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# Having a Say on School in Fiji

Report on the Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji  
Suva, Fiji Islands • 26-27 June 2009

A Pacific Policy Project Paper  
Crawford School of Economics and Government and Save the Children Fiji

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# Acknowledgments

The Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji would not have occurred without the support and contribution of a number of individuals and organisations.

We would like to thank the Australian government's development assistance agency (AusAID) for providing financial support for the forum. We would like to thank Maree Tait from the Crawford School of Economics and Government at The Australian National University and Save the Children Fiji for believing in the vision.

A special thank you goes to those individuals who worked so hard during the forum: Sera Vulavou and Sheniel Sen for their fantastic facilitation; Hayley Primrose and Cassandra Ledger for photographing and documenting the forum; Miriama Seru, Mere Mafi, Mere Masi and Joneti Rokotuibau for their wonderful support and Vanisha Mishra for acting as rapporteur.

We would like to express our appreciation to the schools that supported the participation of the children and young people.

Our deep appreciation goes to the parents and chaperones who accompanied and supported the young participants who travelled from Labasa, Levuka, Savusavu, Lautoka, Ba and Nadi.

Our greatest debt of gratitude goes to the children and young people who participated in the forum, who gave so generously of their time and ideas and who sought to represent not only their own concerns but to raise the broader issues that will make education a more positive experience for all children in Fiji.

Sharon Bessell

Iris Low-McKenzie

Susie Anise

July 2009



# Executive Summary

The Children and Young People's Forum on Education was held in Suva in June 2009, with 29 participants aged between 12 and 19 years of age from across the Fiji islands. The forum sought to provide insights into children and young people's experiences of education and their views on how to ensure that school is a positive experience for all children in Fiji. The aims of the forum were threefold:

To provide children and young people with a safe space in which they could discuss their experiences of school—good and bad.

To provide children and young people with an opportunity to make recommendations on how to ensure that school is a positive experience for all children in Fiji.

To provide a foundation for educational policies and school practices that are genuinely children-centred and able to progress the human rights of all children.

The forum was based on techniques of participatory and rights-based research and resulted in recommendations from the participants for all those involved in education. This report provides an overview of the process that was used during the forum, including the principles on which the forum was based.

This report also provides the key messages from the forum, using the participants' own words wherever possible. The overwhelming message from participants is that corporal punishment, although banned by Fiji's Ministry of Education, is used widely and often takes violent and humiliating forms. All participants viewed the use of corporal punishment as the single most important factor in undermining students' experience of education and in creating a negative school environment. A second important message is the importance of promoting equality in and between schools. The participants emphasised the need to create greater equality of resources and facilities between urban and rural schools, to overcome discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and to ensure the right of children and young people with special needs to access high-quality education. A third message relates to the importance of teachers maintaining professional standards. Participants raised concerns about teachers coming to school affected by alcohol, of teachers being disengaged, favouring some students (often relatives) or failing to arrive for classes. Finally, an important message is that children and young people value education and appreciate the opportunity to attend school. Good, caring and professional teachers can transform children's lives in positive ways. Much can be done, however, to improve the ways in which children and young people experience school in Fiji.

In keeping with the aim of providing a foundation for educational policies and school practices that are genuinely children-centred, this report presents the recommendations of the young participants. Significantly, duty-bearers are identified for each set of recommendations—including the duties and responsibilities of children and young people.

Finally, the report provides in full the final statement—the manifesto—of the children and young people who participated in the forum.

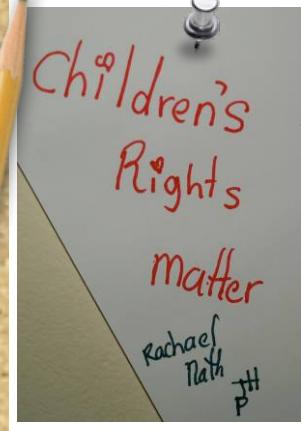
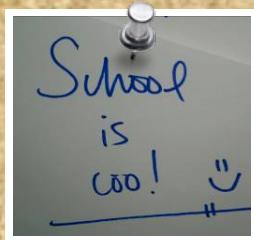
# Participants



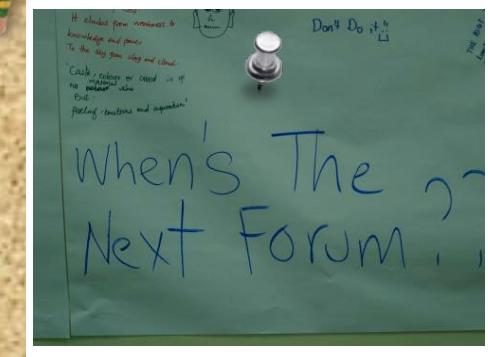
Participating in the Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji were:

Dylan Siliusi Kava	Digegele Rabale	Makatilena Fulori
Jessica Ann Petueli	Mosese Colati	Ashna Naidu
Alena Tinai	Martin Natuwawa	Sheena Dehm
Elisha Singh	Akapusi Tuivatukalo	Pate Beramaisuva
Samantha Koroi	Losalini Raluve	Lora Atalifo
Lavonne Talei Goundar	Joseph Ravu	Manoa Koroiwaqa
Poonam Pritika Singh	Rachael Nath	Arieta Koto
Alexander Ligairi	Halamehi Taraivosa	Josefa Vulavou
Karolina Delaivuna	Melita Cook	Hinesh Deo
Joyce Zheng	Kinisimere Ravula	

# Messages from the forum graffiti board

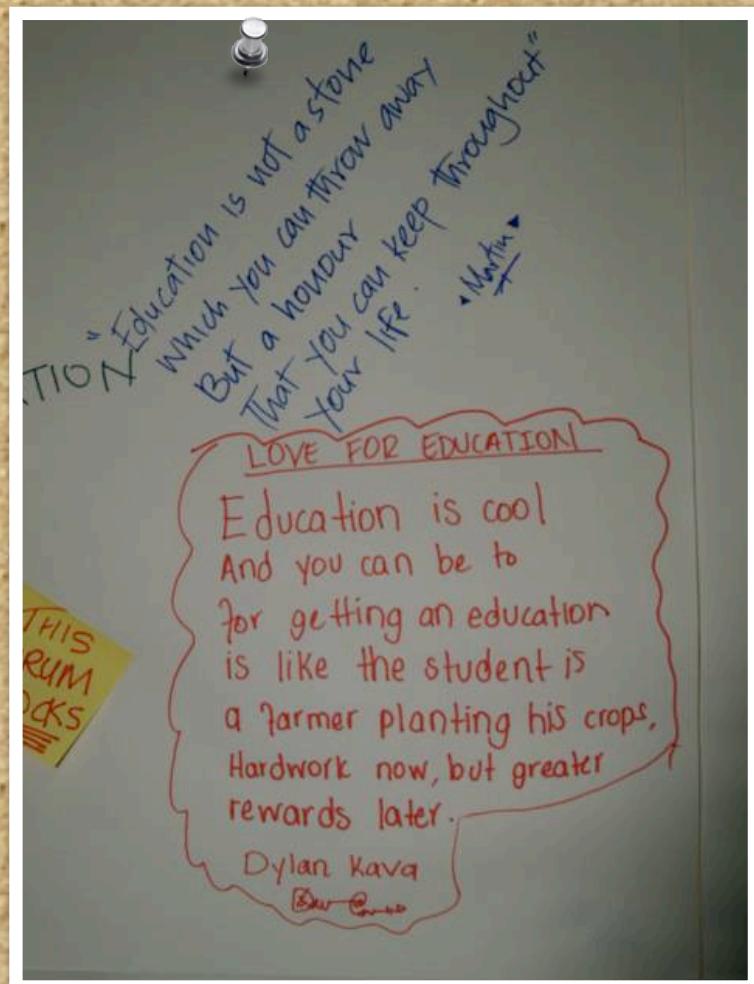


Rachael  
Rath  
PHT



"It eludes you...  
knowledge and power  
To the sky you step and climb.  
'Cause when you need it  
no mountain is so high  
that you can't climb  
it.  
filling parentheses and equations!"

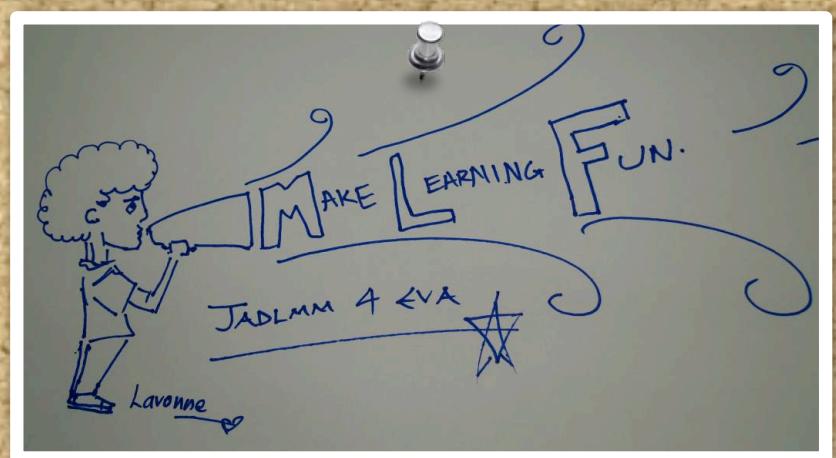
Don't Do It.



## LOVE FOR EDUCATION

Education is cool  
And you can be too  
for getting an education  
is like the student is  
a farmer planting his crops.  
Hardwork now, but greater  
rewards later.

Dylan Kava  
Bew Caw



# The Vision

The Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji grew out of the belief that high-quality education, which serves the current and future interests of children and promotes their human rights, must be responsive to the views, experiences and priorities of children and young people.

Education is a human right to which all children are entitled under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Government of Fiji in 1993.

Upholding children's right to education means providing access to school for all—regardless of ethnicity, religion, sex, wealth or poverty, ability or disability. Upholding children's right to education also means that school should be a safe and positive experience for all children.

The Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji aimed to achieve the following:

- To provide children and young people with a safe space in which they could discuss their experiences of school—good and bad.
- To provide children and young people with an opportunity to make recommendations on how to ensure that school is a positive experience for all children in Fiji.
- To provide a foundation for educational policies and school practices that are genuinely children-centred and able to progress the human rights of all children.

Ensuring that school is a positive experience for all children means engaging in a conversation with children about their views and experiences, listening to and valuing what they have to say and accepting responsibility to act.

This report is a first step in acting on the recommendations made by the children and young people who participated in the forum. It aims to reflect accurately the children and young people's messages. Wherever possible, the participants' own words are used. Quotations are not attributed directly to individuals in this report for reasons of confidentiality.

# The Participants

Twenty-nine children and young people participated in the forum. The participants were aged between 12 and 19 years. They came from across Fiji, including Suva, Nadi, Ba, Lautoka, Levuka, Savusavu and Labasa. The participants from outside Suva were accompanied by adult chaperones (parents, teachers or Save the Children Fiji staff/volunteers).



The participants represented all major ethnic groups in Fiji and were from different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nineteen girls and ten boys participated in the forum. Two participants were deaf and communicated through sign-language interpreters; one participant had physical impairments. All participants currently attend school.

# The Organisers

The forum was organised jointly by Save the Children Fiji and the Crawford School of Economics and Government at The Australian National University. It was supported by the Australian Government's Agency for International Development (AusAID). The forum is part of a policy and action-oriented research project undertaken by Dr Sharon Bessell from The Australian National University, in collaboration with Iris Low-McKenzie and Susie Anise from Save the Children Fiji.

# The Principles

The forum was based on principles of human rights and respect for the participants' views, experiences and preferences.

All children and young people agreed voluntarily to participate in the forum. They were free to withdraw from the forum at any time or to choose not to take part in specific activities.

Participants had the opportunity to decide how the forum proceeded, the major issues to be addressed and how discussions would take place.

The forum was based on the following principles:

- All children and young people's views should be valued and respected.
- Children and young people are experts on their own lives.
- The forum should be fun.
- Participation by children and young people must be entirely voluntary.
- Children and young people must be free to withdraw from the forum at any time or to choose not to take part in specific activities.
- Children and young people should be able to decide how the forum will proceed, which issues will be addressed and how discussions will take place, with only broad guidance from adult organisers.
- The forum should be a safe place in which children and young people can share their views.

Before agreeing to participate, children and young people were given information about the forum and informed consent was sought. Informed consent was also sought from children's parents or guardians and endorsement was sought from the schools that the young participants attend.

During the forum, children and young people were given the option to opt out of any activity or discussion that made them feel uncomfortable—or if they were simply uninterested.

A parent or chaperone accompanied those children and young people from outside Suva. Several parents and chaperones were present during the forum and formed their own 'table', where they discussed what they considered to be the priority issues for education in Fiji. The organisers explained to parents and chaperones the importance of giving the young participants space to discuss issues among themselves without adult influence or intervention, and the adults present were very respectful of this.

# The Process



The theme of education and the broad structure of the forum were decided by the adult organisers. The program was carefully designed, however, to create space for the young participants to decide which topics would be the focus of the forum and how they would be discussed.

The venue was spacious and comfortable. Children and young people could move about freely and there was space for energisers and meals. Children and young people could choose to work at tables or on the floor. There was space to display posters and signs made by the young participants around the walls.



## *Step 1: Getting-to-know-you activities*

The forum began with some activities designed to support the young participants in getting to know one another. Sera Vulavou and Sheniel Sen, who are members of the KidsLink alumni, facilitated the activities. KidsLink is Save the Children Fiji's child-led initiative for children's participation.

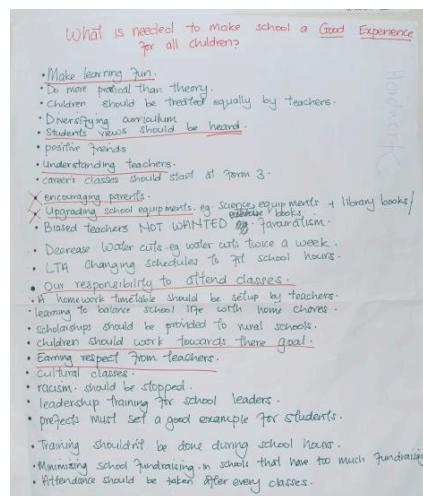
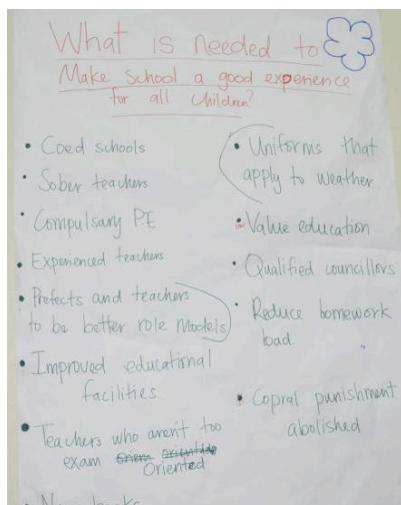
## *Step 2: What are the best experiences of school?*



The first activity of the forum gave children and young people an opportunity to think and talk about the great things that happen at school—the positive experiences. Children and young people talked in small groups about their best experiences of school. They then wrote individually on pieces of paper their best experience(s) of school. The pieces of paper were put on the wall to share experiences and remind one another of the good things that can and do happen at school. This activity began the forum on a positive note and helped the participants to get to know one another and share good experiences.

## *Step 3: What needs to happen to make school a positive experience for all children in Fiji?*

Next, the children and young people, in small groups of five or six, turned their attention to the things that need to happen to make school a positive experience for all children in Fiji. Each group talked about what needs to happen and shared their own experiences and those of their friends and classmates. Each group developed a list of the things that need to be done or to change.



### *Step 4: Sharing ideas*

Each group presented its list to the other participants. Each group decided how to present their ideas and which members of the group would make the presentation.

All groups decided that all members who wanted to be part of the presentation should have the opportunity to do so.



### *Step 5: Setting priorities*

Having shared their ideas, each group set about determining their priority issue(s): the most important thing(s) that should happen if school is to be made a positive experience for all children in Fiji.

Each group then made a poster to highlight the importance of the priority issue(s). Posters were shared between groups.



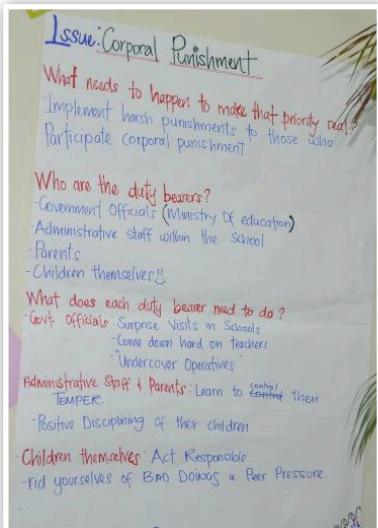
### *Step 6: Getting information*

The participants had lots of ideas about how to improve the educational experience for children in Fiji. They also had lots of questions, and needed information in order to make recommendations for policy and action.



In the afternoon of the first day of the forum, an official from the Ministry of Education was invited to attend in order to answer the children and young people's questions and provide information.

The young participants decided on the questions they wished to ask the official and decided who would ask each question. In some cases, groups had questions they wished to ask; in others, individual participants wished to ask questions.



### Step 7: Developing recommendations

In line with the policy and action-oriented nature of the forum and associated research, the participants were invited to develop recommendations on their priority issue(s). In doing this, each group confirmed they had agreed on their priority. Each group then discussed what needs to happen and who has responsibility for making it happen (the duty-bearers).

Each group then shared with all participants their recommendations for action.

### Step 8: The manifesto



The participants agreed that they would like to present to policymakers their recommendations for action and a 'manifesto' setting out their vision for schooling and education in Fiji.

Each group decided on two statements they wished to include in the manifesto. Each group then presented their statements and all participants discussed the overall content of the manifesto. One group could not decide on only two statements, so it was agreed that they could include four statements.

### Step 9: Delivering the message

In the afternoon of the final day of the forum, guests were invited from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the National Coordinating Committee on Children and relevant international and donor agencies.



The children and young people decided how they would like the final session to run and how they would like to deliver their message.

Each group displayed their poster and set of recommendations on the wall in different sections of the forum venue. Each poster display was called a 'bus-stop'. Guests were invited to 'visit' each bus stop where group members explained their poster and their recommendations. The participants explained to the guests why these things are important and who should take responsibility for bringing about change.

The children and young people then delivered their manifesto to the invited guests.

The forum concluded with a speech on 'Our right to education' by one of the youngest participants.

# The Messages

Treat us with respect –  
and end corporal  
punishment

We want to learn – but  
make learning fun



DISABILITY IS NOT A BARRIER



Remember we are  
children – we need to be  
supported and nurtured

We want to learn – we  
don't want to feel  
uncomfortable, afraid, or  
humiliated



Race, Colour and Religion Should Not Matter.

# The Messages:

## What is good about school

From the discussions of positive experiences at school several themes emerged, which are documented in the following pages—often in the words of the children and young people.

### ✓ Children and young people value education and want to learn

The children and young people who participated in the forum value education highly. They see education as an important part of their lives every day and as something that prepares them for the future. Many participants feel that school provides positive experiences that they would not otherwise have. The participants expressed a strong desire to learn—and to learn in a way that is fun and exciting.

‘Education is really important  
’cause you get to learn to  
experience other things you’ve  
never experienced before.’

‘School provides me a positive  
experience that would not  
have happened at home, such  
as taking part in the oratory  
competition.’

‘Education helps me foster understanding with my  
disability... education helps me to know what is  
happening around me, education helps me to know  
what I can do, education helps me to know my talents,  
education has taught me to read and write...I am able  
to express myself.’

✓ **Good, caring, supportive teachers can transform children's experiences of school**

The role of teachers in children and young people's lives is crucial. Teachers who engage with students and make learning fun transform students' experience of school. The majority of participants had at least one teacher who opened up the world of learning for their students. Many participants had teachers who took the time and effort to foster extra-curricular activities that students enjoyed or benefited from. Forum participants recognised and appreciated the efforts of these teachers.

'[Our teacher] socialises with the students and shares how her secondary school life was with us. We share our opinions with her on how to make English a fun subject to learn and she implements it during her classes. During classes we have activities which include games and other fun stuff to make education fun and interesting for everyone.'

'My English teacher...is the best teacher I've ever come across. She makes English fun and interesting to learn. She isn't just a teacher but also a best friend.'

'I won a certificate from Alliance Française...My favourite subject was French because of my French teacher.'

## ✓ Principals are important — they make a difference

The forum participants view principals as very important in shaping the overall school environment. Several participants described the positive changes made by new principals, including banning corporal punishment and listening to students' concerns. The participants identified each of these issues as very important: the prevalence of corporal punishment is the single most important factor in making school a negative experience for students, while feeling that their views are unheard and their concerns ignored are also serious problems. According to the forum participants, principals have the capacity to make school a far more positive place for students—and one that truly fosters learning.

**'With our new principal, he has enabled all students to practise the rights of speaking out. Freedom is being practised in school.'**

## ✓ Supportive friendships are fundamentally important

The majority of participants identified peer support and supportive friendships as two of the most important aspects of school. Friendships have the potential to make school a positive educational and social environment. Significantly, several participants described how their school friends had supported them through very difficult times. It is clear that adults should not underestimate the importance of friendships and peer relationships.

Things that are good about school:

'When a lot of my friends from school and other schools attended and helped during my dad's funeral. Twelve of my closest friends missed two weeks of school; a friend of mine missed her exams and came as well. The day of the funeral, my form mates missed PT to attend it.'

'My best friend...makes me laugh in school and I enjoy studying with her.'

'[My friends] make me feel that school is fun to come to every day. Seeing each other and working together makes me feel I'm working in a safe environment with them by my side.'

'Getting to know new people, having the most fun time with friends, learning new things about the world, just being with friends and socialising.'

## ✓ Children learn best when learning is fun and interesting

A strong message from the forum participants is that while they want to learn, they want learning to be fun and interesting. Rote learning and excessive reliance on textbooks are considered boring—and not good for learning. The participants value greatly those teachers who have the ability to capture students' imaginations and attention and to make learning fun. Importantly, many participants felt that they learn more, and more easily, when lessons were interesting. The participants felt strongly that they learn more from teachers who engage with students and do not simply follow the textbooks and notes.

Things that are good about school:

'My maths teacher is the coolest teacher—during her class we have a game. She will throw a piece of paper at us and then ask us a question and we would have to answer.'

'My physics teacher is kinda strange because he compares everything in physics to relationships—for example, if your boyfriend is jumping from a building 80 metres tall, how long would it take for him to reach the ground? It's really funny [and] at the same time it actually makes us pay attention.'

✓ **Extra-curricular activities are an important aspect of a positive school experience**

In identifying their positive experiences of school, many participants ranked extra-curricular activities highly. Many felt that extra-curricular activities—be they sporting, cultural, artistic or intellectual—provided an opportunity to pursue their passions and interests. For some children and young people, extra-curricular activities are an opportunity to engage in activities that are fun and exciting in an otherwise boring experience of school. Significantly, extra-curricular activities can provide an opportunity for children and young people who are not strong in classroom lessons to demonstrate their skills and talents, thus fostering self-confidence and learning in the broader sense.

**Things that are good about school:**

‘[My teacher] started scouts; when we won the netball match; when I won the second place of the oratory contest.’

‘Sports—I am selected to play rugby and our teacher is our coach, he is good at training us how to play rugby.’

‘Getting to be the captain for our school U17 netball team.’

‘[Going on] excursions, talent quest, dance group.’

# The Messages:

## What needs to change

During the forum, several issues emerged that make children's experience of school negative and cause frustration, fear, anger and pain. It is notable that the list of negative experiences is significantly longer than the list of positives.

- ✗ Corporal punishment is still commonly used, often in violent forms.
- ✗ Children are often humiliated, sometimes for things that are beyond their control, such as not being able to afford the appropriate school uniform.
- ✗ Girls sometimes face sexual harassment from teachers and feel frightened or uncomfortable.
- ✗ Some teachers do not turn up for class or arrive in an unfit state to teach.
- ✗ Some teachers refuse to engage with students or answer questions, instead relying entirely on notes and handout materials.
- ✗ The system remains heavily exam focused, sometimes stifling creativity and the desire to learn.
- ✗ Prefects often enforce punishment rather than modelling good behaviour and providing leadership.
- ✗ Favouritism is common, resulting in preferential treatment for children who are related to or known to some teachers.
- ✗ Children often feel discriminated against due to their race, religion or sex.
- ✗ Children with special needs are not well catered for and face multiple forms of discrimination.
- ✗ Facilities are often poor and in a state of disrepair.
- ✗ Resources, particularly books and equipment for science, are inadequate.
- ✗ Toilets are often dirty, smelly and unfit for use.

## End corporal punishment

The overwhelming message from the children and young people who participated in the forum is that the use of corporal punishment must stop.

All participants had witnessed corporal punishment and many had experienced it. Significantly, most participants felt that teachers were most likely to use corporal punishment when angry or frustrated. Corporal punishment is therefore a result of teachers being unable to manage classrooms effectively and losing their tempers. The participants felt that corporal punishment was not a form of ‘discipline’.

**‘There is a lot of corporal punishment; some teachers use anything to hit the children. Some children have bruises.’**

The widespread use of corporal punishment is disturbing and makes school a violent and frightening place for many children and young people. Corporal punishment often takes very violent forms, including punching and beatings with objects (such as hosepipes and rulers). Such an environment is not conducive to learning or to teaching children values of non-violence and tolerance.

Significantly, many participants noted the need for discipline within the classroom, but all questioned the effectiveness and morality of corporal punishment.

Alongside physical violence, punishment also takes the form of humiliation and unappealing tasks, such as cleaning toilets. Humiliating punishments are sometimes used for breaches of school dress codes. The forum participants found this especially unfair when the child involved was unable to afford a school uniform.

## Make school fun, interesting and exciting

It is striking that while children and young people want to learn, they want school to be a fun and positive experience. A strong message from the forum is that students learn little—and have little desire to learn—from teachers who are disengaged, bored or uninterested in the subject. The participants were particularly concerned about teachers who read from notes or textbooks rather than engaging with the class.

**‘The teachers are just there, they don’t do anything to make learning fun. We need teachers to liven up the teaching system, to help us become more interested.’**

The overwhelming focus on exams tends to restrict creativity. While the majority of children and young people said they would prefer fewer exams, the exam-oriented nature of the curriculum is a particular problem for children with special needs.

**‘Teachers when they are explaining say learn this because it will come in your exam. We go to school to learn not to sit exams.’**

**‘Most of us wake up in the morning and feel like “Oh man, I have to go to school... when is the weekend going to come?” We should be like “Oh great, I’m going to school today! Another fun day in school!”**

Alongside the pressure of exams, children must deal with the pressure of large amounts of homework. Children are often punished for not completing homework, particularly in primary school, even when they have legitimate reasons for not doing so.

The participants felt that excessive amounts of homework prevent students from playing and engaging in other activities—including, in some cases, sleeping.

**'We are children and we need time to sleep and study and to go out.'**

## Stop unprofessional behaviour from teachers and foster respect

The forum participants raised serious concerns about unprofessional behaviour on the part of some teachers, including some teachers coming to class late, failing to turn up, arriving under the influence of alcohol, refusing to teach some children (for example, those who do not have textbooks) or speaking a language that not all children in the class understand. When teachers behave in an unprofessional manner, students feel that they are not respected and they are less likely to be respectful to teachers.

**'Some girls have male teachers hitting on them.'**

**'It's not on...it's weird...it's disgusting.'**

Also disturbing is the extent to which girls are subjected to sexual harassment and inappropriate suggestions from some male teachers. Several girls spoke privately about the prevalence of sexual harassment, and their fear, discomfort and anger. A practical issue here is the problem of white school uniforms becoming transparent when wet (as commonly happens in the rainy season). According to several female participants, this makes girls more vulnerable to comments and inappropriate looks from some teachers.

## Improve resources, facilities and services

Finally, the forum participants raised the problem of inadequate resources, particularly dirty, smelly or inaccessible toilets. Poor library resources and inadequate equipment for subjects such as science were also identified as problems.

**'I think I'm reading the same books my dad did. Not just the same stories or texts—exactly the same book. Twenty years old!'**

Unreliable bus services and bus schedules that do not match school hours are also a serious problem for many students. Several participants spoke of bus services that either arrived after the start of school or have students at school more than an hour before school starts.

## What is needed to make school a positive experience for all children

Funding	Resources and facilities	Relationships	Curriculum	Teachers
• Make education free	• Improve facilities	• End favouritism	• End corporal punishment	• Teachers need better training
• Distribute school money fairly across the school	• Provide new books	• Prefects should be better role models	• Make learning fun	• Teachers need more experience
• Provide scholarships for rural and urban schools	• Make uniforms weather appropriate  • Provide clean toilets  • Provide reliable buses  • Coordinate bus timetables and school hours  • Stop water cuts  • Ensure physically impaired students have access	• Encourage parents to support children  • Provide qualified counsellors  • End racism  • Support positive friendships  • Students should respect teachers	• Broaden the curriculum  • Make the curriculum less exam oriented  • Reduce the homework load  • Allow students to choose electives  • More practice, less theory  • Start career classes earlier (in Form 3 not Form 5)  • Learn about other cultures	• Teachers need to know how to support students with disabilities  • Teachers must come to school sober  • Teachers must turn up to class  • Teachers should be better role models  • Teachers should respect and listen to students

# Priority Issues

The participants identified four priority issues that must be addressed if education is to be a positive experience for all children in Fiji.

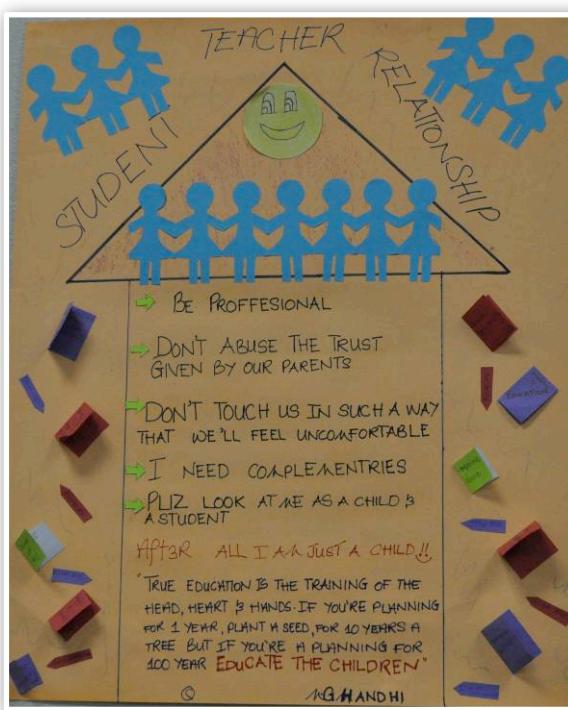
- \* *End corporal punishment in practice as well as in policy. It is important to note here that while the Ministry of Education has prohibited the use of corporal punishment, it is still practised widely.*



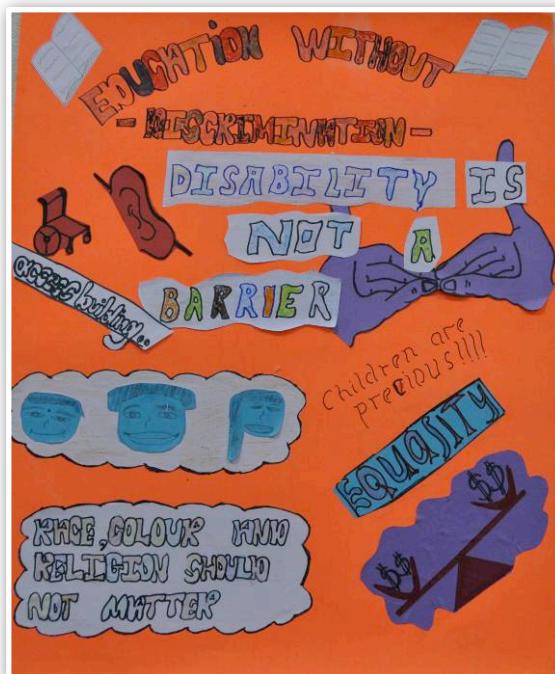
- \* *Equal treatment of all children, with a particular need to improve the school environment for children in rural areas.*



- \* Improve relationships between teachers and students, with an emphasis on ensuring teachers treat students with dignity and respect.



- \* End discrimination of all kinds—be it based on ethnicity, religion, sex or class—with a particular emphasis on ending discrimination against children with a disability.



One group produced a powerful poster summarising the main problems that need to be addressed if school is to be a positive experience for all children. This poster captures the priorities of other groups, as well as a range of additional problems.



The poster depicts:

- the teacher espousing the importance of not smoking while smoking himself
- a hosepipe on the blackboard, used to beat students
- a girl in front of the blackboard shivering from cold in her short-sleeve uniform as the wind rushes through the windows
- a girl falling off a broken chair
- the teacher holding a book that is torn and covered with cobwebs
- a blackboard that is broken and covered in cobwebs
- windows that do not have louvres
- a teacher who is unshaven and dressed inappropriately.

# The Recommendations

*'learner are needed to do?*  
THESE POINTS WE HAVE SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO  
CONSIDERATION BY ALL. NOT JUST HEARD AT  
THE FORUM NOT FORGOTTEN ABOUT, BUT  
SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO "ACTION" GROUP '1'

The participants at the Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji recommend the following:

## *For schools*

- ◆ Multicultural schools should provide a variety of cultural programs and lessons so that no group feels neglected.
- ◆ Cultural classes should be held at least once a week. Classes should be for teachers as well as students, so teachers learn not to discriminate against different races.
- ◆ Schools should adopt rules to prevent race and religious-based discrimination and criticism among students and teachers.
- ◆ Schools should promote networks between schools, parents and communities to support education.
- ◆ Schools should ensure teachers are aware of the three 'r's: rights, roles, responsibilities.
- ◆ Schools should ensure that children with special needs are treated equally and not looked down on.
- ◆ Every school should set up a 'voice box'. This is a box that allows students to raise issues, make suggestions or lodge complaints anonymously. Schools have a responsibility to act on the issues raised by students.
- ◆ Every school should establish a student council.
- ◆ Every school should hold awareness programs about the negative effects of corporal punishment.
- ◆ School management should ensure that school facilities meet occupational health and safety standards.

## *For the Ministry of Education*

- ◆ The Ministry of Education should make regular visits to schools to ensure that fees levied by school management are not too high and are equal across schools.
- ◆ The Ministry of Education should include cross-cultural lessons in the school curriculum so that students are aware of the ways of others.

- ◆ The Ministry of Education should adopt and implement strategies to cater for the education of children with special needs; this should include training for special education teachers at the Fiji College of Advanced Education.
- ◆ The Ministry of Education should make surprise visits to schools to ensure corporal punishment is not being used. This could include the use of ‘undercover operatives’ to ensure classrooms are safe from violence.
- ◆ The Ministry of Education should ensure that equal funding and facilities are available to schools in rural and urban areas.

### *For schools and the Ministry of Education*

- ◆ Schools and the Ministry of Education should implement harsh punishment for those teachers (and others) who inflict corporal punishment on students.
- ◆ School and Ministry of Education workshops, seminars and counselling programs should be developed to raise awareness of the rights of children and the responsibilities of children, teachers, schools and parents.
- ◆ Schools and the Ministry of Education should act to avoid bribery and corruption.
- ◆ Schools and the Ministry of Education should work together to stop racism.

### *For teacher training programs*

- ◆ Teachers should be trained to handle children—not only knowledge of providing services but an understanding of how to nurture children. This should be part of initial training and continuing professional development.
- ◆ Teachers need to learn strategies to control their tempers.
- ◆ Teachers need to learn how to use positive discipline.

### *For teachers*

- ◆ Teachers should be professional.
- ◆ Teachers should have boundaries between themselves and their students.
- ◆ Teachers should be good role models and set a good example for their students.
- ◆ Teachers should treat students with respect.
- ◆ Teachers should not abuse or hurt their students.
- ◆ Teachers should act in such a way that does not make children scared or uncomfortable.
- ◆ Teachers need to control their tempers.
- ◆ Teachers should not take out their anger, frustration or personal troubles on students.

### ***For parents and families***

- ◆ Parents and families need to understand that disabled children are entitled to an education.
- ◆ Parents and families should educate their children on the importance of understanding and appreciating other cultures.
- ◆ Awareness-raising strategies should aim to educate parents and families that education is of equal value and priority for male and female children.
- ◆ Parents and children should be open to sharing problems, ideas, thoughts, advice and solutions.
- ◆ Parents should talk with their children, understand their viewpoint and trust them.
- ◆ Parents need to learn how to use positive discipline.

### ***For non-governmental organisations***

- ◆ Non-governmental organisations should fund and organise workshops for parents of disabled children, so they are aware of their children's needs and rights.

### ***For children***

- ◆ Students should construct a questionnaire designed to find out whether their teachers know about children's rights. If the majority of teachers do not know about children's rights, students should write a letter to the principal recommending that the school conduct a seminar, led by the principal, about corporal punishment and its negative effects on children.
- ◆ If their teachers do not know about children's rights, students could seek support from other organisations, such as Save the Children Fiji, to assist in raising awareness among teachers.
- ◆ Children should be aware that they are students in school and behave appropriately.
- ◆ Children should be aware of the three 'r's: rights, roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ Children should know the boundaries between themselves and their teachers.
- ◆ Children should respect their teachers.
- ◆ Children need to act responsibly and reject peer pressure and bad doings.
- ◆ Children should be grateful to have the opportunity to learn.

***Everyone has responsibility to ensure that children with special needs are treated as we treat others, and as we treat our friends.***

# THE MANIFESTO

## Final statement of the participants in the Children and Young People's Forum on Education in Fiji

- Students need to be heard.
- Systems should be put into place whereby children's issues, concerns and thoughts are heard and taken seriously. The following things should happen in every school:
  - (i) a voice box should be installed, so children can express their thoughts and opinions anonymously.
  - (ii) a representative student council should be established in every school, so that issues can be taken to school principals, management and the Ministry of Education to improve educational services for children.
- Teachers should have good communication and people skills with students.
- The Ministry of Education should consider ways to make learning fun and interesting for children and teachers.
- Teacher training should be improved.
- Teachers' anger often leads to corporal punishment of students and the Ministry of Education should train all teachers to control their anger.
- Teachers should aim to be in a happy mood and to steal the interest of children.
- There should be more activities that will make learning fun and interesting, such as outdoor activities and experiments.
- The primary school curriculum should build on the skills, talents and hobbies of children.
- Schools need proper equipment and facilities.
- We want practical activities and theory to be balanced.

- Special education training should be implemented at the Fiji College of Advanced Education.
- Children with disabilities should receive equal opportunity for education—for example, teachers should use sign language to teach deaf students and schools should be accessible to children with physical disabilities.
- Equality is needed for better education and a brighter future. We are all one and we should be treated equally.
- One education policy should be adopted by all schools so that school management does not formulate its own manipulative and biased policies.
- There should be strict regulations against the abuse of children by teachers.
- Action should be taken against teachers who are abusive towards children in any way.
- There should be a proper monitoring system, which includes consultation with children, to be able to identify the loopholes in the school system.
- Children should be involved in research that will improve policy and services for children.
- The Ministry of Education should build a networking system with other ministries to be able to provide better services.





THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION DOES NOT LIMIT EDUCATION TO THE PRIMARY ~~STAGE~~ OR TO THE FIRST STAGE OF BASIC EDUCATION OR AMONG CHILDREN OF A PARTICULAR AGE RANGE. THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IS ALSO NOT AN END IN ITSELF BUT AN IMPORTANT TOOL IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE...





