

# Psychosocial Processes that Facilitate Unity and Interdependency: Contemplation for Research Development

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## Abstract

The need for us, as educators, to cultivate and encourage a climate of unity, harmony, and prosperity in educational and non-educational settings is pertinent. Conflict resolution in teaching and learning in educational settings, for example, is a feat that may be achieved via different methodological means. In this article, we provide an account of our teaching and research experiences in the Republic of Fiji Islands. Fiji is a developing country that is located in the South Pacific region, consisting of two major ethnic groups: Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. It is a unique country, but yet marred by financial insecurities, political instability, and ethnic and racial tension. Many Indo-Fijians often face and experience prejudiced and discriminatory views and actions by Indigenous Fijians and other Pacific Islanders.

This reflective discourse, differing from our previous published work (Phan, 2007; Phan & Deo, 2007, 2008), is a personal methodological narrative that detailed the effectiveness of our pedagogical strategies in the promotion and enhancement of harmony and unity between people. We discussed, specifically, the inclusion of Bandura's (1997) *personal self-efficacy* theory, and how this qualitative examination and reporting of "evidence" may, in fact, provide a premise and scoping for additional research into unsettled sociocultural settings.

**Keywords:** unity, harmony, ethnic tension, conflict resolution, personal self-efficacy, future time perspective, reflective discourse

## 1. Introduction

The notion of conflict resolution and our ability to live in harmony is imperative, especially in relation to needs that pertain to the creation of responsible and caring citizens. In the field of educational psychology, there are theoretical tenets that encourage and cultivate a sense of interdependency (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) amongst individuals, notably, *personal self-efficacy beliefs* (Bandura, 1997) and *future time orientations* (De Volder & Lens, 1982; McInerney, 2004). In consideration of these two mentioned theoretical orientations, we reflect on our previous teaching and research in a higher education institution in the South Pacific region. A number of South Pacific Island States consist of peoples with different historical origins, cultural values, ideologies and beliefs, resulting in diversities and conflict in thinking and actions. The Republic of Fiji Islands is a clear example of dichotomy and multiculturalism, often leading to negative bias, racial discrimination and despair amongst her citizens (e.g., job prospect). Our previous research investigations with undergraduate students in learning processes (Phan, 2007, 2012c; Phan & Deo, 2008) have provided empirical grounding for consideration into matters that relate to positive psychology and personal interrelations between individuals.

This article reports on a reflective discourse (Note 1) of our professional experiences, detailing pedagogical strategies and practices that we utilized in order to resolve some of the issues identified (e.g., ethnic tension). Our noting in this matter indicates, specifically, the significance of social dialogues and interactions and collective self-efficacy beliefs. Localization and discussion of issues that were of a concern (e.g., uncertain futures), for example, enabled students to feel unified with a sense of purpose and shared identity. We envisage that this qualitative examination may provide a theoretical premise for continuing conceptualizations and research development in the area of friendship, harmony, and peace building. Furthermore this unconventional personal account, differing from other methodological approaches (Druckman, 2005; Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 1998), may also make contributions, empirically and methodologically. Conflict resolution, peace building, and the fostering of harmonious relationships require, in our view, in-depth continuous examinations of

person-context data. Subsequently, it is our anticipation that the scope of this study may inform readers of other methodological alternatives that could be used.

## 2. A Brief Account of the Republic of Fiji Islands

The Republic of the Fiji Islands is a country with an enriched history, encompassing diverse cultural values, beliefs, and customs. Historically European explorer Abel Tasman discovered the Republic of the Fiji Islands, formerly known as Fiji Islands, in 1643. Fiji became a British crown colony in 1874, and after almost a century of colonial rule, gained independence in 1970. Similar to colonial experiences in other parts of the world, the imposition of the British colonial systems and structures had profound influences on Fiji and these have changed her social, political, economic and educational systems.

Fiji is located between latitudes 15-22 degrees south, and longitudes 177-180 degrees east of the equator. Situated in the tropics, Fiji has a mild, tropical, maritime climate. This Small Pacific Islands state comprises of 332 volcanic islands, spread over 1.3 million square kilometers of ocean, of which approximately one-third are inhabited. Fiji is a plural multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-lingual island country with a population of 893, 354 (July, 2005 estimates). The *taukei* (Indigenous Fijians), or the traditional owners of Fiji, and the Indo-Fijians (still considered by nationalists as *vulagis* (visitors), although they have been here since 1879) are the two dominant ethnic groups that make up 54 and 39% of the total population, respectively. The Indo-Fijians are largely descendants of the sugarcane plantation laborers, who were brought to Fiji under the British indenture system in 1800s. The other 7% is made up of Rotumans, Europeans, Chinese, part-Europeans and other Pacific Islanders. The two main islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, are home to over 90% of the population. The two capital cities of Fiji, Suva and Lautoka, are located on Viti Levu.

The rural and remote population of Fiji is about 60%, while 40% is concentrated in the urban areas. For ease in administration, Fiji has historically been divided into four main regions: Eastern Division, Western Division, Northern Division, and Central Division. Fiji, unlike many developed countries, does not have a broad economic base. The major economic activities, which also are the main sources of foreign earnings, include tourism, sugar and timber production, and manufacturing. Economic progress and development have been severely affected by the military coups of 1987 and 2000, as well as the expiry of land leases since then, which has seen massive displacements of Indo-Fijians from native land. This has increased the levels of poverty, particularly amongst the Indo-Fijian community (Government of Fiji, 2000, p. 44). The two military coups have also been a major source of ethnic tensions and this has resulted, in part, in many Indo-Fijians migrating overseas. Similarly, the two coups have resulted in the introduction of a number of affirmative action policies for Indigenous Fijians in education and socio-economic development in order to bridge the socio-economic and educational divides between the Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians (Government of Fiji, 2001; Ministry of Education Fiji, 2000; Puamau, 1999).

The social ecology of the Indigenous Fijian society is one that is communal, highly stratified and hierarchical, and largely based on social power structures. The Indigenous Fijian society is characterized mainly by the extended families, making interrelations between family members a paramount. Primacy of group interest (e.g., a social function to celebrate the birthday of the village chief's granddaughter) over individuals' own wishes and motives (e.g., taking a brief break to study for the final exams) is emphasized. Respect for authority figures is tantamount (Phan, 2010b), thereby the notion of asking questions for clarification, say, is unacceptable and is considered as being rude and confrontational. The *status quo*, or acceptable behavior, would be for individuals to listen quietly, watch, observe, and pay attention to the authority figure. Given their strong affiliation to values that accentuate communalism, the Indigenous Fijians tend to prioritize social, church, and cultural obligations over education (Dakuidreketi, 1995; Nabobo, 1998, 2001; Narsey, 2004a; Puamau, 1999; Ravuvu, 1983; Tierney, 1970). Indo-Fijians, in contrast, live largely in nuclear families and exhibit a greater degree of independence and competitiveness in academic work (Dakuidreketi, 1995; Narsey, 2004b).

The aforementioned emphasis suggests some major disparities between the Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. Notably, there are dichotomous upbringings, values, beliefs and ideologies that consequently differentiate the two Fijian cultures. The notion of sharing and looking after others in the community, for example, is reflective of the Indigenous Fijian "culture" and emphasizes a collective whole, or often referred to as *interdependence* (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988) in the literature. There is, an emphasis on the distribution and sharing of ideas, knowledge, values, and materialistic things within the family and community. The Indo-Fijians' philosophical stance, in contrast, acknowledges the importance of individualism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), wherein individual achievements are encouraged. By the same token, however, individual achievements (e.g., obtaining an outstanding result for university entry) are bestowed to the

immediate family and relatives.

One cannot deny that there are disparate beliefs, customs, and values between the two main groups that co-exist and inhabit Fiji. This distinction is conflictive, but yet provides us with a clear understanding of the sociocultural complexities of Fiji. Indeed, our observations of Fiji and her citizens detail an intricate psychosocial evolution and process. We cannot be definitive in our assessments and judgments, but feel there is a major perpetuation of negative bias and ethnic and racial discrimination between the two Fijian groups. This negativity transcends to all different levels of society, from daily contact to education and the political system that governs Fiji. Perhaps from a socio-political perspective, this constant conflict serves advantageously to uphold Fiji's democratic values and beliefs. As a double-edged sword, however, ethnic tension in this country also stiffens social and economical development, limiting it from progressing into a powerhouse of change and growth in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **3. Personal Account and Reflection**

Our teaching and research development in Fiji was fruitful and provided a basis for serious consideration into a view for potential changes. Our personal account in this section, especially in terms of documentation and reflection, differs from our previous research studies (Phan, 2007, 2008; Phan & Deo, 2007, 2008), which were predominantly quantitative, using complex causal modeling procedures. We take this opportunity to reflect on our previous teaching, and discuss how this aspect of professional development may assist in the facilitation of harmony and unity between the two major Fijian groups. This scholarly undertaking, in our view, is rather unique, as it emphasizes the utilization of personal reflection, as a form of research methodological discourse, to inform others.

Between the period of 2004 – 2008, we both taught undergraduate units and a postgraduate unit together at a university (note 2) located in the Asia-Pacific region. Our research interests included students' learning in secondary and higher education contexts, with various cognitive (e.g., learning approaches) and social (e.g., the self-systems) psychology theories used as a premise for investigations. Subsequently, arising from our teaching and collaboration, we explored a number of avenues in our research projects, notably: personal self-efficacy beliefs, students' approaches to their learning, epistemological beliefs in relation to traditional knowledge, and motivational processes. Specifically, we used surveys and quantitative methodological approaches, such as the manipulation of data and statistical testing using complex causal modeling techniques (e.g., latent growth analysis: Phan, 2012a, 2012b).

In our data sampling, we were relatively inclusive of secondary and tertiary students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One major emphasis of our research investigations concerned reasons that could account for differences in students' epistemological beliefs, learning approaches, and cognitive-motivational processes. Consequently, as a result of this interest, our articulations and conceptualizations provided a foundation for us to delve into other issues, specifically as we explained, the *status quo* of Fiji. Our noting of the Fijian society, especially the interactions and social discourse of the two main Fijian groups was quite illuminating, which we discuss in this section of the article.

#### *3.1 The Status Quo: Contemporary Insight into Fiji*

Before we engage in a discussion into the facilitation of conflict resolution and unity, we would like to discuss briefly the historical background of the Indo-Fijians in Fiji. It is important, from our point of view, that readers have an understanding of Indo-Fijians and their social, economical, and political positioning within Fiji and other Small Pacific Islands states. The Indo-Fijians arrived as part of the British Indenture system in 1879, and have remained since in Fiji with many residing in villages and urban areas, working alongside Indigenous Fijians. This co-existence has remained the *status quo* for than a century, sometimes with success (e.g., interracial marriages between the two Fijian groups) and, in many cases, with failures, such as the ongoing racial discrimination and negative bias that can be seen today. The latter point is not so blatant (e.g., verbal abuse), but rather manifests in the biased forms of national policies, educational and schooling system, geographical and urbanization, constitutional rights, and political party demarcation.

One major contentious issue that has been noted entails Indo-Fijians' experiences of landlessness and poverty, a recurring fact that transcends to different generations. Many Indo-Fijians, especially those who are uneducated, poor and reside in rural areas do not have rights to, nor can they afford, free hold land. Their main source of financial income is sugar cane farming and other minute blue-collar jobs, which bring very little monetary values to the family. The Mataqali leases lands to the Indo-Fijians for living, sugar cane and crops farming, etc. Living conditions and standards are relatively poor, and many Indo-Fijian families face ongoing financial plights that consequently have detrimental effects. Some families, for instance, cannot afford school fees, and this results in many of the children to leave schools at an early age. We sometimes witnessed a small portion of Indo-Fijian

children staying at home to assist their parents in daily chores and other related activities and tasks that could bring in small gains for the family. Some Indo-Fijian parents even go to the extreme of rearing and nurturing their daughters with a view, in particular, for marriage at the age of 18 - 19.

It may be said that, apart from the issue of landlessness, other economical, social, and political functioning in Fiji also reflects experiential feelings of discrimination, insecurity, and despair. In villages in rural and remote areas, often in many cases, the two major Fijian groups live harmoniously, side-by-side, and share many of the daily functioning (e.g., sharing water from a well) successfully. In this sense, cultural-ethnic disparities and harmony and unity do co-exist in Fiji and not everything is despondent. Having said this, however, conflicts and animosities periodically occur in urban settings such as Suva, the Capital of Fiji. We often hear of dissent, wherein Indigenous Fijians would blame the Indo-Fijians for many of Fiji's shortcomings, such as political turmoil, poverty, social upheaval (e.g., taking away jobs), and racism. This "reversed" psychology, in our view, is quite interesting and reflects, in part, a form of Sigmund Freud denial. The Indo-Fijians, in contrast, also share similar distasteful views and perceptions about the Indigenous Fijians. Well-to-do Indo-Fijians, for example, would use and express many derogatory terms to depict the Indigenous Fijians (e.g., "... They are lazy and don't do anything..."; "... They are the cause of major problems, such as crime, violence, rape, etc."), and blame them for many of society's problems.

We often witnessed contempt that was reciprocated between the two main Fijian groups in Suva and many other urban areas. It is quite unfortunate, and we saw this on a number of occasions, where racial prejudice and feeling of antagonism are passed on from generation to another. Apart from daily contact in society, there is a demarcation in schools and universities, which we explore and discuss in the subsequent sections. What is clear here is that discrimination, of any form, is not unidirectional, but rather shared and reciprocated between all groups. What is noticeable too is an undercurrent of prejudice feelings towards the Indo-Fijians by other Pacific Islanders (e.g., Solomon Islander). This collective antagonism is quite remarkable, and we query whether this "isolation" of the Indo-Fijians has anything to do with their differing customs, cultural values and beliefs, and ideologies? There are other speculations and reasoning, and these are endless in our pursuit to understand why Indo-Fijians are still being marginalized.

In Suva and many other urban areas in Viti Levu, for example, the Indo-Fijians often do not socialize with Indigenous Fijians or other Pacific Islanders; this lack of socialization is also reciprocated. Occasionally, we did see social interactions between the Indo-Fijians, Indigenous Fijians and other groups, but these individuals could have come from elsewhere and settled in Suva, for example, to work, etc. In rural areas in the Northern and Western Divisions of Fiji, amicable relationships are evident and quite observable (e.g., an Indo-Fijian speaking Fijian fluently; interracial marriages). The "rural life" and "village life" are intact and apolitical, with many still having a generous mindset. Suva, the Capital, is a social and political hotspot, often instilling strong nationalist views of ethnic beliefs and ideologies. The politics of Fiji, in this analysis, are quite divisive, separating Indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians, and other ethnic groups along political lines and parties. One could say that Fiji's politics in part, expressed by the government of the day, reflect certain biased ideologies and actions, exacerbating more ethnic and racial divisions between all groups.

### *3.2 Why is There a Need to Achieve for the Indo-Fijians?*

From our personal account the daily social, cultural, and political functioning of Fiji often portrayed disunity and discord in some parts of the country. Education, as a major form of commodity, does not fair any better. Secondary schooling and university studies, in particular, reflect a sense of division between the Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. This distinction was quite conspicuous at university, with students in and outside of lectures and tutorials manifesting behaviors and feelings of separation. One clear example of this is the displeasure that was displayed when students had to work with each other in assignments, etc. The question then that we could ask, is why? We expected more harmony, respect, and amicable relationships between the two main ethnic groups, given these individuals are/were the cream of society.

Perhaps an understanding of this manifestation can be explained by the genesis of the Indo-Fijians and their "status" within Fiji. Our discussion here is limited, and does not necessarily include other possible reasoning as to why prejudice also exists in education institutions. The main issues of landlessness and poverty, as we highlighted previously, have often plagued the Indo-Fijians to deliberate with a sense of motivation and purpose from an early age (Phan, 2009b, 2010b). Indo-Fijian parents would rear and nurture their children from early on to work hard and achieve for family pride and dignity. In this sense, financial difficulties and struggle for democratic rights serve as an impetus for many Indo-Fijians to view education as a form of social mobility (Phan, 2009b). Indo-Fijian children in schools often work hard and excel, academically. Their ethos is one of study, and

doing what ever it takes to achieve academic success. Failure, in contrast, is judged negatively with disappointment, shame, and despondency.

The Indo-Fijians' way of thinking and philosophy is that formal academic qualifications, either trades certificates or university degrees, mobilize economic and social vibrancy (Phan, 2009b). This perception orientates many Indo-Fijian children towards a performance-approach goal structure (Ames, 1992; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Trash, 2002), wherein evaluative and social comparison is a norm (e.g., "What did I come in the class, Ms. Nandani?"). Competition is thrived upon and, in this sense, the notion to fulfill parental expectations starts very early on in life (e.g., obtaining good grades to enter university). Upon entering university, many Indo-Fijians express a yearning to achieve for various reasons that have to do with a prospective life. Indo-Fijian students work long hours and are quite deliberate and "ruthless" in their approaches to learning. In our previous research studies (Phan & Deo, 2007, 2008), for example, we noted and reasoned that many Indo-Fijian students were "culturally appropriated" to approach their learning in a superficial, automated manner to achieve high academic grades.

Our teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate units in education and psychology yielded some interesting insights. Notably, in terms of assessment tasks (e.g., research projects, quizzes), we noted that Indo-Fijian students would do extremely well, often coming first, second, and third in a tutorial class. There was sense of purpose and, more importantly, a need to achieve and obtain this high academic standing. In line with the student approaches to learning (SAL) framework (Biggs, 1987; Marton & Säljö, 1976), and especially Richardson's theoretical tenet (Richardson, 1994) Indo-Fijian students showed a "reproducing" and "achieving" preference, producing exceptional results every semester and year. Despite the high-obtained grades, on reflection, we are quite skeptical of these achievements and question whether many of these students knew what they learning. Rote learning and memorization (e.g., "I learn some things by rote, going over and over them until I know them by heart even if I do not understand them": Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001) were the main motives and cognitive strategies for many Indo-Fijian students, neglecting in this process the pleasure of mastery, subject interest, and personal growth (e.g., "I find that at times studying makes me feel really happy and satisfied": Kember, Biggs, & Leung, 2004).

What we noted in our units, too, is that there were characteristics of protectionism and selfishness from some of the Indo-Fijian students. Our observations showed, for instance, a strong sense of individualistic (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Triandis, et al., 1988) rather than collectivist thinking. Even between the Indo-Fijian students themselves, despite their friendship, there was a strong notion of self-interest and self-preservation (e.g., "... Every man is for himself...", as one student would say). The Indo-Fijian students would socialize outside of class hours, but would share very little, if any, of their studies and/or knowledge with each other. A common belief was that "there can only be one success and others must fail". Competition was thrived upon and, in many cases, Indo-Fijian students' behaviors, thinking, and reactions exhibited evaluative and social comparison attributes (e.g., comparing results with each other to see who came first).

From the mentioned briefing, it is not surprising perhaps to understand why there is an exclusion shown to the Indo-Fijian students at university. The Indigenous Fijian students and other Pacific Islanders, because of their historical and cultural upbringings, align more closely to the philosophical tenets of sharing and caring for others. Noticeably, we noted that Indo-Fijian students, in general, outperformed Indigenous Fijian and Pacific Islander students in quizzes, exams, etc. Could this significant difference be accounted for by the theoretical nature of the units? Is it simply a matter of memorization and rote learning, where Indo-Fijian students are better versed in this learning approach? This intuition and possibility is, of course, speculative and requires in-depth exploration and empirical validation.

Our explanation for the disparities in learning and achievements between the Indo-Fijian and Indigenous Fijian and other Pacific Islander students is more of a personal reflection. We reason that Indigenous Fijian students' historical and cultural philosophies could, in part, account for this inferior achievement level. Specifically, like other Pacific Islander students, Indigenous Fijians prioritize and place more value on social functioning and family ties. The notion of caring for others' well-being is more prevalent and well respected, thereby placing academia as a second or third choice and priority. Furthermore, we noted in our daily contact that there was a sense of easy going and laissez-faire behavior and thinking from many of the students. Different from the Indo-Fijian students, there was more "caring" and unreserved sharing that reflected altruistic and unselfish motives and acts. Receiving modest marks and grades for assignments, quizzes, etc. were not of a major concern, and many Indigenous Fijian and Pacific Islander students did not react negatively. In fact, from our point of view, the Indigenous Fijian students' personas and behaviors toward learning showed more emphasis of non-performance goal orientations.

The noting of our teaching and daily contact in this section may explain further the racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination that exist in higher education institutions. We do not believe, for instance, that physical appearance is a determinant of discriminatory feelings and behaviors. Rather, in our perceptions and understanding of the situations at hand, we contend the main conflict involved differences in historical backgrounds (e.g., the issue of landlessness), ideologies, and cultural beliefs and values. The Indo-Fijian students, as we mentioned previously, view academic qualifications as a medium that perpetuates social and economical vibrancy. The Indigenous Fijian students, in contrast, do not have this history of survival or upheaval to think about (e.g., “..... We could always, if need be, go back to our village and work on the land....”, as one student would say). This extreme dichotomy, in our view, is a key division, separating two worldviews in thinking: the Indo-Fijian students cannot understand how anyone could be so “laid back”, “uncaring”, and “lazy”, whereas the Indigenous Fijian students would consider their counterparts as being “selfish”, “self-serving”, “ruthless”, and “uncaring”.

Consequently, from the discussion above, it is not surprising to find a sense of discord between Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian students at university. Occasionally, there was evidence of friendly social relations between the two groups for some students; if anything, for the majority, prejudiced and discriminatory feelings and beliefs were expressed privately. Racism was more likely to manifest in the form of social and professional conduct, such as an Indigenous Fijian student choosing not to socialize with a group of Indo-Fijian students after class. On campus during lunch hours, for example, we often saw a group of Indo-Fijian students, or a group of Pacific Islander students socializing and interacting with each other. Personal relations were similarly observed, where inter-racial and inter-ethnic friendships between male and female undergraduates were few and far in between. Some students expressed to us that parents and family members would disapprove and have unfavorable views of such inter-racial or inter-ethnic friendships. This aspect in views and beliefs about personal relations is interesting and illustrates the extent of mistrust and seeded racism between the two main groups. In this sense, from our observations, the Indo-Fijian parents are more antagonistic of their daughters conversing with Indigenous Fijian boys, than their sons conversing with Indigenous Fijian girls. Interestingly, we saw on a number of occasions where Indo-Fijian boys wedded Indigenous Fijian girls. Some Indigenous Fijians would suggest that this is an exhibition of reversed psychological racism (e.g., “..... Sir, you never see an Indian girl marrying a Fijian boy....”, as one student would say), wherein Indo-Fijians refused to acknowledge the Indigenous Fijian culture, etc. We have to admit, in contrast, many Indigenous Fijian parents do not see inter-racial and inter-ethnic relationships as being of a major concern.

The *status quo* of Fiji is one of many characteristics, often portraying negative connotations for outsiders to view and interpret: prejudiced beliefs, ethnic and racial profiling, disunity, social conflict, and economic turmoil. What is of significance, from our point of view, is the disconnectedness that seems to permeate amongst the Indo-Fijians. The notion of identity, for example, is lacking and many Indo-Fijian students we spoke to had ambitious aspirations to migrate overseas for work, etc. Many of the Indo-Fijian students would not view themselves as being “Fijian” or “Pacific Islander”, but rather a separate entity. In fact, from our perspective and understanding, there was a sense of transiency in this matter, wherein Indo-Fijian students believed that they would eventually emigrate. The Indo-Fijian students’ personas indicated an absence or unwillingness to assimilate and enculturate into the Fijian society and, more importantly, the Pacific Islands way of life. Of course, it is one’s own democratic rights to think, believe, and act in a certain manner, but we could not help but noticed the separation in time and space between the Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian students.

#### 4. Our Approach to Facilitation

Cognizant of the strong beliefs and views that were held by both Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian students, we made concerted efforts to facilitate open dialogues, collaboration, and harmony between the two groups. On reflection now, we realize that in part our teaching resulted in positive psychology and enriched learning experiences for many of the students, in general. Predominantly, in our attempts to foster a sense of friendship, facilitative relationships, and effective learning, we engaged in both cognitive and non-cognitive psychological dimensions in our pedagogical strategies. These formal and informal practices were spontaneous, and executed to optimize student learning and other non-academic behavioral outcomes. In particular, we explore and discuss in this section the potency of psychosocial tenets that included the self, especially self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1997), and social discourse and interactions (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985).

##### 4.1 Personal Self-Efficacy: A Collective Approach

Personal self-efficacy, a major tenet of Bandura’s (1977, 1997) social cognitive theory, is concerned with “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments”

(Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Self-efficacy is a potent psychological construct, as it relates positively to human agency in both academic and non-academic settings (Pajares, 1996). There is a voluminous body of research, since the late 1970s that documents the potent effects of self-efficacy beliefs in achievement contexts (Pajares, 1996; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Schunk, 1995; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1997), assists individuals in the mobilization of their effort expenditures, resilience and persistence in the face of adverse situations. Furthermore, from a general perspective, the significance of self-efficacy lies in its governing of choices in life (e.g., choosing a mathematics-related career path), and thought patterns and emotional reactions. Individuals with a heightened sense of self-efficacy, for example, approach learning and difficult tasks, in particular, with feelings of serenity. A low sense of personal self-efficacy, in contrast, has a number of detrimental effects, such as the nurturing of stress, depression, and other maladaptive behaviors.

Self-efficacy, as a non-cognitive psychological aspect, relates positively with students' learning in achievement contexts (Bandura, 1997). There is extensive research in academia, attesting to the potency of personal self-efficacy and readers may wish to consult in-depth in a number of texts (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996, 1997; Schunk, 1995; Schunk, et al., 2008). In brief, for the context of the discussion in this article, personal self-efficacy is predictive of students' academic learning directly and indirectly, via other processes such as achievement goal orientations (e.g., performance-approach) and study processing strategies (Diseth, 2011; Fenollar, Román, & Cuestas, 2007; Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008; Pajares & Johnson, 1996; Phan, 2010a). The emphasis for us, in this regard, is that self-efficacy is an explanatory construct that may feature positively in educational settings.

In our pedagogical approach to teaching, we often made attempts to instill positive self-beliefs in students. This specificity entailed two main approaches: (i) verbal discourse, in accordance with Bandura's (1997) theoretical tenets of self-efficacy, and (ii) a cultivation of a learning environment that would instill positive self-beliefs. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory posits that individuals formulate and develop their self-efficacy beliefs for academic learning (e.g., "I feel I have the perceived competence to obtain an A<sup>+</sup> in the unit Psychology 101"), say, from four major sources of information: enactive learning experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states. Enactive learning experience, in terms of success and failure (e.g., "I often receive good marks for this unit and subject"), is an important antecedent, and predominantly assists students in their judgments of perceived competence. At university, for example, we would expect students to rely and gauge more from their own learning experiences, subject to mastery and/or evaluative criteria to form self-efficacy judgments. Vicarious learning experience, in the forms of social comparison and role modeling, may also influence students' self-efficacy beliefs. Verbal persuasion is of lesser importance, and emphasizes primarily on evaluative and attributional feedback expended by others (e.g., "You're doing very well, Arti; keep up the good work"). Emotional and physiological states engage students to judge their capability, strength and vulnerability to dysfunction.

Our teaching practices often reflected a desire to bring students together. In particular, our efforts were directed at the creation and sustaining of a classroom milieu that was receptive of positive self-beliefs, social dialogues, and interactions. We focused on the cultivation of students' self-efficacy beliefs toward learning and, more importantly, their relations with others, via means of verbal discourse. Periodically, in tutorial classes, we would provide timely feedbacks (e.g., This is really good effort; I'm pretty pleased to see your group is doing well") and conversed with students to assist them in their learning. We noticed that, in many cases, students continued to rely on this verbal practice in their learning. Their personas and behaviors reflected a sense of dependency and, more importantly, supported our previous theoretical contention pertaining to cultural customs, beliefs, and values. For the Indigenous Fijian and Pacific Islander students, for example, there was the indication of respect shown, such as asking for guidance and clarification, but never questioning us in our explanations or answers. In group work, many of the students remained quite in our presence, and yet became relaxed and carefree in our absence. For the Indo-Fijian students, in contrast, the reliance on verbal discourse (e.g., explanation of a topical theme) was more deliberate, entailing the taking in of information for their own purposes and motives (e.g., obtaining a good mark for the next assignment task).

In terms of self-beliefs for academic learning, especially personal self-efficacy, our observations indicated some interesting points. What we noticed, in particular, was the difference in calibration or accuracy of one's own judgments of perceived competence (Pajares, 1996) between the two groups of students. The Indigenous Fijian students were more inaccurate and quite often, misjudged their own capabilities. They would, for instance, express heightened self-efficacy beliefs or self-confidence (e.g., "Sir, I have studied and I know I will do well; I've gone through all my notes, and everything is fine", as one student would say), but yet performed quite poor

in their quizzes, assignment tasks, etc. This inaccuracy facet is characteristically unique and, in our view, requires further in-depth examination and research development. In hindsight, this negative bias in self-efficacy or confidence judgments is perplexing and we query whether this collective “behavior” is, any way, related to the Indigenous Fijian culture. Is it possible, for instance, that indifferent and unworried attitudes in articulation and reporting of self-beliefs reflect one’s own historical and cultural upbringing? The Indigenous Fijian customary upbringing connotes a sense of *laissez-faire* standpoint, wherein external forces such as a need to excel academically do not make a major contribution.

The Indo-Fijian students, we found, were more accurate in their dispositions of self-efficacy beliefs. Unlike the Indigenous Fijian and other Pacific Islander students, many Indo-Fijians were more biased, negatively, in their judgments of self-efficacy, and this (e.g., “Sir, I’m very nervous and feel I haven’t studied; It was hard and I don’t think I’ve passed, as one student would say) reflected a sense of cautiousness. Often, in many cases, the Indo-Fijian students achieved exceptionally well and outperformed their Indigenous Fijian and Pacific Islander counterparts. We believe that this methodological approach is, similarly, an indication of their historical upbringing and cultural attributes, where the years of uncertainties and insecurities could have provided a premise for many to behave self-consciously and unpretentiously.

In our daily teaching and instructional practices (e.g., assessment tasks), we also made concerted efforts to engage students in social interactions and collaboration. Traditional practices instilled a set of ideologies and beliefs, such as the accentuation of passiveness, respect, and utmost quietness in the presence of authority figures (Phan, 2010b; Phan, Maebuta, & Dorovolomo, 2010). Apart from this, the issues of prejudice and biased feelings that we mentioned previously also negate active conversational dialogues and interactions. This social dysfunctioning, we believe, reflected disunity, clash of cultures, and nonconformity in thinking and behaviors. Consequently, to foster enriched experiences and positive interactions between students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, we articulated and developed assessment tasks (weekly tasks) that were done in groups of 6 – 7. The composition of each group consisted of different genders and cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and there was no choice in this matter. This pedagogical approach apart from achieving academic outcomes (e.g., understanding of a weekly topic), entailed a development of social skills for students. More importantly, we encouraged this group work in order to enhance students’ attitudes and feelings toward others.

Over the course of time, we noticed that Indigenous Fijian, Indo-Fijian, and other Pacific Islander students were more open-minded and tolerant of each other. With group assignments that were done each week, we encouraged students to discuss their own learning and other related experiences and include these in their answers of the questions (e.g., “Make sure when you discuss these questions within your group that you draw in your personal experiences”). Standing back and listening to the conversations, we could see from the facial expressions and body language that students were engrossed with each other’s recall of experience, answer, etc. There were prompting questions from some group members, and others took opportunities to clarify, etc. In some cases, students were distracted and engaged in other non-academic conversations about daily events (e.g., the latest movie at the cinema), personal lives (e.g., what is happening in Ashika’s family), and contemporary issues (e.g., the latest politics in Fiji). We did not mind this off-topic discussion, as it served well to bind all students together. One notable aspect that we focused on was Bandura’s (1997) theoretical tenets pertaining to collective self-efficacy, defined as “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). Collectivism, in our view, is an important theoretical tenet that may reflect and indicate the nature and personal and cultural characteristics of Indigenous Fijians and Pacific Islanders. The notion of sharing and caring for others’ well-being is an “embedded” attribute that reflects, in part, the Fijian society, especially in rural and remote areas. Consequently, we also made attempts to cultivate an enriched classroom climate that reflected transparency, academic freedom, and positive dynamics for students to experience and converse. Students, for example, were never reproached for incorrect answers or tangential, irrelevant discussions.

Verbal discourse, including reflective (e.g., “Recall what you all said last time in your discussion, and it was excellent; how do you this that response fits in for this section?”) and attributional (e.g., “I was really impressed with this group’s response; it was an excellent collective effort...”) feedbacks were used to stimulate and enhance students’ self-efficacy beliefs, collectively, for academic learning. Weekly assessment tasks (e.g., reading response task of a topical theme) that emphasized on common learning objectives and outcomes (e.g., acquired an understanding of a weekly topic (e.g., Vygotsky’s theoretical tenets) and obtaining a group mark) for attainment by the group were of significance, especially in relation to group members’ capabilities to converse and work with each other. Instilling a heightened sense of collective self-efficacy (e.g., “I feel pretty confident that we all, in this group, have the capability to achieve a good mark for this weekly assessment task”) was

pivotal, as it helped students to identify and affiliate to a group identity. We continuously encouraged students to feel belonged, as we believe this feeling of acceptance and affiliation of group identity (e.g., "You may all want to go off somewhere quite and work on this task; spend some time together to get to know each other") would act as an important antecedent of collective self-efficacy.

Commonalities (e.g., living in the same town), shared interests (e.g., finding out and reading about historical events), likings (e.g., going fishing on Saturdays), etc., served as attributes to bond students together with a sense of belongingness. We observed, on many occasions, students in groups would express shared beliefs (e.g., the need to eradicate poverty), views, and opinions (e.g., education should be offered to everyone, disregard of genders, race, etc.) that reflected their united front. This sharing of views, ideas, etc., also helped reinforce students' collective self-efficacy beliefs and interdependency for learning. Our undertaking in this matter also entailed social dialogues that emphasized on students' collective self-efficacy beliefs toward positive attitudes and respect for others (e.g., "I feel confident and positive that I share similar values and attitudes for others in my group, disregard of their differences").

The enhancement of non-academic outcomes, such as tolerance and positive attitudes for others was quite prominent in our postgraduate units. During the summer period, we would travel to other regions and participated in intensive school teaching. These units (e.g., Advanced Research Methods) had small student enrolment numbers, and consisted of mainly principals, head teachers, and teachers who wished to pursue higher education degree awards. Again, similar to students in undergraduate units and courses, the ethnic composition was mixed (e.g., Indigenous Fijians, Indo-Fijians). Differently, however, many of the students who attended these intensive schools were matured and were from non-urban areas. Their personas and interactions reflected more accommodating attitudes, tolerance, and viewpoints about others. After official hours, we were often invited to partake in *talanoa* sessions at one of the students' dwelling or, in some cases, at the actual teaching center where the intensive school was held. These talanoa sessions are a customary practice for Fiji, wherein both men and women gather in groups to drink the local drink, *kava*, and to take part in talking, discussion, etc. (Sharma, 2000). For us, in particular, this was an informal and intimate event, and enabled us to know more about students' thinking, perspectives, and learning.

Our talanoa sessions, often held four to five times per week, involved discussions of issues, ranging from lecture clarification to story telling and personal recall of childhood and learning experiences (e.g., a student recalling his/her previous primary school learning experience in a village school). Both Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian students took part in these talanoa sessions, often sitting side-by-side and conversing freely without any prejudiced notion or cautions. We observed the significance of cognitive maturity and personal experience and how these, in combination, influenced students' willingness to interact proactively without biased presumptions or preconditions. Students were enthusiastic and talked and discussed a wide range of contemporary and education issues (e.g., the latest statistical figures in relation to Year 12 results) without our prompting or encouragement. One aspect that we noticed was the collective keenness and self-efficacy shown by students in relation to their postgraduate studies, professional growth, and future time prospects. The latter emphasis, in hindsight, is interesting and relates closely to the psychological theory of future time perspective (FTP)(De Volder & Lens, 1982; Lens, Simons, & Dewitte, 2002; Mehta, Sundberg, Rohila, & Tyler, 1972; Seijts, 1998).

The FTP theory (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007; McInerney, 2004; Vázquez & Rapetti, 2006) posits the notion that one's sense of purpose for the future serves as a motivational force for individuals to engage in activities and tasks (e.g., one's own volition, for example, to find out more about the operational nature and functioning of Green Peace) that are perceived as being instrumental for future outcomes (Phan, 2009a). Consequently, as previous research has shown (e.g., Andriessen, Phalet, & Lens, 2006; Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007; Simons, Dewitte, & Lens, 2004), individuals' cognitive abilities to anticipate in both immediate and long-term outcomes of tasks in a distant future relate positively to various cognitive, motivational, and performance measures. Anticipation of a positive future, for example, assists an individual to plan, participate, and accomplish personal goals and objectives (e.g., obtain a grade point average of a B) that may then contribute quality attributes to his/her professional development. When we introduced, initiated, or discussed issues that were of interests for professional growth (e.g., the importance of having a doctorate in the workplace), both Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian postgraduate students took part in this discussion readily. There was a heightened sense of social confidence and self-efficacy shown by these students, and their exchange reflected tolerance and compassionate attitudes.

A talanoa session, similar to weekly group work with undergraduate students, is instrumental for interactions and social dialogues. This informal gathering facilitates closeness and tolerance, and provides a basis for students to feel confident and self-efficacious towards social interaction with others who may have dissimilar interests,

personal beliefs, values, etc. Consonant with Bandura's (1997) theoretical tenets of personal self-efficacy, for example, this concept of talanoa may yield relevant and potent information for cognitive appraisals (e.g., one's own reflection and justification of previous thinking and action (e.g., a biased view of Indo-Fijians)) and other related exploits. Sharing one's own personal experience of success or overwhelming despondency, say, may transcend a sense of respect, empathy, or role model for imitating and learning.

#### *4.2 Final Analysis: Our Thoughts*

From the above account, we contend that it is feasible and plausible to unite both Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian students. The positioning of discontent and disunity noted in the preceding sections is not fixed, but rather subject to contextualized changes. Our noting of undergraduate and postgraduate students at university exemplifies some notable strategies that could be used to facilitate harmonious relations in unsettled areas. We do not believe, drawing from our reflection and personal account that issues pertaining to conflicts and disunity are definitive and unfixed. Rather, with resilience and effort, we maintain that opportunities for ongoing dialogues may instil positive attitudinal changes in people. Collective self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), for example, is an important psychological feat that may bring together different racial and ethnic groups.

Both Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian students share a bond in terms of previous and ongoing experience of poverty, family hardship, and social instability. This sheer tenacity of deprivation also serves as a motivation for change. We realize that envision and hope for a prospective future (e.g., obtaining academic qualifications) may enable students from all walks of life to share a common cause. Our role in this matter was relatively uncomplicated, involving the facilitation of a context that would embolden a dream for change. Structured pedagogical strategies and instructional practices, for example, were shown to provide a cornerstone for positive interactions and effective learning, disregard of students' differences in ethnicity, social class, political affiliation, etc. To this end, we were able to identify and bring to students' attention the issues of future uncertainties, financial insecurities and, to a certain degree, sociopolitical unrest for discussion. These issues were of significance, illuminating to students the complexities of a society that are outside of their realm of control. The sharing of personal and professional experiences (e.g., financial limitation of a family), as we encouraged in our dialogues, enabled these students to form a sense of a collective self-efficacy (e.g., "I'm glad there are others like me; we're not alone in this feeling of not knowing what to do", as one student would say), which in turn enculturated a common identity.

Our final positioning in this matter is that there is a myriad of thoughts, activities, and actions for serious consideration. Like Fiji, other unsettling places elsewhere may integrate both psychological (e.g., personal self-efficacy beliefs) and social (e.g., one's own historical origin) components in their pursuit of peace building, academic excellence, etc. From a psychological point of view, as we have discussed in this article, there is credence for researchers to instill and assist in the heightening of collective self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and confidence towards localizing and confronting intense and controversial issues (e.g., is there a need for us to discriminate an ethnic group?) for change. By means of thoughtful negotiations and positive dialogues, we may feel efficacious in our understanding and resolution some of the issues and situations at hand. This methodological and theoretical approach may subsequently espouse other considerations, such as the development and/or revision of national curriculum and policies.

### **5. Conclusion**

This article is a personal reflective discourse that scoped our teaching and research development over the course of a few years in a higher education institution. We focused on the issues that are of concern, notably, the ongoing racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination experienced by many in the Republic of Fiji Islands. The historical and sociocultural milieus of the country, in part, created the tension and complexities that have been perpetuated throughout the decades. Fiji is rather unique in her social, cultural, and political compositions, and has experienced a number of turmoil, such as the three military coup d'états that have taken place since 1987. This political and social imposition is also exacerbated by existing contemporaries, such as the impasse of financial insecurities, sociopolitical instability, and continuous division between the two major ethnic groups. The constant prejudiced and discriminatory views held, and unwillingness to engage proactively with each other often instill dislike, unprofessionalism, and biases that consequently lead to disunity, intolerance, and disharmony.

In the course of our teaching and research development, we were able to document our professional experiences with teaching students and how our pedagogical strategies assisted, in part, the facilitation of positive psychology and harmony. The facilitation of friendship, cooperation, and understanding for us involved the inclusion of Bandura's (1997) theoretical orientation of personal self-efficacy, and our undertaking to foster and

enhance a positive, dynamic classroom milieu. The argument we have made in this article contends there are difficulties and limitations that deter the flourishing of constructive dialogues and positive relations between Fijians of different racial and ethnic groups. The perpetuation of financial insecurities and socio-political instability of Fiji has left many Fijians, both Indigenous and Indo-Fijians, to feel disenchanted that there is no sense of hope. Our positioning, from the perspective of academia, entails that psychosocial facets relating to teaching may assist us in conflict resolution, and the enhancement in relationships between students.

The scoping of our reflections has provided a theoretical premise for consideration of further conceptualization and research development. The personal account of our teaching and research journey in Fiji, although enriched and as often highlighted in qualitative research (Esterberg, 2002; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Merriam, 1998), is limited in a number of caveats and parameters. Perhaps most poignant, from our point of view, is the unstructured methodological approach that was used in this study. We suggest that continuing research considers other structured methodological approaches, qualitative or quantitative, in this examination and pursuit of unity, harmony, and positive psychology and relations between individuals. More empirical grounding is needed, for example, to validate and clarify the extent to which psychosocial facets (e.g., attributional beliefs) may contribute or shape individuals' relations within social and unsettling settings. This person-context relationship in conflict resolution and peace building may involve the use of multilevel data and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM)(Little, 2000; MacCallum, Kim, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1997; Marsh, Martin, & Cheng, 2008; Skrondal & Rabe-Hesketh, 2004). This complex statistical technique may provide enriched empirical grounding, especially in relation to the discerning and contextualized nature of the surroundings between regions, countries, and individuals, etc. Quantitatively, for example, it would be of considerable interest for us to explore and ascertain possible differences in perceptions and self-efficacy beliefs, say, between individuals living in different geographical locations. How do Indigenous individuals from the rural areas in the Northern Division differ from those in urbanized areas in terms of perceptions of unity? In a statewide jurisdiction system, we could also extend to include a multilevel analysis that may discern varying patterns in perceptions and favorable-unfavorable views of others' ethnic, religious and/or sociocultural differences.

From a longitudinal perspective, taking into consideration our reflection of prior professional development, it would be insightful for us to explore and identify the trajectories of individuals' personal experiences pertaining to prejudicial imposition, conflict, and disunity. In this analysis, from a methodological approach, the use of latent growth modeling (LGM)(Bollen & Curran, 2006; Hancock & Lawrence, 2006; McArdle & Nesselroade, 2003) may shed enriched information pertaining to, say, the change and instability of reactions and behaviors that coincide with direct confrontation and experience of conflict and disunity. One could, similarly, consider the impact of governmental policies and/or community participation on developmental trajectories of self-beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy) and other related processes.

Similarly, it would be an interesting feat for researchers to expand and explore other war-torn places and unsettled regions. Religious and ethnic tension may often dictate how people behave and act. Extreme beliefs and behaviors, for example, may reflect feelings of despair, insecurity, and hopelessness. The inclusion and implementation of psychosocial dimensions, such as the use of verbal discourse and supportive social milieu may stimulate and enhance individuals' sense of confidence and self-efficacy to organize and execute courses of action (e.g., resilience and effort expenditure) for positive and constructive attainments (e.g., adopting adaptive behaviors such as tolerance towards others). One notable outcome, arising from this concerted effort, is an achievement of reconciliation and understanding between people. Another major key theoretical orientation that may account and explain individuals' ongoing experiences and resolution is future time perspective (FTP)(Lens, et al., 2002; Mehta, et al., 1972; Seijts, 1998), defined as individuals' cognitive ability to anticipate both the immediate and long-term outcomes of tasks in a distant future (Andriessen, et al., 2006; De Volder & Lens, 1982). What does the future hold, collectively, for a minority group of individuals who may share similar attributes and negative experiences (e.g., as discussed previously, the Indo-Fijians) in a society? How does the encouragement of a positive anticipation for the future (e.g., persist to work together towards harmony) assist and facilitate in a constructive dialogue between all groups? These questions, a premise for continuing research development, entail the use and teaching of FTP tenets to understand and accommodate experiences and human behavior that relate to discrimination, prejudice, and disunity. By situating the future as being positive and a possibility, one could in fact cognitively transform individuals to view and think things differently.

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## Notes

Note 1. This is a personal account of our own professional experiences in Fiji, and everyone may not share the issues and views that have been identified in this article. We reserve our views, beliefs, and judgments for the context of this article only. The positioning outlined and discussed in this article is solely for the purpose of academic dialogues and scholarly contribution for continuing research development.

Note 2. For confidentiality, we shall not make reference to the actual university name.