1968). Their planning was a form of action research to generate their own knowledge (Elliott 1991, Holly 1991, McNiff 1993). Basically the new model involved linking the planned curriculum (theory) with the operational curriculum (practice). The simplified version of the emergent curriculum development model is illustrated in **Figure 4**. This model was different from other models of SBCD present in the literature (Skilbeck, 1982; Marsh et al, 1990). This model rejects the logic of top-down and bottom up strategies for curriculum development. It links the top-down and bottom-up models of curriculum development through horizontal relations narrated in the implementation process presented below. Hence the model is applicable in top-down and bottom-up strategies of curriculum development to make mutual adjustments and continuous learning.

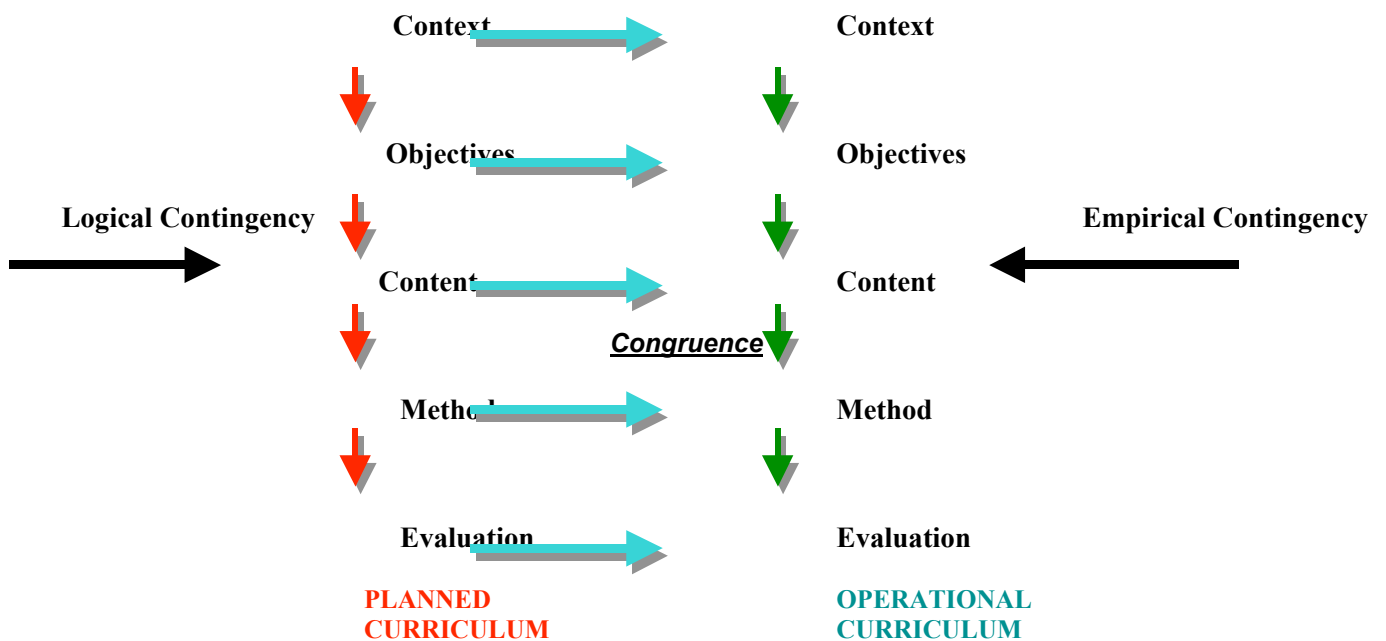


Figure 4 - The School-Based Curriculum Development Model

Implementation of the Planned Curriculum

Management of the Implementation Process

To operationalise this model I had conceptualised the project as a design process architects use in the construction industry. Commencing with a general vision each intervention was a response to a specific problem or opportunity arising within this vision. The first intervention included standardising the format for the planned curriculum including a clear specification of the context, learning objective, the content, the proposed teaching learning strategy and assessment of student learning as interrelated components. Second intervention linked the operational curriculum (Punia 1984) with the planned curriculum, as illustrated above.

I devised a *Teachers' Record Book* to record what teachers taught, their problems and suggestions to overcome these problems. The teachers and the management met regularly to ensure proper control and support for the planned curriculum. Teacher support included additional teacher training, time for planning, access to advisor and availability of good quality teaching-learning materials. **Appendix 4** provides a list of various activities undertaken in curriculum and staff development. This list is a copy of the original sent to CFTC at the end of the project.

Project Evaluation by the Stakeholders

Evaluations have many goals and forms. The evaluation in this project was more of internal audit than an independent evaluation. It aimed at learning from the project experience. In this project I focused on linking the planned curriculum with the operational curriculum. I had no time and I made no efforts to link my work with the interests of the stakeholders outside the institute. On hindsight I regard it an omission on my part. It is important to do good work and seen to be doing a good work. All improvements occurred with existing resources, making the institute a highly efficient institution.

To ensure learning and sustainability I finished this project with a formal review with stakeholders and produced a comprehensive written record of the learning processes and outcomes. At the end of the project all stakeholders met to evaluate the project in the form of half-day seminars to review the project work. The stakeholders acknowledged tremendous progress made in improving the quality of curriculum development and staff development. The management, teachers and the students benefited the most. According to the principal

the failure rate of students had dropped from 30% to 10% and many of his teachers had become curriculum planners. However, I did not verify these statements from the principal.

It was a mammoth curriculum and staff development project. This work turned a reactive institute without confidence in its work into a proactive one with confidence and justification for its work. Politics enters in all aspects of our lives. Half way through the life of this project the new Minister of Education set up a committee to evaluate the institute in response to alleged dissatisfaction with the work of the institute. The evaluation committee praised the work of the institute, particularly my contributions at the institute. This external evaluation with intentions to find faults provided the institute with a free publicity for its good work.

I had intuitively developed a technique to ensure continuity and sustainability of this project by producing records of my work in seven booklets **appendix 5**. Furthermore, I had intuitively developed a new style of evaluation called learning-oriented evaluation (Gasper, 2000). This type of evaluation emphasises stakeholder learning in addition to the achievement of anticipated objectives. I had developed a portfolio of my professional development by the end of this project (Redman, 1994). These ideas were unknown in the academic literature of that time and I was not conscious of the value of my work beyond the FIT project. The recent development of credits for this type of work for academic awards is a significant step towards professional development of practitioners.

Emergent Conditions of Success and Emergent Issues

There were several interrelated factors involved for the success of this project. The success of this project occurred due to my friendly relationship with the principal, my technical ability, character based on spiritual values and external support from the CFTC. The project revealed important issues in international aid e.g. definition of advisory roles, advisor relationship with counterparts, the nature of assistance from aid agencies. These issues still remain unresolved.

Implications of the Project for Practice Elsewhere (Generalising the learning from this project)

The work carried out at FIT had the potential for use in the neighbouring islands struggling to develop technical education at that time. My own work in the next project is an example of transfer of learning from the FIT project. The ‘Commonwealth of Learning’ situated in Canada could have taken up such a task more formally across many countries in the South

Pacific still struggling to improve the quality of technical education. Ripples of this project are still being felt in the South Pacific. Recently this work reached the technical education in New Zealand through informal contacts. This year (2002) I met the ex-principal of FIT who told me the following story about the IVTB project in the eighties.

One day he met one of the ex-FIT members of the teaching staff in Suva who was currently on leave in Fiji from New Zealand where he was teaching at present. This person inquired about my whereabouts from the principal and then told him that during his interview in New Zealand the chairman of the Board had copies of the seven booklets I had compiled on the work we did during the FIT project. The members of the Board told this teacher that they had not tackled those problems in their institute and they needed guidance in implementing some of those ideas.

My research on teachers' planning guided curriculum, staff and institute development in the context of school-based curriculum development. **Appendix 9** provides Professor Calderhead's comments about the value of this research for curriculum and school development. With the current interest on school improvement and effectiveness (Reynolds et al 1996) this project has greater professional significance. My recent learning from the EdD programme shows that the model in **figure 4** and *Teachers' Record Book* mentioned above provided a suitable mechanism for collaborative Action Research (McKernan 1991, Elliott 1991). Furthermore, it was a useful strategy to capture teachers' theories of practice (Ross et al 1992).

However, I was not aware of these research possibilities at that time. The above accounts are a good indicator of the limitations of learning from experience without a discursive consciousness, which I developed during my studies for the EdD. My work shows that practice can precede theory. Practice has its own logic: learning from practice occurs through insights obtained through perception, often remaining tacit. This project is an example of learning through action in which *"the knowledge, the practice was the synthesis of different kinds of knowledge and different ways of knowing. No one was freestanding or more important; they were independent and complementary. Together they provided personal theories of practice"* (McNiff and Whitehead, 2000, p. 52).

My Developing Values and Standards of Professional Judgement

A few glimpses of my standards of professional judgement in unusual circumstances, learning from insights gained from interaction with the social context and from personal introspection are presented below. These episodes are also useful indicators of influences of my character at that time. Unlike habitual learning, my insights developed from deep observations of the phenomenon and seeing connections instantly. Hegarty (2000) deals with this type of learning more comprehensively. He wrote: “*Practical behaviour calls for a large repertoire of incomplete sets of insights, skills in selecting appropriately from them, and the ability to generate fresh insights which complete the set in an illuminating way*” (p. 46). Introspection involves the use of meditation/contemplation. However, I found that the insights remain tacit and situated knowledge unless the person translates them into known knowledge, which is a creative act I learnt in preparing this dissertation.

Learning to Appreciate Cultural and Ethical Differences (Trompenaars 1993)

International consultants need sensitivity to contextual and cultural differences. There were significant cultural differences in the countries I inhabited. **See appendix 19 for details.** The following episode narrates how I learnt to be sensitive to cultural differences.

The administrator of FIT became friendly with me soon after my arrival and he was helpful to me in many ways. One day I saw a beautiful Fijian girl passing by and casually remarked to this person about her looks. The next day this girl arrived in my office and requested to talk with me. I welcomed her into my office as usual. To my utter surprise she said that she was willing to sleep with me. To this unusual offer I politely remarked that she was a beautiful lady and that it was man’s privilege to ask her for such an act, not for her to make such an offer. Then I inquired about the reasons for her offer. She said that the administration officer told her that I wished to sleep with her. I said that I might request her if and when I wished to sleep with her and that she should not believe in anyone else. She went away rather disappointed.

Some months later the same person casually asked me how the lecturers in the UK related with their students on personal level. He informed me that some of the lecturers of FIT were known to sleep with their female students and that he wanted reliable information to deal with this situation. I casually told him that the staff in the UK probably would do the same, as long the students were adults and willing. I forgot all about it until one day the principal

called me to his office and inquired if I knew what my friend had been doing to his students. Naturally I had no idea of the incident. The principal told me that this fellow had been fondling the daughter of one of the ministers and she came to him with a complaint. The principal had to handle the case very tactfully. We both laughed when I told him my side of the story.

I was under constant observation. These people seemed to be learning from my character. I learnt to be very careful with what I said and did in this place with a different culture. Almost every encounter in this place was a new learning opportunity. The next episode presents an example of learning from teaching in a seminar. For reasons unknown to me I seemed to have intense influence on people.

Learning about Successful Teaching in Direct Teaching

This incident taught me an unusual way to obtain feedback and to summarise my training sessions. I conducted a seminar in one of the schools of IVTB at the “Ba Centre”. *After a full day of teaching I was exhausted but I wanted to summarise the days’ work. I casually told the group about my condition and requested them to summarise the work for me with my support wherever necessary. They quietly came out one by one to summarise parts of the days’ work. I found that I could not have summarised my work better than they did.* I did not understand how these teachers grasped my message so well. I later narrated this incident to the principal of FIT who only remarked that I was not conscious of my abilities. Hopefully I am aware of these abilities now. Probably success came from the sincerity of my character with a sense of responsibility for my job and relevance of my message.

Learning the Importance of Incidental learning (Jarvis et al 1999)

Learning from professional dialogue amongst interested professionals is a rich source of learning. The following episodes provide examples of this kind of learning. During tea breaks the senior staff of FIT would gather around my table for informal chats. Later the principal also joined these conversations. On reflection I find that these chats were never frivolous. Mostly serious issues of life and of the institute were discussed. I enjoyed these conversations amongst professionals. From these dialogues I became aware of the significance of incidental learning. I remember the following three stories of incidental learning from professional dialogue amongst professional educators.

- **The first story presents a living educational theory of classroom teaching of the VP of FIT.**
- **The second case illustrates subconscious learning of a lecturer from FIT and my living educational theory of spirituality.**
- **The third example presents my personal learning from introspection.**

The first story provides a superb example of transfer of learning from Rugby into teaching. This example came from the vice-principal of FIT who was a jovial, stocky fellow with excellent physique. In fact he was the ex-captain of the Fiji Rugby team. He informed us that as the captain of his team he never ran hard after the ball like other players who were always puzzled at his behaviour. He could always visualise the next position of the ball in the field. That was how he theorised expertise in classroom teaching. I learnt that deep learning is personal, practical and mysterious.

The second case still remains a mystery to me. A lecturer from the FIT would join our intellectual conversations with interest but would not enjoy conversations on spirituality. When I left Fiji for my assignment at the Western Samoa Technical Institute the principal of FIT kept in touch with me. One day I had an unusual letter from him informing me that the young man who joined our teatime chats was having spiritual experiences and that he was behaving irrationally to quit teaching and to pursue spirituality full time. Furthermore, this fellow wished to come to me to Western Samoa to explore spirituality from me. The principal suggested to me that I should guide him through a letter. I wrote to this person along the following lines. The gist of what I wrote to this person, on my understanding of spirituality is as follows. This letter also expresses my current understanding of spirituality.

I became deeply interested in spirituality as a subject for study at the FIT and this is my primary interest at present. Spirituality, as I understand, is about man's quest after self-knowledge. Socrates advised us long time ago to know ourselves. Some serious men in the past developed interest in spirituality and they succeeded in their quest during their lifetime. The rest of the humanity has either worshiped them or hated them. It is an understandable response from the masses. They cannot understand such people who often behave at odds with common beliefs and rituals. Most people have flashes of spirituality. A few people think of spirituality as a means to human perfection and it is a life-long learning process.

According to the principal of FIT this young man gradually recovered from a flash of a sudden insight into the unknown often experienced by thoughtful people. Unfortunately I never met this person after this incident.

The third case presents my personal experience of learning from introspection. In 1985 when I left FIT for Western Samoa for another assignment, the institute had reached the professional standards of similar institutes in the developed countries such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand. This statement is amply supported with evidence in many documents mentioned before. A few years after my departure from FIT Fiji had an army uprising ousting the democratically elected government of the time. Consequently many teachers from the FIT left the country. According to the reports coming from FIT the condition of the institute was worse than that I had experienced when I first arrived in FIT.

One day while sitting in my flat in Western Samoa I was musing over the situation in Fiji after the army uprising. I was feeling sorry for wasting four years of my life at FIT. Suddenly my internal voice spoke, *“ those people who participated in the project are spreading your message in other countries and in a wider world. Your efforts had not been wasted. Rather they have a wider impact on education in the world arena. Nothing is wasted in the cosmos.”* I suddenly understood the wisdom of this voice and realised the limitations of evaluation as a concept. I realised from this flash of insight that our actions affect not only our lives but those of others as well and every action has a reaction, which may not be immediately apparent to us. I also learnt that some human knowledge is available through introspection.

Like interaction of the self with the nature, the inner dialogue of the self with itself can result in insights into the mysteries of human life. We seem to possess a higher mind. This mind responds to our questions when we are completely open and sincere in our quest. I suddenly realised the limitations of formal learning in educational establishments. Whole nature and our higher self is ready to answer our questions if we were sincere and open to learning. This incident transformed my outlook on life and learning.

The Awakening of Spiritual Intelligence

According to Chopra (1996), *“when you are doing that one thing, you loose track of time. When you are expressing that unique talent in many cases- the expression of that talent takes you into timeless awareness”*. At FIT I had occasional spiritual experiences which remained

beyond rational explanations. Chopra 1996 above offers one explanation of my condition. I can only describe the state of my being during these moments. During moments of spiritual awakening I was full of unbounded love and energy for all creation with little self-consciousness. The answers to my questions would come from my own higher mind in the form of flashes of insight. These changes in my behaviour were visible to others but I was not conscious of them (**see appendix 3**). As a result of these experiences I became more conscious of unity in diversity in the universe and the limitations of rational thinking and knowledge. I began to see my work as a service to the cosmos. Consequently I spent a considerable time providing seminars and technical advice to other institutions of Higher Education in Fiji, including Fiji school of Medicine, Agriculture College, Public Services Commission, Police Training School and N G Os. In fact I might be considered a consultant to technical education in Fiji as a whole (**see appendix 3**). However, with this spiritual awakening my attention was diverted from pursuing my PhD for personal development.

An Emergent Image of My Self

A professional educator with well-developed philosophy of life, credibility with his clients, tolerance for uncertainty and adequate technical knowledge in education and a vast embodied knowledge of his project seems to emerge at the end of this project. The present discursive consciousness of my embodied knowledge developed through the MPhil dissertation (Punia 1992, Covey 1994, Eraut 1994) and this dissertation. It has been a long and continuous process of learning.

It is interesting for me to realise now that with the present consciousness of this project I might have finished my PhD at the end of this project in the eighties. I might also be criticised for neglecting my PhD work and spending an excessive time on this project beyond my assigned duties. However, I had made a deliberate choice to pursue my spiritual interests over the academic interests. From then on my spiritual pursuits have taken precedence over my academic interests.

While still at IVTB, I was approached by CFTC to accept a similar assignment in the same region at Western Samoa Technical Institute. I accepted the assignment without making extensive inquiries about the place and the nature of the new job. This omission caused many later problems but it opened up exciting possibilities for learning at the same time. The next chapter presents my living educational theory of reconstructing a technical institute in the same region.