"Make Me Be Good":
Reform Strategies for the Islands

The Need for Reform

The summons to reform is very much in the air these days. Certainly since the amended Compact went into effect in 2004, we've heard the call almost incessantly. The subject is raised in foreign embassies, by donors, by big-name financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and most of all by Interior Department's Office of Insular Affairs (OIA). Everything seems to need reform of some kind. The public utilities of the Freely Associated States were the target of reform in a recent workshop held in Honolulu. But focus quickly tends to narrow on one or two of the most urgent needs. Just within the past two months I've been asked several times for thoughts on what can be done to reform Chuuk's public education system. Since the improvement of the public schools in Chuuk seems to be at the top of many people's priority list, this might make a good case study to illustrate a few of my own thoughts on how reform might best be implemented in the islands.

To our friends from Chuuk who might feel that this is just another cheap shot at a state clearly having its problems, I ask you to bear in mind that not every public discussion of a problem is meant to discredit the state and its people. If we hope to fix the problem, we must first admit to it. Remedies will require broad discussion, not just to ensure they are the best available, but to win the popular support they will need if they are to work. Besides, many of the problems discussed in this article are not unique to Chuuk; they are shared more widely by other entities than the latter might care to admit. This article, in fact, is as much about reform movements in general as it is about Chuuk's public school reform. What are the strategies that might work? How can they be effectively implemented?

Problems in Chuuk's Public Education

The decline in the Chuuk public school system has been in evidence for several years now, but the downward spiral seems to have accelerated recently. During the 1990s, Chuuk High School had an average pass rate of 5% on the COM-FSM entrance test, compared with a pass rate of between 40% and 50% for the public high schools in the other states. The product that Chuuk's public elementary schools, with a few notable exceptions, were putting out was below par, and by the end of high school Chuukese students were even further behind their peers in other states.

For years people have pointed out the poor condition of the school facilities–the leaky roofs, broken windows and torn screens, the shabby condition of the classrooms, and the lack of clean water and toilets–but this is merely scratching the surface. The never-ending list with landowners over the lease arrangements for the land on which the village school is built has led to landowners shutting down schools at whim. There are schools that have been closed down for months at a time, sometimes because of disagreements with landowners, but often because the roofs leak and the children get drenched in rain showers or must sit in puddles on the floor.

The run-down facilities would seem to be a symptom rather than the cause of the educational

malaise. In recent years, people have been hired on as teachers because of political pressure–often without credentials, but more importantly without any real interest in teaching. Failed teachers are often forced on the state education department, thus lowering morale even more. One school has been closed for an entire year even though teachers are still getting paid. Teacher attendance, while officially reported at 97%, is far lower than this, as everyone in the communities and at the state education department well know. Yet, no accurate record of teacher attendance can be maintained, since teachers who do not show up for work are not reported for their absences. Meanwhile, good teachers are understandably demoralized by this course of events. Some simply shrug and take the attitude: "If the teachers who never show up are getting paid, why should I come to teach every day?"

None of this is to deny that there are still some good schools and highly motivated teachers who do what they can to help their students against all odds. Their individual efforts are laudable. Overall, however, public education in Chuuk is faced with systemic problems that can not be resolved simply by the goodwill of a few heroes. Public education in Chuuk is being held hostage by landowners who close down schools, by teachers who don't teach, and by those with political influence who force relatives on the department to get a paycheck. It is being undermined by principals and supervisors who can't bring themselves to report any of this to authorities for fear of the storms that will hit when no-show teachers are docked for failing to show up.

If this brief analysis is accurate, the education problem in Chuuk cannot be corrected by most of the measures that are usually discussed today. Insistence on teacher certification makes little sense when the problem is to get teachers, certified or not, into the classroom. Textbooks won't do much good unless class is being conducted so that teachers actually use these materials. Management plans–another earnest suggestion offered by well-intentioned observers–are to be found in abundance. Strategic education plans were written in 2001 and 2005, and a third plan was drawn up in 2007 to operationalize the first two. To date none have been effectively implemented. Shall we now design yet another strategic plan that will implement the 2007 plan, so that it in turn might put into effect the two earlier plans? As we ponder such questions, young Chuukese are losing ground in the competitive race that formal education has become.

Options for Reform

The first option is to introduce structural reforms from the top down. If there is a systemic problem, then the structure must be overhauled. Legislation must be enacted to ensure that there are no legal loopholes: principals will be required to submit accurate teacher attendance records, and only teachers who put in their full hours will be paid. The Western approach is to make it difficult for persons not to comply with the law by legislating strict procedures and imposing harsh penalties, including fines and imprisonment, for failure to observe the law. The assumption is that once the law is enacted and the procedures are right, positive change will follow.

All of this is well and good, but Chuuk has such laws on the books. The problem is not the legislation, but the enforcement of this legislation. The strictest laws and the most severe penalties will carry no weight unless they are enforced. The effectiveness of structural change, therefore, is dependent on what devices will be used to ensure the enforcement of the regulations

and procedures.

If the present education administration won't implement the procedures needed to improve the schools, the first impulse is to find another that will. The easiest way to carry out such changes is to replace the management team with another one that is better trained, more highly motivated, and immune to the social pressures that are put on island administrators. This may often translate into "sending in the Marines"–in other words, replacing the top echelon of the education administration with Americans (or other outsiders) who will do the job that local people can't bring themselves to do.

The second option, a softer and gentler one, is to take the matter to the grassroots and have them create a stir that will fix things. When structural changes aren't implemented and the government falters, perhaps the people will take up the cry for reform, demanding out of self-interest what the government is denying them. This approach has much to recommend it; there is something fair-minded, even noble about it. We find peasant revolutions, grassroots movements, and populist causes interspersed in the histories of many nations. Indeed, there is a widespread belief that all lasting reform happens this way–or at least *should* happen this way.

One variation on this approach is to use modeling as a means of engendering reform. The theory is that if we present one or two good examples of effective services, others will be attracted to imitate their successes. Do we wish to change school performance? We might start by showing what a good school can accomplish, thus demonstrating the secret of successful management, and soon others will follow. If people want to truly have better education for their children but just don't know how to get around the obstacles, this should do it. A groundswell will follow, and the bottom up approach to reform will be justified. This, at any rate, is our fond hope.

Attempts at Chuuk Public Education Reform

The grassroots approach has been attempted in Chuuk at different times. Three years ago MicSem worked with women's groups, urging them to begin cleaning up the schools and lobbying with their legislative representatives for repairs or to help out with other needs. The hope was that they would gradually assume ownership of the village schools. The women in some places did help for a while, but the effort slowly died out. Why? Was it the discouragement they felt at nibbling around the edges but not being able to attack the major problems that the schools faced? Was it the insurmountable odds they faced in taking on the more critical issues than keeping the grass cut or the school grounds clean? How were they going to get the teachers to come on time and stay all day long? They were Chuukese women, a force to be reckoned with for sure, but still subject to the same social pressure as anyone else. They faced a daunting task and were unable to bring about the reforms we had hoped they might advance.

We also tried modeling schools. In the Schools page on our MicSem website, we offered a glimpse of each public school–photos showing the condition of the school and an assessment of some of the key physical factors (toilet and water supply, security screening, furniture, storage for school materials, etc). The idea was to give people a look at the good schools, in the hope that they might be inspired by the examples, even as we hoped to shame the poorer schools into

improving. Predictably, some education officials, annoyed at the publicity they were receiving, saw this as a way of discrediting their schools and heaping scorn on those places unfortunate enough to have poorer quality schools. Although it is difficult to weigh the long-term effects of such efforts, modeling does not seem to have resulted in the desired changes in public education in Chuuk.

There have been a number of reform attempts from top down as well. One such attempt took place in summer 2007 when the Director of Xavier High School brought together over 30 elementary school principals for a three-week workshop to develop a clear educational vision and good leadership practices. Despite the benefits of the workshop, principals were sent home to do the best they could in a setting that discouraged real reform.

Most of the reform attempts over the past decade have resulted in management plans designed to lead Chuuk's public school system out of the educational wilderness. However well-designed these plans along with the strategies they endorsed, they remain unimplemented, as was noted above. Laws need to be enforced if there is any hope that they will change behavior. Plans need to be implemented if they are to make a difference. Yet, the prevailing assumption behind these management plans seems to have been that island leaders needed to be enlightened. If only they had a management plan that might chart a course for them, they would eagerly seize it and charge happily into a future that is bright with promise. My own experience suggests that this is anything but the case. Government leaders, department heads and others tasked with managing programs are not empty-headed individuals, bereft of ideas and without any vision for the future. They are usually persons quite capable of understanding the benefits of plans, often enough even capable of drawing up such plans themselves. If they fail to execute reasonable plans for reform, it may be because these plans fail to take account of countervailing forces. Perhaps what leaders need is not so much enlightenment as protection.

As a young teacher at Xavier High School years ago, I noticed that whenever there was a school problem, students would invariably propose that the administration make a law–as if that would settle the whole problem. It was as if they thought that somehow everyone would become virtuous: students would turn away from the can of cold beer being offered to them with a polite refusal as if the law had transformed thirsty teenagers seeking a little excitement into cherubs. "Make us be good by making a law" was the way the thinking went–at least as I understood it at that time. Later I came to understand that the students were not as naive as all that. They were capable of discerning what they ought to do; they also recognized the limits of laws alone to govern conduct. They were pleading for something to compel them to follow their better instincts, when they knew very well that other forces–like peer pressure–would put a huge burden on them to act otherwise. Their plea was for a countervailing force strong enough to keep them from swerving off the path of virtue. If they could not count on one of their teachers to lay a heavy hand on them as they reached for their beer, at least they could appeal to a school regulation and the threat of expulsion when trying to explain to fellow students why they could not join the fun.

We can depend on the virtue and good intentions of people to do the right thing, or we can gain a choke hold on people to ensure their cooperation. My years in the ministry have taught me how important it is to be able to count on good intentions, but my years as a high school teacher and

administrator have taught me how unrealistic it is to depend on good intentions alone. Good intentions may be a necessary beginning, but much more is needed in the long run.

The Missing Element in Reform

The Xavier students I taught decades ago were onto something when they pleaded "Make me be good." Yet, today many of us continue to put our confidence in plans, even when we suspect all along that it would take extraordinary virtue to put these into practice. Individuals might subscribe to the ideal of good education and swear with some sincerity that they would do everything to support it. But put them in the position of trying to secure a position for a nephew or brother who badly needs a job and watch what happens. It's not that these people don't care at all about education; it's just that sometimes the personal stakes can become so high that they trump high-minded principles about what education should be. At times like that, it is important that there be a strategy to force them to submit to their highest principles.

Such a strategy may be self-imposed, as was the case among prominent Chuukese businessmen during the 1970s. At that time many local businessmen with growing operations, fueled by the expanding US subsidies and the burgeoning government payroll in the islands, found themselves in a difficult situation. As islanders who were viewed as "rich" by their families, they found themselves faced with a dilemma. Their families and relatives would approach them for help–in the form of jobs at times, or more often for goods they hoped to obtain from the businessmen's own stores. To refuse would have meant being regarded as insensitive to the needs of their relatives, while to comply would have imperilled their growing businesses. To escape this quandary, several of the local entrepreneurs hired expatriate managers, often former Peace Corps volunteers, to manage their businesses for them. It was not so much the accounting and managerial skills these young expatriates offered that made them so helpful, for most had no business degrees or previous managerial experience. It was something even more important: they insulated the owners from the day to day decisions in the management of their stores. Henceforth, when a relative made a demand on the owner, he could send them on to his manager, who was hired precisely in order to firewall the owner from the cascade of requests such as these that might otherwise undermine the business. The manager's most important function, then, was to insulate his employer from some of the social pressure that might prevent him from making sound business decisions.

Outside consultants would most likely have offered Chuukese entrepreneurs a business plan when what they really needed was something very different. Plans of any sort–business plans or national development plans–don't count for much when insulation from family and community pressure is what's needed. A business plan is not the answer when the real obstacles to good management are the pressure to provide an income for relatives regardless of what they can contribute, the temptation to overlook performance problems because of personal ties to the employee, or plain old lethargy in the work force.

Xavier students seem to have understood this years ago even if they couldn't quite formulate it, and Chuukese businessmen adopted a strategy to deal with such pressure three or four decades ago. How could we have missed this as an essential element in good governance and delivery of public services?

Back to the Education Problem

"Management is the problem," one former ADB official speaking about infrastructure problems told us recently, "and good management is the answer." His remark represents what seems to be conventional wisdom on the matter: just be sure to adopt good policy and get the right person for the job. The "right person" presumably has the management training and the attitudes needed to do the job. But is there such a thing as the "right person" when it comes to managing education in Chuuk? Are there untapped heroes out there, persons so utterly selfless and committed to the task that they are prepared to accept any abuse as part of the price of putting into place a good education system? Is it realistic to expect that anyone can swim against the current so strongly as to implement the reforms needed in Chuuk?

Is Chuuk's public education suffering today because no one in the education office–or in the general population, for that matter–has the slightest interest in improving the schools? Or is it because no one has the clout to institute the reforms needed to change course direction, bucking the tide of self-interest that blocks such reforms? I would imagine that there are thousands of Chuukese who would welcome the reforms if they were forced on people. Is it too much to believe that these people might join the chorus "Make us be good" if the same rules were laid down impartially on everyone everywhere in the state?

In the earliest years of the 20th century, as Germany began to extend its rule over the islands, it sent a warship into Chuuk Lagoon to demand an end of local warfare. When the commander of the ship announced that all Chuukese were to turn in their guns, people who had been known for their ferocious inter-island warfare complied and brought their weapons to the ship. For years I was puzzled by the readiness of people to submit to the handful of German troops who were demanding they surrender their firearms. In time, however, I began to realize that the local people were turning to a foreign power to make and enforce the rules that they themselves could not make and enforce. As a result, they were able to enjoy the peace that nearly everyone dearly wanted, no matter how strongly a few village warriors might have thumped their chests. Is it possible that people in Chuuk today would willingly turn to outsiders for a solution of the problems that bedevil their education system just as they did a century ago in order to achieve a peace that none had the power to bring about on their own?

This is not to propose a foreign takeover of the Chuuk education system today. There's no need to do so. The Germans never really assumed control in Chuuk in the early 20th century after they collected the weapons. In fact, there never was a resident district officer, nor were any troops ever stationed there. The Germans merely provided a convenient excuse for people to turn in their weapons and put an end to the warfare that was exhausting their society. The Germans, like those expatriate store managers and the Xavier rule book, were symbols of authority to which people could point to explain why they were doing what they would have liked to do all along. In effect, they insulated people from the strong social pressure to continue bad practices and block reform.

Letting the Outsider Take the Blame

It should come as no surprise that people in a small, tightly bound society may need someone to blame when they try to depart from standard practice and implement reforms of any kind. This might involve cutting off power for someone who has not paid his bills in months. It could be insisting that store owners pay their import taxes before offloading shipments. It might be refusing to hire a prospective teacher that the school does not really need. In such cases, it's handy to be able to say: "The devil made me do it," even as all fingers point to the "Foreign Devil" with his stern white face. This is the principle of insulation at work.

An expatriate can perform multiple functions at the same time: buffering the local administrator educating him on what needs to be done to improve the system, and coaching him on how to get around the political pitfalls that this will often entail. This "foreign devil" figure needs to be immune from the social and political pressures that might be exerted on a local decision-maker. Like the young Americans that store owners once hired to manage their businesses, he should be someone who doesn't owe favors and is free to say no when he must in order to spare his boss the blame.

But if these figures are to have an educational impact as well, it is important that they be kept close at hand. Ideally, they should be training their boss and the public at the same time. They can offer counsel to their boss not just on management procedures, but on some of the approaches that could make policy decisions politically acceptable. Meanwhile, they are buying time for public education, deflecting public pressure long enough so that people in the community get accustomed to what at first seem to be harsh procedures and begin to experience for themselves the pay-off of a more forward-looking policy.

This strategy has been institutionalized in the Palau Constitution, which provides for a Special Prosecutor to dig up and bring to trial misdeeds of government officials that would otherwise remain unpunished. The position, naturally, has always been filled by a foreigner. How could a Palauan possibly perform this job and preserve normal social ties in the island community? The poor soul who served in this position might not have been the most popular person on island, but he played a necessary role: he enforced regulations evenhandedly upon all, but in such a way that none of the government officials themselves had to bear the blame for the damage he did. In recent months, however, the person occupying this position was forced out–perhaps for very justifiable reasons. But, as part of the backlash, the Palau Congress has proposed new legislation that would give it control of the appointment process for this office. This, of course, would make the Special Prosecutor accountable to the very parties over which he is expected to exercise control and probably render the office ineffective.

When I presented this strategy at a recent utilities conference in Hawaii, some objected to it as a cop-out. "We are all educated adults. We should be able to withstand public pressure and do the right thing." Perhaps so, but this statement was made by an elected leader who had watched his own legislature cave in to public pressure just a year ago as it drastically lowered the rates for power, thus wiping out a $6 million reserve fund that had once made his state the model for the region. It may be that some individuals in some departments in some governments are up to the task, but it would be foolish to count on it happening regularly. Even I, an American who is generally looked upon as strong-minded, regularly resort to such cover in the office; I send people with requests for MicSem products to other staff members to collect fees for material I

myself am reluctant to charge for.

Missed Opportunities

If the US had taken note of this strategy at the beginning of Compact 2, it might have positioned its OIA personnel more strategically–that is, in Micronesia where they could have provided cover for local administrators even as they cemented alliances with them. Eventually, as it turned out, the US was forced to do this anyway, but at additional expense and only after one train wreck followed another. To control the runaway budget deficits in Chuuk, the US was obliged to open an independent Compact Funds vetting office in Chuuk and to place expatriates in the Finance Department of that state to ensure that strict procedures were followed for allocation of funds and cutting checks. The cost, in terms of money and goodwill, would have been greatly reduced if the US had utilized this strategy from the outset.

This is not to say that the fault lies only with the US. If Chuuk administrators had taken the trouble to examine their own history, they might have better understood the need to make peace with their adversaries and look for common ground. If they had muted their criticism of a "takeover" by the FSM National Government and "infringement on national sovereignty" by the US Interior Department, they might have struck a working relationship that could have achieved what both parties set out to do. There was a failure to understand that OIA could be a valuable ally–the equivalent of those expatriate business managers in the 1970s. In this case, the political "enemy" might have been useful as a scapegoat even while serving the best interests of the state.

Chuukese voters will forever request favors for family members–an easy job for a relative close to retirement, a little bit more money from the government for their landlease, a paid medical leave that would help pay the costs of referral in Hawaii. None of these people are deliberately out to undermine the education system; they are just appealing for help as anyone would in a tight-knit island society. Yet, their pleas for help, multiplied dozens of times each week, have drained the education system of whatever effectiveness it might have once had. These people–those seeking teacher's jobs, landowners, teachers who need medical treatment–see only the limited good: the beneficial effects that their government salary will have on them and their family. They are blind to the destructive effects of requests like theirs on the operations of the education department, the financial position of the government, or the potential for long-term damage to the schools.

Administrators in Chuuk, just as in other places, feel obliged to please their constituencies. But who is to protect the administrators themselves from yielding to these endless requests for fear of incurring the wrath of people who believe their concerns are being ignored? Often enough in island society government leaders, like everyone else, are aware of the need to *go along* if they want to *get along*. To protect them from taking the low road, US Department of Interior has learned the importance of the choke hold in forcing submission over and against the overwhelming pressures to disregard proper procedures and simply "go along." To counter these pressures, the US at first resorted to the strategy of withholding funds if prearranged conditions are not met by local governments. This can come across as heavy-handed: "Either you do the right thing, or else." But there is another approach, the one recommended here: to place in certain key positions persons free from political pressure, generally foreigners, to maintain the

integrity of procedures. This second approach has the added advantage of showing a touch of human sympathy: "We're interested enough in helping you develop the capacity to do the right thing that we'll provide the help you need to overcome some of your problems." It's always encouraging to have partners that actually *partner*–donors that do more than tell you what you can't do, but provide the clout to enable you to overcome social obstacles.

A Plan for Education Reform

Chuuk already has several fine sets of education management plans to draw from. The problem, as most insiders admit, is that the plans are not being implemented. So what would it take to do the implementation in the face of the overwhelming political and social pressure to hire non-performers or keep them on the payroll? What would it take to make the public schools in Chuuk as productive as they should be?

The proposal has been made that the management of the public schools in Chuuk be turned over to an outside contractor altogether since, as the belief has it, no one other than an outsider would be strong enough to implement the changes needed to improve education. But there is an alternative–the one that Chuukese businessmen adopted during the 1970s, when instead of surrendering their businesses entirely to foreign control, they brought in managers to firewall themselves from the daily operations of the business. This was a strategy employed by US Interior Department recently when they brought in "advisors" to protect the Chuuk Finance Department against issuing payments that were not in compliance with the priority lists that had been agreed upon in principle when the state became insolvent. This entailed having a strong local director flanked by expatriates who could say no when necessary to block backdoor payments to those whose political allies were stronger than their claims.

This move will only work, of course, if the governor and the state legislature are willing to support this move. In other words, they must understand and agree that the first thing education must be firewalled against is their own political interference. (Palau had to do much the same when the government provided for a Special Prosecutor whose job allowed him to spare no one, no matter what his position.) Neither the executive nor the legislative branch was willing to sit back and let the needed reforms work their magic when they were tried with the Finance Department. Months into the reform, we began hearing the usual complaints about the FSM National Government in collusion with Interior Department usurping authority over matters that should properly be under the control of the state. Unless this changes, the reform of the public education system is doomed to failure.

Once the management is in place, it can turn to the reforms themselves. The first of these is making it understood that a community may enjoy the benefits of a public school only if it is fully operative–that is, only if the school is in session 180 days a year, and the teachers are in the classroom during these class days. This might seem self-evident, but in fact a good percentage of the schools in Chuuk cannot legitimately make this claim. Indeed, there is reportedly one school, fully funded by the government, that has not been open a single day this school year. Perhaps administrators have been so busy counting certified teachers and ordering textbooks that they have neglected to check whether the schools are in session or not. Then again, how could they have determined this with any degree of certainty? They would have had to depend on the

figures that each school itself submits–and these are almost always wildly inflated.

The management team of the education department, then, is faced with two tasks of considerable magnitude. First, they must work out a system that will provide them with reliable data on teacher attendance and days on which the school is in session. Second, they must close dead schools, burying them so deep that the corpses can not be dug up and propped in place as if they were still living and breathing. The task is difficult but it can be done. One former Director of Education for Pohnpei closed a number of fatally ill schools on the island, much to his credit and to the relief of his colleagues who had been attempting artificial resuscitation without success for years.

Even this is just the beginning. There remains the dicey problem of ensuring that there are documented land agreements for the schools so that they are not shut down by a landowner on a whim. Basic facilities must be guaranteed–benjos, water, good roofing, security screening, and some furniture, however rudimentary. Can the state education department draw up a list of minimum standards for the facilities? Can it inspect school facilities yearly to make sure that each school complies with the basic requirements? Can it threaten to shut down–with a termination of all public funding–any school that does not comply with these standards?

Then there is the matter of the learning outcomes designed to measure how well the school is doing in achieving its primary educational purpose. In most states a standard test (NST) is administered yearly and offers a comparative look at the level of achievement of 6^{th} grade, 8^{th} grade and 10^{th} grade students. If the learning outcomes are poor for an extended period of time–perhaps three to five years–the school should be put on probation for a year or two. If the school fails to show improvement during its probationary period, the community might be offered a choice. Either the school would be closed altogether and government funding entirely withdrawn or the community might invite in a religious group or some other organization to run the school for them as a charter school of sorts. This option was offered to communities in the Marshall Islands during the late 1980s as part of a ten-year plan for the public school system. Several communities opted to turn over their local schools to religious groups. Some of these schools showed significant improvement: test scores rose dramatically even as local teachers received on-the-job training from the new school administration.

Some local communities, with the support of the state education department, are quite capable of running good schools on their own. Others will need prodding by higher authorities, but in the end will be able to make the reforms needed to run an acceptable school. Still other communities are too divided and lack both the cohesion and motivation to run a good school. These communities might profit from a charter school arrangement, just as troubled areas in the US have. It is important that the agencies that contract to run schools for the communities retain the right to hire and fire teachers and establish their own policies governing school administration. Like the state education department itself, these agencies must be free from outside political interference that could undermine reforms. Whatever choice communities make regarding their schools, they must be willing to accept responsibility for their school; only to the extent that they are willing to do so should the school receive financial support from the government.

As for textbooks and a sound curriculum and certification of teachers–topics that seem to always

be the center of discussion–they are all important steps forward, but only after these much more basic issues are addressed.

Conclusion

If reforms are to stand any chance of success, they should be designed so as to deal with the core problem, not the symptoms of that problem. Training teachers is no doubt important somewhere along the way, but to cast this as the core problem of the education system in Chuuk is utterly foolish. It would make very little difference whether the teachers all had doctorates in education unless you can get them to come to work each day and stay until classes are finished. Moreover, even if the teachers themselves are reform-minded, island culture still requires them to defer to the authority of the principal. The first and most essential point in designing reform, then, is to identify the problem–the real problem, not just its symptoms.

The general assumption made is that the problem is either lack of a sound plan or proper management. Hence, waves of consultants sweep into the islands proposing training and management programs, when the present island managers could probably recite by heart the do's and don't's of proper procedure. Chuukese businessmen in the 1970s knew a thing or two about good business practices, but they needed another sort of help. They needed insulation from the demands of friends and relatives and they needed a way of making real demands on their employees, many of whom were family members, without destroying their social relationships.

It is entirely possible that a great number of people in Chuuk today are making the same kind of plea that we used to hear from our Xavier students: "Make us be good." They, like those Xavier students, are social animals, under considerable pressure to put last things first: to take care of those closest to them even at the expense of the system. If this is in fact the case and this constitutes the core problem in public education in Chuuk–and perhaps in other public services as well–then a structural adjustment needs to be made to alleviate the problem.

The major alternative, as we have seen, is to appeal to the grassroots people until a groundswell is created for reform. As wonderful as this may sound, it might prove unrealistic in the long run. In a society in which high stock is placed on "going along in order to get along," such movements might be nearly impossible to bring to fruition. Certainly in Chuuk there is enormous pressure to wait out any troublesome situation patiently and see what happens. By all means, we should engage in community education programs and awareness-raising efforts, but we should also beware of expecting too much from it.
The same cautions may be made about reliance on modeling. Indeed, there have always been very good public elementary schools in Chuuk, and there are a few even today. Perhaps in time these schools will encourage others to try to imitate their success, but let's not count on it. The obstacles today are simply too daunting for schools to attempt what principals and teachers may feel is impossible.

Structural change seems to offer the best hope for reform today. It does not require a foreign takeover of the Chuuk education system, but it certainly demands something along the lines of the insulation strategy that has been outlined in this article. If the reform is properly designed, it will have local managers working alongside expatriates in genuine partnership. The partnership

might be uncomfortable at times for both sides–for this sort of relationship can involve arm-twisting and demand a willingness to accept blame for what the other does–but it probably has a better chance of working than anything else.

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