Chapter Six

The Making of a Consultant/Advisor in Institute Development at the Western Samoa Technical Institute (WSTI)- 1986-1990.

> Uncertainty, ……………is the fertile ground of pure creativity and freedom (Chopra 1996).

This chapter presents my living educational theory of rebuilding WSTI in a very difficult situation including lack of financial resources, human resources and confidence to undertake this task. The above quotation seems to explain the remarkable achievements of this project with many uncertainties and opportunities to learn. In this chapter I learnt to rebuild a technical institute with the host country and two other aid agencies. I learnt to cope with uncertainty, work in teams, successfully install connective curriculum (Young 1998) and to match staff development with innovations. The lessons learnt from this project have the possibility for transfer in other contexts. I have attempted to be comprehensive in the following accounts.

A truly international team worked and lived together in harmony in WSTI. The opening and the closing scenes of this project present glimpses of the extent of the challenge and our professional response to tackle such a problem. I arrived in an institute in complete disarray but left it with a planned curriculum, trained staff and adequate resources to implement the planned curriculum. More importantly there was an incredible change in staff and student attitudes. However, in this highly successful project I made a serious mistake in failing to close the project appropriately as in the previous chapter. The following three independent sources of information support the following accounts in this section.

1. The record of achievements from the last principal of WSTI providing a comprehensive account of my contributions in this project **(appendix 6).**

2. A copy of the summary of the evolving process of the project including the emergent problems and their solutions derived from my final report to CFTC **(appendix 7).**

3. A letter of appreciation from the principal project officer of CFTC at the end of the project **(appendix 8).**

The other sources of information left at WSTI and with the CFTC included:

Monthly reports for the CFTC

WSTI Newsletter

Training materials

Theory and practice of curriculum development at WSTI

A policy framework for curriculum development for WSTI

The following narrative includes the project context, my role, the development problem, its solution and the emergent image of my professional self.

The Project Context

The following accounts indicate the difficult circumstances in which I had to work. My spiritual values, an integrated character and vast technical competence of such work gave me the courage and patient to survive this difficult period and to make considerable contributions towards the success of this project. My choice of the word 'daze' in the following accounts is deliberate. The following sudden change in the context added to a further difficulty in ending this project with complete success.

The WSTI project made a rapid progress for three years with full support from the director and the Minister of Education. Then a sudden change occurred. The government of Western Samoa changed and the Director of Education suddenly died of a heart attack. Consequently, a new Minister and a new Director of Education took charge of the WSTI. During the four years at WSTI I worked with four principals, four Vice-principals, two Ministers and two directors. I had been assigned to train one Vice-principal while I had to train so many principals and vice-principals and coordinate the work of an international team. A project is a living entity in which roles, people and context remain in flux. The consultants have to change with these changes. The following accounts reflect my first impressions of the complexity of the problem. The people involved in these accounts were highly intelligent, who worked under very difficult circumstances. They provided me with full cooperation in my work. Without such cooperation from the insiders I could not have been successful in my work and the insiders might not have benefited from my presence amongst them (**see appendix 5)**.

The First Arrival

I will not forget my first entry into Western Samoa. The vice-principal drove me from the airport to my hotel in Apia, the capital of Western Samoa. The scene in Western Samoa was very different from Fiji, a bigger place and the most advanced of all the small islands in the South Pacific. My first problem started when I could not get vegetarian food in the Hotel. After a few weeks of near starvation in the Hotel I found an accommodation which was far below my standard of living. I had difficulty in finding good quality vegetarian food and suitable accommodation for me in Apia. The working conditions at WSTI provided me with the next shock.

The Daze of Introduction to the Institute

I came to WSTI when it was going through a difficult time. The principal and the staff were working under very difficult conditions. On the second day of my arrival the principal of WSTI arrived in my hotel to take me to the institute. The man about sixty from New Zealand came in a truck belonging to the institute. On reaching the institute he started to brief me on the state of WSTI. I noticed that the staff of the institute walked past us without greeting. I asked the Principal for the reason for this unfriendly behaviour. He swore and said, " *these useless fellows were on strike against me a week earlier".* I did not dare to pursue the matter further and kept on walking to observe the state of buildings.

The whole place was literally in shambles. A few students and staff seemed to be roaming around aimlessly. In the classrooms there were broken chairs and no electric bulbs and power points. The principal told me that the Samoan students and teachers stole objects from their classrooms and the workshops. I met two teachers sitting in an empty classroom in the dark. I chatted with them about the state of affairs in the institute. They fed me with more dismal information. At the end of the day I stood on a high ground to survey the entire scene and found it so depressing that I felt sorry for myself and I thought of going back to England the next day.

There were several rational and ethical reasons why I did not decide to return home that day. First, I do not believe in quitting from any challenge, which was likely to haunt me for the rest of my life. Secondly, all my previous overseas experiences were difficult initially, but finished well at the end. Thirdly, one must appreciate the fact that the countries do not invite overseas consultants unless there are problems which they cannot handle without support

from elsewhere. This is probably a good rule to remember in undertaking overseas assignments.

I hoped to share my anxiety with the director of education and the minister of education. My first meeting with these people added to my anxiety further as narrated under the next heading.

<u>Meeting the Stakeholders</u>

I found the following meetings with the director and the minister of education disturbing. These people showed no interest in my work. However, later it will evident that they led the project enthusiastically. For the next few weeks the principal of WSTI took me around to meet all the stakeholders involved in this project. My first meeting was with the director of education. A stocky and short guy welcomed me with a loud laugh and a remark, **"** *so you have come Mr. Punia."* He further commented that many people like myself came and went without much effect on WSTI and that he was thinking of closing the Institute. I responded to the director that I was not a miracle worker and that I might do something there with his support. This person had another laugh without any further remarks and took me to meet the Minister of Education next door.

As soon as I entered the room the Minister greeted me with a stranger remark. He said, **"** *Mr. Punia I need money, not persons."* I replied, " if you need money, not myself, do get in touch with the aid agency, my employer and I will be more than willing to return to my country". I was shocked at the lack of interest in the assignment by the key stakeholders and regretted not finding the full facts about this assignment before accepting it. Later during the day I wrote to the Director of Education about their strange treatment of me and for this he apologised and welcomed me formally to their country and to the institute. The above meetings indicated to me the absence of policy, resources and confidence in the education department in tackling the problem at WSTI.

During the next few weeks I met the commissioner of Labour, principal of the Secondary Teachers' College, the head of the Curriculum Unit of the Ministry of Education, heads of various aid agencies (UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF) and the officials of several embassies, particularly from Australia and New Zealand. These meetings and personal contacts proved valuable during the life of the project. All these people had stakes in the WSTI, but they lacked confidence and resources to tackle the problem. More importantly they lacked a

common vision and someone with the technical competence to tackle the problem as a whole.

My Professional Role

It is difficult to identify my role in this project. I played many roles at different times including a teacher trainer, a project director, a consultant in curriculum and staff development, a principal, an architect for the construction of new buildings, supervisor of installation of the new equipment and tools. My vast technical knowledge and a cooperative character with embodied spiritual values enabled me to undertake these roles voluntarily. It might have been very difficult to find specialists to complete this project.

Discovering my Role

FIT and WSTI projects provide examples of some of the unresolved issues in the CFTC policy for technical aid. Like the FIT project, the role description provided to me by the (CFTC) had remote resemblance with the realities of this project. For instance this curriculum and staff development project ended as an institute building project. My job description from CFTC was as follows.

Advisor Curriculum and Staff Development Technical training with the duties and responsibilities of the post, as agreed between the government and the Fund to be as follows:

> **Supervise the work, assist and guide the Vice-Principal as appropriate;**
> **Develop curricula in all training areas;**
> **Develop instructional materials and training aids;**
> **Coordinate and direct the task of updating and revising prevocational and apprenticeship programmes;**
> **Assist the development of an examination system;**
> **Such duties within his competence as may be required of him by the principal.**

Like FIT in the previous project, in this project the education department had its hidden agenda to make use of me to suit their needs. The principal of WSTI was initially co-operative but later became unfriendly towards me. To my horror I found that the Education Department planned to retire him by the end of the year and to place me in his place as an advisor and a principal. They had worked out a clever scheme to save the salary of a local principal. To clear this misunderstanding I had to take the principal to the Director of Education to inform him that I would not and could not be the principal of WSTI as I had a specific brief from my employer in London.

In fact nobody was aware of the real problem and its solution in the beginning of the project. The following narrative of the development of this project will reveal my actual roles and the real problem of the institute.

Definition of the Problem

The State of Curriculum and Staff Development at the Outset of the Project

The following accounts indicate the difficult working conditions in WSTI at that time. These accounts are intended to indicate the state of WSTI, not the competence of people who worked there at the beginning of this project. These people were working without any support and accountability. The following narrative indicated to me that there was no approved curriculum and a student assessment system in place within the institute. This was causing many associated difficulties such as lack of staff and student motivation towards their work and lack of discipline in the institute generally.

A month after my arrival in WSTI there was the annual graduation day of the institute. It was the most pathetic scene I have ever witnessed. There were two invited guests, one from the Australian embassy and the other from the New Zealand embassy. There was nobody from the ministry of education. There were some parents and some teachers and I was sitting next to the principal. There were about thirty students. To my amazement many students came forward to receive their certificates with their arms on slings. I asked the principal, *" Sam, have they been in a battle?" To this he casually replied, "The fools get injured in workshops".*

A few hours after the graduation they were issuing certificates to students in the principal's office. Suddenly one member of the staff from New Zealand rushed into my room complaining about the fact that they had issued a certificate to a student he had failed. I suggested that he should go to the principal who was his countryman. He replied that it was the principal who had issued the certificate. From this incident I found that there was no formal curriculum and no approved system of examining students.

There was no discipline amongst students in classrooms. One day I found one boy throwing stones into a classroom in session. There was little discipline amongst the staff who allegedly used workshops for private work during school hours. This was the state of WSTI when I first arrived on a two-year assignment for curriculum and staff development and to train the

newly appointed Vice-principal. There seemed to be a hopeless situation indeed. With the collaborative efforts of an international team a new institute emerged at the end of my assignment. The creative process is presented next.

Assisting the Ministry of Education in the Identification of the Problem and the Preparation of a Policy Document

The following narrative presents the problems of developing countries in improving their education systems without adequate resources. These countries need active support from the developed countries. This project is the story of such a support. Before my arrival in WSTI several consultants had written reports to update the work of WSTI but no action had been taken to implement the recommendations of these reports. There were two serious problems in the implementation of the recommendations of these reports. The government had no funds and there was nobody with technical competence to undertake such a task. My appointment provided the technical support but there were no funds to update the buildings and equipment necessary to support curriculum and staff development. The government of Western Samoa approached UNDP for aid to make key teaching appointments in WSTI and approached the Australian government for funds to update the buildings and equipment.

During the first six months of the project I could do little work in curriculum development without any policy from the government and funds for additional staff and equipment required for changes in curriculum. I kept myself busy engaged in staff development. During this period I had little contact with the director and the minister of education. Then suddenly I had a telephone call from minister's secretary inviting me to meet the minister and the director next day.

The minister and the director had invited me to discuss a report prepared by the ADAB (Australian Aid Agency) for the strengthening of WSTI. The Minister informed me that previously he had other interests in the department but now he was fully committed to the strengthening of the WSTI. He provided me with a direct telephone line to his office. So my first contribution involved assistance in defining the development problem and its solution.

The government had secured funds worth 200,000 US dollars from the UNDP to recruit four UN volunteers and a project officer and worth 300,000 AS dollars per annum from Australia for three years for buildings and equipment in workshops. They had already secured aid from the CFTC for an advisor (myself) in curriculum and staff development. Thus three major

donors became involved in the WSTI project. I assisted the education department to amend the policy document named *"The Strengthening of Western Samoa Technical Institute"*, a policy report prepared by the Australian team of academics and rewrote the chapter on curriculum development policy.

Curriculum development was the nucleus of this project. My recommendations for curriculum development included offering a three-year full-time training programme to students with Form 5 secondary education **figure 5.** On successful completion of the first year students were to receive a 'Basic Certificate' in various technical and commercial areas of study. On successful completion of the second year they were to get an Intermediate Trade Certificate and on completion of the third year they were to receive a full trade certificate and a similar structure was adopted for diplomas in technician courses. This policy met the employers' needs for employment and student need for higher studies at home and abroad.

Full Trade / Certificate…...……………………………………….. Year Three

Intermediate certificate ……………………………………………… Year Two

Basic Certificate…………………………………………………… Year one

Figure 5-Proposed Curriculum for Form Five School Leavers

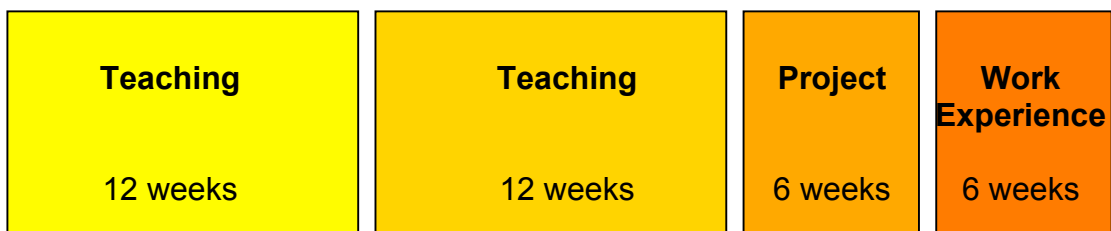| Teaching	Teaching	Project	Work Experience
12 weeks	12 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks

Figure 6- Structure of the Connective Curriculum

Each programme provided three types of learning experiences to students each year as illustrated in **figure 6**. First two terms of 12 weeks each provided new knowledge, skills and attitudes through direct teaching and the third and the last term was divided into two equal parts. During the first half the students learnt to integrate subject-based learning from the

first two terms by completing a simulated project. During the second half of the third term students were to be sent out for an authentic industrial experience. This was to be accomplished through a school-based curriculum where teachers were to plan, teach, assess and evaluate their own programmes under the leadership of the advisor who was to establish procedures and provide training to the teaching staff.

Development of the Solution

The Theoretical Frameworks/ Mental Models used for Institute Development

The aim of my curriculum design was to provide curriculum to meet the needs of the local industry and local students. My second contribution came in providing the technology of school development. I used the theoretical model for institute-based curriculum development developed at FIT in **Figure 4** in the previous chapter. Two additional innovations were introduced at WSTI to link theory with practice and to link student needs with industrial needs. First, the planned curriculum, the operational curriculum and the context were linked to stakeholder satisfaction as conceptualised in **Figure 3** in the previous chapter. Secondly, the direct teaching in the institute, simulated project work and the planned job-experience were used to integrate the subject-based curriculum to make it relevant to the needs of the employers and the students in **Figure 6** above. The planned curriculum was an example of the *connective curriculum* later developed in (Young, 1998). In this format students learnt to link three different types of knowledge.

Implementation of the Solution

Management of the Development Process

Brilliant curriculum policy plans can fail during the implementation process without adequate support and control (Stenhouse 1975, Punia 1992). I provided support in the form of staff training, establishing social structure and procedure for action and accountability.

The extract from my final report to CFTC in **appendix 7** provides the various stages in the development of the project, including activities, problems and solutions emerging at six-monthly intervals. The overall development process in the project was similar to the design process architects use to develop their building projects. It consisted of successive focusing on emerging issues within an overall vision. The development work involved the following interrelated and overlapping processes.

Development of a vision/ policy.

Setting up a social structure to implement the policy.

Introduction of new courses with concurrent staff development and

procurement of teaching-learning resources and construction of new buildings.

Continuous formative evaluation of each stage.

Communicating progress to stakeholders.

Project Evaluation

Although there were several formative evaluations of the project during its life, there was no formal summative evaluation of this project. An independent evaluation of the project from the last principal of WSTI is provided in **appendix 6.** The following accounts present my evaluation of this project. The three aid agencies rebuilt a technical institute about to close using a systematic approach to development. It required a highly collaborative culture amongst project participants. The project successfully matched the planned curriculum, the operational curriculum and the context (Punia 1992). A series of programmes for certificates and diplomas had been introduced with the written planned curriculum, trained teachers and necessary materials and equipment. Above all a professional attitude towards teaching and learning was visible amongst the students and the staff of the institute. The student numbers had increased ten-fold and failure rate amongst students dropped significantly (**see appendix 7)**. Student and staff attitude towards their institute had changed dramatically. In my view the following scene at the WSTI captures the spirit of the change that had occurred in WSTI. This scene will always remain fresh in my memory.

My Unforgettable Last Day at WSTI

My last look at WSTI the day I left the institute provides an incredible yet a true image of the finished project. That day I could see new and newly painted buildings, properly equipped workshops, trained staff working to a well-planned timetable, all courses with a written and tested curriculum, a quiet and a purposeful movement amongst people. Most of all, the students who were alleged to be stealing things from the institute were watering flowers around their classrooms and the local staff who allegedly used workshops for personal benefits were stopping private people from entering their institute. When I first came to the Institute I had no space to sit and I was leaving a spacious and fully furnished office on my departure. This change was exhilarating to experience and to behold.

However, I made a serious mistake as a consultant. Unlike the FIT project I did not formalise the summative evaluation with full involvement of all the stakeholders and produce written records of my achievements. The adverse effects of this omission became evident in later years in unusual places.

Failure to End the Project Appropriately

Every thought has loose ends somewhere. In FIT I had performed a collaborative evaluation of the project and left written records of the achievements, processes and lessons learnt. However, I had not appreciated the importance of this task at that time. Consequently I failed to attend to this significant stage in the development of WSTI project. This might have caused the following misunderstanding.

Some years later I found a book in the IVTB library in Mauritius from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on innovations in curriculum development in various countries in the South Pacific. I was astounded to find that in this book there was no mention of the CFTC assistance in curriculum development at WSTI. The author extolled the curriculum innovations at WSTI and attributed this work to UNDP. How this error occurred is not important. This incident reminds me that I had not finished my assignment properly and kept the stakeholders adequately informed (Jwahar and Mclaughlin, 2001,Obeng 1994).

My Professional Self

Advisor's Philosophy and values in the Project

I learnt to employ Taoism form of leadership in my projects. In my work I valued teamwork more than individual contributions. I found that people in teams were capable of solving their problems without difficulties when problems were more important than the individual selves. In this and the previous projects the local officers took all the credits for the successes of these projects. This strategy ensured their cooperation in owning and contextualising these projects under my leadership. The following philosophy derived from Taoism has worked for me.

The wicked leader is he who the people despise;

The good leader is he who the people revere;

The great leader is he who the people say,

We did it ourselves.

My Personal Contributions

This project involved teamwork. The "Record of Appreciation" of my work from the last local principal of WSTI, now the Vice-chancellor of the University of Western Samoa, provides additional information of my personal contributions towards the development of this project in **appendix 6**. It might be argued that such a testimonial is unreliable. However, during the life of this project many documents and reports were available to support the above accounts. **Appendix 6** is intended to add an additional voice to my accounts.

My Learning

This project is an example of my living educational theory of institute/school building. My learning consisted of (1) context/environmental learning to seek support (2) mental model building for curriculum development (3) caring/ intrinsic motivation based on spiritual beliefs (4) use of multiple intelligence to solve the problem (5) learning to work together in communities of practice (Solomon 2002).

My Emergent Professional Image & Transitions

In chapters five and six I learnt to be a change agent, not an advisor, drawing my authority from personal character based on spiritual values (Covey 1992, 1994) and technical competence in solving problems (May, 1991; Eraut 1994). My professional creativity lay in learning from insights (Ashcroft and James 1999) and creating new knowledge from the scholarship of integration (Boyer 1990). I suggest that such advisors are technologists/ professional educators/ Doctors of Education who can define and solve educational problems in leadership roles. They are not technicians solving problems defined by the aid agencies and their clients. The EdD might be an appropriate educational programme to prepare such people. As a result of these projects I began to think more like an educator than like a trainer.

With the end of the previous two projects in two technical institutes I left education in technical institutes to enter training in two Training Boards established to improve performance in the private and public organisations of Mauritius.