

The Modernization of Colonialism and the Educability of the “Native”: Transpacific Knowledge Networks and Education in the Interwar Years

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1104851>

Abstract

This article focuses on a seminar-conference held in Hawaii in 1936 on the “educability” of native peoples. The seminar-conference was convened by New Zealand anthropologist Felix Keesing and Yale education professor Charles Loram and supported by the Carnegie Corporation, among other organizations. Conference delegates—who came from across the Pacific, including the US mainland, Australia, and New Zealand, and from as far as South Africa—joined to discuss the future of colonial education. The residential conference, which lasted several weeks, resulted in published proceedings and the establishment of extensive transpacific networks. One in a series of international congresses on education that took place during the interwar years, the 1936 Hawaii conference offers unique insight into the transnational dialogue among academics, education practitioners, colonial administrators and, in some cases, Indigenous spokespeople, concerning the modernization of colonialism and new forms of citizenship in the era of progressive education and cultural internationalism.

“Like the cool and timeless mountain tops above the bustling life of Honolulu city, there loomed up throughout the busy sessions of the seminar-conference a continuous range of thought as to the aims and objectives of education.”¹ With these remarks, New Zealand

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Research for this paper was supported by an Australian Research Collaborative Future Fellowship; great thanks to Nicole Davis for research assistance.

¹ Felix Maxwell Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries: Interpreting a Seminar-Conference Conducted by the University of Hawaii and Yale University, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1936* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1937), 31. The same publication was published in 1938 by Oxford University Press, and this article references both issues. While the published report written by Felix Keesing appears in many libraries around the world, the full proceedings have been much harder to locate. Special thanks to Rozz Evans, Head of Collections, University College of London Institute of Education, Newsam Library, for her determined and ultimately successful search for these volumes. Felix Keesing and Charles Loram, eds., *Papers and Addresses presented at the Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries, held under the auspices of the University of Hawaii and Yale University, with financial assistance*

anthropologist Felix Keesing evoked the tenor and setting of a 1936 residential seminar-conference that addressed the education of native peoples in the Pacific. These words were part of his introduction to an “interpretation” he published as *Education in Pacific Countries* in 1937 (and again in 1938) of the seminar-conference, which he had initiated and co-convened with Charles Loram, a Professor of Education at Yale and a former colonial education administrator in Natal, South Africa. The seminar-conference, which was supported by Yale and the University of Hawaii, with direct funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York,² was held over five weeks at the University of Hawaii, where Keesing was based in the Department of Anthropology. Sixty-six “educators and social scientists” from “twenty-seven national and racial groups” traveled to the island of Oahu to attend the conference.

Keesing was joined in organizing the conference by his wife and fellow anthropologist, Marie, with whom he had published a series of books about anthropology and modernization among Samoan, Philippine, and Native American people. In this work, *race* was interpreted as an effect of long-term evolutionary and geographical forces, and was evident in the present in cultural rather than biological expressions of difference.⁴ Internationalism in the Pan-Pacific was a key feature underlying the seminar-conference as a site where progressive ideas of worldliness and modernization were applied to a region considered to have the potential to

from the Carnegie Corporation, Honolulu, July 3–August 7, 1936, SB12621 (hereafter cited as Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries).

² The total cost to Carnegie for the conference was under US\$11,700 (in present day terms slightly over US\$ 200,000). “Financial Statement,” Felix Keesing to Frederick Keppel, Nov. 2, 1936, Felix Keesing Papers, Special Collections, University of Hawaii at Manoa (hereafter cited as Felix Keesing Papers, UHM); Correspondence—Education in the Pacific and Report (hereafter cited as Correspondence), Sept.–Dec. 1936, folder 2. **Is this just a folder within the Keesing Papers or is it from another archival source? If it is from the Keesing Papers UHM – this second citation should be Education in the Pacific and Report, Sept.-Dec. 1936, folder 2 Felix Keesing Papers UHM. If it is from a different collection, please indicate collection name (and location) and a shortened reference for hereafter** **Correct, this is from the same set of papers. Please adjust also for fns 45, 93 and 98.**

⁴ Fiona Paisley, “Applied Anthropology and Interwar Internationalism: Felix and Marie Keesing and the (White) Future of the ‘Native’ Pan-Pacific,” *Journal of Pacific History* 50, no. 3 (2015), 304-21.

lead the world in the reform of colonial relations. It was also part of the worldliness anticipated for the new nonnative subject who would carry out these new colonial regimes of contact.

In the following, we draw together four frameworks in order to better understand what we have called the *transpacific* context for this remarkable event, each of which represented overlapping yet distinct interests: (1) Pacific regionalism as a site of international agency and imagination; (2) the differentiated project of progressive education for native and citizen subjects; (3) transnational networks of anthropology and the social sciences and their impact on colonial administrations; and (4) the realities of colonialism itself. By interweaving these strands of influence and context, we set out to show how the American Pacific of this era was shaped by competing British, Australasian, and European knowledges about “native” subjects and their futures. As recent scholarship has shown, the field of progressive education that emerged as an international force in the interwar years was a self-consciously idealistic attempt to create citizens capable of understanding the world beyond national or cultural boundaries.⁵ Against this idealization of the worldly citizen-child-subject we locate the applications of anthropology and the uses of social science in promoting new kinds of educational provision as a means of modernizing colonial administrations.

Following the work of historians such as Tomoko Akami and Warwick Anderson, who point to the overlap of anthropological and internationalist networks and knowledges in creating the Pacific of the interwar years, the region thus figures in the following as more than a geographical location or some kind of free space into which internationalism was able to

⁵ Celia Jenkins, “New Education and Its Emancipatory Interests (1920–1950),” *History of Education* 29, no. 2 (2000), 139–51; Julie McLeod and Katie Wright, “Education for Citizenship: Transnational Expertise, Curriculum Reform and Psychological Knowledge in 1930s Australia,” *History of Education Review* 42, no. 2 (2013), 170–84; and John Howlett, *Progressive Education: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 141–76.

introduce, untrammelled, its progressive ways.⁶ Rather, we argue that colonial education debates about the value of Pacific regionalism illustrate how the international is applied in necessarily contingent and partial strategic forms that highlight, rather than subsume, the distinct status of the objects of its interest. Indeed, it is apparent that the idea of experimentation was deeply embedded within interwar political frameworks of nationalism, imperialism, and colonialism as civilizing regimes and that these were revitalized, rather than replaced, by the League of Nations. For example, in its mandates system, which called for a new “trusteeship” of native peoples in which education “adapted” to their needs and “mentality,” the League and its supporters hoped to provide for the development of an amenable peasant class in Africa and the Pacific.⁷

Participation in Pan-Pacific internationalism shaped the interests of both Keesings, who were members of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), a leading cultural internationalist network in the region, and Marie, who was a member of the Pan-Pacific Women’s Association also. Both organizations would be involved in the 1936 seminar by holding receptions, arranging sight-seeing, and generally making the conference delegates at home via their Hawaiian headquarters at the Pan-Pacific Union. Philanthropic and sociological interest in African and African American education was also influential. Loram, known for his book, *The Education of the South African Native* (1917) and his subsequent work as a member of the Phelps-Stokes Commissions in Africa, had recently convened a similarly themed conference at

⁶ Tomoko Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919–45* (London: Routledge, 2002); and Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁷ Edward H. Berman, “American Influence on African Education: The Role of the Phelps-Stokes Fund’s Education Commissions,” *Comparative Education Review* 15, no. 2 (June 1971), 132–45.

Yale in 1934⁸ and agreed to join the Keesings in their Hawaii project. Thus, the international event in Honolulu reflected the kinds of American-British cooperation noted by historians of internationalism and philanthropy in the League of Nations era, the influences of which extended into Dominions like Australia and to other parts of the world, as attested by the Keesings' Rockefeller fellowship in the previous decade.⁹

Colonial administration was another important set of interests shaping the Hawaii events. The British Colonial Office provided key input into the planning stages of the conference. One of the most significant participants, in terms of its preparation as well as success, was Arthur Mayhew, Secretary of the British government's Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies and editor of the influential *Oversea Education*. Mayhew was previously an educator and colonial official in India and had also been important to realizing Loram's 1934 Yale conference agenda. It was his intention to invite a number of nongovernment representatives

⁸ During his early career he had been a member of the Phelps-Stoke Commission (1920–1921 and 1924–1925) that investigated education in British East Africa in relation to its activities in promoting education for African Americans in the southern states of America. See "C. T. Loram Memorial Fund, Public Library," pamphlet, series 111A, box 206, folder 2, CCNY; "Dr. Loram was director of the Yale University Summer Seminar on Education and Culture Contact in 1934," newspaper clipping; and "Dr. Loram Dies: Yale Expert on Race Relations," *Herald Tribune* Oct. 7, 1940, Charles T. Loram, 1929-1941, Carnegie Corporation of New York Records, Rare Book and Manuscripts Collection, Columbia University, series 111A, box 206, folder 2, (hereafter cited as CCNY); Arthur Mayhew to Sir John Shuckburgh, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Feb. 8 1933, Yale University Conference on the Education of Non-Western Peoples,, Records of the Colonial Office, Commonwealth and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, Empire Marketing Board, and related bodies, The National Archives, UK, CO 323/1208/11 (hereafter cited as NAUK) ; Loram's discussion with Mayhew about the 1934 conference is noted in Richard D. Heyman, "C. T. Loram: A South African Liberal in Race Relations," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5, no. 1 (Jan. 1972), 47. As well as editing *Oversea Education*, Mayhew had published on education in previous years. See Clive Whitehead, "The Concept of British Education Policy in the Colonies 1850–1960," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 39, no. 2 (Aug. 2007), 161–73; and Clive Whitehead, "Oversea Education and British Colonial Education 1929–63," *History of Education* 32, no. 5 (Sept. 2003), 561–75.

⁹ See for example, Ross L. Jones, "Macaws, Elephants and Mahouts: Frederic Wood Jones, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Human Biology Project," *Australian Historical Studies* 44, no. 2 (2013), 189–205; Kate Darian-Smith, Julie McLeod, and Glenda Sluga, "Philanthropy and Public Culture: The Influence and Legacies of the Carnegie Corporation of New York in Australia," *Dialogue* 29, no. 2 (2010), 85–90; and Michael White, "Carnegie Philanthropy in Australia in the Nineteen Thirties—a Reassessment," *History of Education Review* 26, no. 1 (1997), 1–24.

from the West Indies who, it was hoped, would bring their own experiences of education under colonialism to the conference's discussion about the "Education of Non-Western Peoples."¹⁰

Given the confluence of stakeholders and issues it brought together, the 1936 seminar-conference offers a unique opportunity to investigate the circulation of global debates about modernizing colonialism in the 1930s, yet almost nothing has been written about it. Our article considers why this might be the case, taking as our starting point the relative silences and discontinuities between progressive education and colonial education already evident in the 1930s. Certainly, the seminar-conference sought to provide a progressive forum for those interested in the reform of colonialism through education. Core questions raised during discussions in 1936 concerned the value of comparing the "educational problems and policies in the different Pacific countries." This process of comparison inevitably involved representatives of the region's multiple colonial powers—the Netherlands, France, New Zealand, Australia, and North America—as well as those who were subject to colonial and mandate administrations on the ground who, in a few cases were included in the invitation list. Delegates were expected to look beyond their own education policy and/or experience in order to consider the "wider circumstances of racial and cultural contact," such as its impacts upon "the so-called primitive peoples," and whether education should be directed toward "indigenous development" (that is, on their own terms) or "towards assimilating them into the dominant peoples" (the latter suggesting the virtual erasure of cultural difference and the promotion of adaptation).¹¹

¹⁰ Arthur Mayhew to Mr. Beckett, Advisory Committee, Colonial Education Office, Series of Internal Memoranda, "Yale University Conference on the Education of Non-Western Peoples," Sept. 4, 1933, NAUK, CO 323/1208.

¹¹ "Advance Notice—Conference and Seminar on Education in Pacific Countries. Honolulu, 1936," no date, 2–3. NAUK.

These choices took on a distinctive inflection in the context of the Pacific, and of colonial relations more broadly. We argue that they spoke also to matters of national, regional, imperial, and global concern relating to nonnative peoples regarding the role of education in shaping new modes of citizenship and “international understanding”¹² in which the modernization of colonization and race relations were considered to be fundamental elements. Our discussion of the 1936 conference opens, therefore, with consideration of contemporaneous concerns about the formation of nonnative educational subjects as both national and engaged in world affairs. The social sciences, with their promise of unlocking the interiority of the child subject, were represented as essential in responding to the forces of globalization, as indicated by the increasing rates and degrees of contact between incoming and Indigenous peoples and cultures. Forward planning in social matters, it was anticipated, would help predict possible areas of negative psychological influences upon individuals, given the larger socio-economic impacts upon communities and societies, and would also help to prevent the dangers of violent or socially destructive reactions upon the part of colonized peoples to the process of acculturation.

The regional focus of this special issue of *HEQ* is also highly pertinent to our investigation of the Honolulu gathering as it adds into our analysis a fifth factor in shaping its significance and influence. It was in the context of Pan-Pacific internationalism, we argue, that native education became the prime focus for discussion, which, at the same time, drew on progressive ideas about culture, childhood, and the process and purpose of learning—all questions familiar to the New Education Movement, with its networks of influence extending beyond Europe and

¹² Daniel Laqua, “Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order,” *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 2 (July 2011), 223–47.

Atlantic North America. In one sense, global networks of expertise are evident in the invitation list and the agenda for the 1936 seminar-conference. However, as we show, this self-conscious effort at worldliness was itself limited in its staging and performance. A distinctly Pacific form of regionalism played its part in shaping the kinds of subjects imagined in relation to people living under colonization or mandate in the region. The flow of ideas rehearsed at the 1936 gathering, while seemingly cosmopolitan in its tastes and desire for inclusivity and diversity, was also profoundly influenced, we argue, by existing national, imperial, and colonial routes of exchange and influence, and by the possibilities and limitations of settler/colonial relations themselves. These relations were the actual sites in which educational provision was or was not carried out. In the Honolulu case, native representatives were sought as contributors to discussion in order to provide authentic insight; a remarkable move in comparison to other education conferences in this era. And yet, as elaborated below, their interventions would be incorporated as further evidence of the proclaimed capacity of nonnative speakers to see both the big picture and the particular needs of any one Indigenous population in perspective. Colonialism was not to be overturned but reformed through the application of sociological and anthropological insights. Rather than a locale in which subaltern voices might be heard and their perspectives provide a radical reconfiguration of the project of rethinking colonial relationships, here Indigenous spokespeople were engaged in mobilizing liberal imperial ideals of humane and humanitarian governance for their own purposes, presumably seeking to activate the language of progress to the benefit of their own communities, but at the seminar-conference this was not in overtly anticolonial terms.

Furthermore, the conference offers a view into the value attributed to social science expertise for addressing numerous challenges faced by a variety of dependencies, mandates, and territories that increasingly fell under international, as well as national, regulation.¹⁴ “Education” was routinely mobilized by such progressives, intellectuals, and practitioners as a way forward in realizing the aims of modernizing former imperial relations into a humane response to race relations history in a globalizing world. But what that globalizing world might look like was seen very much through the lens of colonial relations. As Paul A. Kramer has argued, “The imperial is a necessary tool for understanding the United States’ global history”¹⁵ and it is essential to understanding the American involvement in the international educational debate held in Honolulu.

We open with the New Education Fellowship (NEF) and its articulation of progressive education in the interwar years via a series of international conferences: we consider one of these conferences held in South Africa in 1934 and, in more detail, one held in Australia in 1937, before proceeding to a discussion of the 1936 seminar-conference. Our proposal is that, when seen in context and comparison, these two conferences speak to distinct, if overlapping, educational agendas, their differences offering a route into understanding the role of education in forming and demarcating the modern citizen, and in managing different cosmopolitan and colonial sensibilities, depending on locale and audience. We argue that consideration of the ideas underpinning debates at the 1937 NEF conference held in Australia (temporally and geographically proximate to the 1936 Honolulu conference) helps shed a new light on the ways

¹⁴ Susan Pedersen, “Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations,” in *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen (New York: Routledge, 2005), 113–34.

¹⁵ Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (Dec. 2011), 1349.

in which native children have been historically attended to, while at the same time being marginalized within progressive education and its historiography. In this fashion, deliberations at the 1936 Honolulu conference, while instructive in their own right, help to reveal some of the exclusions and silences already evident within progressive education's self-conscious internationalist vision in this era. By relativizing the progressive moment in the 1930s, we hope to highlight questions not only about the purposes of education but also of educability itself: who was understood to be the educable subject and who was not? Was the capacity for education universal and equitably distributed? What were the dividing practices of progressive education's expansive, worldly, and modernizing mission? And what did progressive education exclude from view, despite—or indeed, as a result of—its world-minded and inclusive vision?¹⁶

Educating Dominion Subjects

During the interwar years, a wide range of international education conferences brought together experts to deliberate the purposes of education, the types of curriculum schools should pursue, how best to educate children to become good citizens for the future as well as how to recognize, categorize, and educate different (student) populations, such as those with special needs—the handicapped or the rural child. The historian of education Eckhardt Fuchs describes this as a time of “institutionalised internationalisation,” a phenomenon that flourished through both loose and formal networks of organizations and individual experts.¹⁷

¹⁶ On questions of educability and Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, see Julie McLeod, “Educating for ‘World-Mindedness’: Cosmopolitanism, Localism and Schooling the Adolescent Citizen in Interwar Australia,” *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 44, no. 4 (2012), 339–59. For a discussion of the influence of conceptions of race and racial categories that underpinned progressive education in the United States in the immediately preceding era, see Thomas D. Fallace, *Race and the Origins of Progressive Education, 1880–1929* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Eckhardt Fuchs, “Educational Sciences, Morality and Politics: International Educational Congresses in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 5–6 (Oct. 2004), 757–84; and Kevin J. Brehony, “A New

The spread of psychological knowledge into educational theory and practice, the expansion of education systems to manage extensions in compulsory and mass elementary education and the accompanying rise of bureaucratic expertise, and the emergence of cross-national bodies that addressed education, such as the International Bureau of Education (IBE) based in Geneva (1925, forerunner of UNESCO) and the League of Nations, all formed part of the context in which these conferences proliferated.¹⁸ Philanthropic organizations, such as the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation, played pivotal roles in funding and cultivating these transnational activities.¹⁹ Capital, people (experts, educators, teachers), letters, books, and pedagogies all traveled across the globe, fostering the exchange of new ideas and seeking solutions to educational challenges beyond the national frame.

The influence of progressive education philosophy on these conferences was marked; it was often mediated through the reach of such organizations in the United States as the Progressive Education Association as well as Dewey's educational writings, or the New Education Fellowship (NEF), based in the UK, which organized its own conferences as well as had a hand in many

Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921–1938," *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 5–6 (Oct. 2004), 733–55.

¹⁸ Eckhardt Fuchs, "The Creation of New International Networks in Education: The League of Nations and Educational Organizations in the 1920s," *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (Apr. 2007), 199–209; Rita Hofstetter and Bernard Schneuwly, "The International Bureau of Education (1925–1968): A Platform for Designing a 'Chart of World Aspirations for Education,'" *European Educational Research Journal* 12, no. 2 (2013), 215–30; David McCallum, "Educational Expansion, Curriculum Reform and Psychological Theory: Australia in the 1930s," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 22, no. 2 (1986), 225–37; Joseph Watras, "The New Education Fellowship and UNESCO's Programme of Fundamental Education," *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 1–2 (Feb. 2011), 191–205; and Nikhil Das Gupta, "The Educational Activities of the League of Nations," *The New Review* ii, no. 7 (1935), 59–63.

¹⁹ Martin Lawn, "The Institute as Network: The Scottish Council for Research in Education as a Local and International Phenomenon in the 1930s," *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 5–6 (Oct. 2004), 719–32; McLeod and Wright, "Education for Citizenship"; Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); and White, "Carnegie Philanthropy in Australia in the Nineteen Thirties."

others. The NEF was arguably the most high-profile international network promoting progressive education philosophies at this time. It was founded in 1921 under the leadership of Beatrice Ensor, a theosophist and a former inspector of secondary schools in Britain.²¹ She was passionate in her advocacy of new education, cultivating extensive international networks and disseminating ideas through the NEF magazine, *New Era in Education*.

This progressive education focused on the citizen child; it advocated a child-centered philosophy, active and practical learning, immersion in the natural world, and education directed to the inner world and the child's personal growth. Like Deweyan progressivism, its catchcry was education for the whole of life, not just the accumulation of formal school subject knowledge, and it placed a strong emphasis on democratic and cooperative relationships among students and teachers. For the NEF in particular, key aims were developing international understanding and fostering worldly citizens in service of peace and democratic collaborations,²² of "carrying into effect a conception of education worthy of and adequate to the democratic way of life"—aspirations also integral to the expertise gathered around Pan-Pacific internationalism in this era.²³

The NEF enacted its internationalism through promoting teacher exchange, as well as the exchange of ideas in its publications and through establishment of local branches across Europe and beyond. Its influence was most visible in its series of international conferences—held first

²¹ Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era"; Sue Middleton, "Clare Soper's Hat: New Education Fellowship Correspondence between Bloomsbury and New Zealand," *History of Education* 42, no. 1 (Jan. 2013), 92–114.

²² McLeod, "Educating for 'World-Mindedness,'" 339–59.

²³ Conference brochure, "Education for International Understanding," NEF conference held in Australia, 1946, Archives of the World Education Fellowship (WEF), UCL Institute of Education (IOE), Newsam Library and Archives, University of London, WEF/A/111/201; see also, Joyce Goodman, "Education, Internationalism and Empire at the 1928 and 1930 Pan-Pacific Women's Conference," *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 46, no. 2 (2014), 145–59. [The WEF and IOE were confusing – I realized later they weren't being used to represent the actual citation but just an abbreviation for an organization.]

across Europe and the UK, then extending into the white Dominions—with a conference in South Africa in 1934, followed by New Zealand and Australia in 1937. The NEF conferences represented a wide range of views, from those advocating administrative reforms and psychological testing to those promoting attention to the spiritual dimension and psychic life of children. In some respects the NEF seemed to reject an instrumentalist view of schooling, as a part of a larger vision of how to live a cosmopolitan and purposeful life.²⁸ Yet this expansive vision appeared not to extend so readily to native or colonized people. That is, while certain principles were upheld as universals, there was largely silence, or at best muted discussion, regarding their relevance to some population groups, such as native peoples. This was not only in terms of educability per se, but the very possibility of imagining an inner life that might be “freed” and flourish under the right educational circumstances.

The 1934 NEF conference held in South Africa had the theme of “Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society,” and hosted John Dewey as one of its prominent guests.²⁹ There were some familiar names in the list of speakers, many of whom subsequently toured with the NEF to events held in Australia and New Zealand during 1937, including Harold Rugg, a social studies and curriculum expert from Teachers College, New York; Pierre Bovet from the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute in Geneva; and the ever-present Beatrice Ensor. The title and location of the conference might suggest that it was principally concerned with the education of native and colonized peoples, but this was not the case. Presentations covered more general topics, such as Dewey’s “The Need for a Philosophy of Education”; “Modern Trends in Educational

²⁸ See also Howlett, *Progressive Education*, 144–45.

²⁹ John Justin Godfrey Carson, John David Rheinalt Jones, and Ernst Gideon Malherbe, eds., *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society: Report of the South African Education Conference held in Capetown and Johannesburg in July 1934, Under the Auspices of the New Education Fellowship* (Capetown: Juta, 1937).

Psychology” from William Boyd (Head of the Education Department, University of Glasgow); and a section on rural education in comparative perspective. Part II of the conference focused on “Education in a Changing African Society,” and addressed some themes similar to those discussed at the 1936 conference, such as a presentation on the educability of the Bantu, and a synthesis of a discussion led by Bronislaw Malinowski on “Education as a Re-Integrating Agency,” which grappled with whether to provide a predominantly European education to African children or to follow the slogan “Develop the African on his own lines.”³⁰ In the words of E. G. Malherbe, the conference organizer, who (in a role similar to Keesing’s) edited and provided summaries of the conference papers, the core debates pivoted on whether education should “reproduce the type,” handed down from racial and cultural groups, or whether “education must also provide for growth beyond the type.”³¹ In relation to native education, the question is translated thus: “Is the Native to be educated for a European society or for life in his own indigenous, primitive society which is rapidly disintegrating?”³² This is a repeated concern, as if there is nothing else of consequence to ask in relation to native education. While there was considerable overlap in speakers and topics at the 1934 conference in South Africa and the 1937 NEF conference in Australia, there was also a marked difference in the program in that, tellingly, the question of native education did not surface as a reported topic of structured discussion or presentation at the Australian event. Settler colonialism in the Australian context clearly sought to distance the education of the citizen child from the Aboriginal child, whose education was managed via separate legislation, often through separate schooling. Modern

³⁰ “Education as a Re-Integrating Agency,” in Carson et al., *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society*, 424–25.

³¹ Carson et al., *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society*, v.

³² *Ibid.*, vii.

education in Australia effectively veiled the uncomfortable fact of settlement. As the next section illustrates, it would take a specifically Pacific conference to bring Aboriginal Australia to the frame; yet, as the Honolulu conference would show, Aboriginal educational subjects would be mobilized as members of a “race” occupying the baseline of capacity against which all other native peoples might be measured.

Assembling Expertise

The 1936 seminar-conference in Hawaii aimed to bring together a remarkable range of expert individuals speaking for and about diverse constituencies. It involved presentations from colonial administrators, university professors, anthropologists, school principals, teachers, and Indigenous spokespersons. Each participant committed several weeks to presenting papers and sharing ideas on the education of native peoples, from closed seminar discussions to a range of lectures open to the public. The “Who’s Who” in Keesing’s published report, released within a year of the event, shows that delegates came from across the Pacific region (including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and their dependencies), from colonial powers with interests in the region (such as Japan, France, the Netherlands, and Britain), as well as from countries that might offer examples and models outside of the region, such as South Africa and Latin America, where racial differences were reflected in separate schooling policies and practices. Participants included well-known figures such as Arthur Mayhew (Colonial Office, London), James Russell (Director of Education, Fiji), A. P. Elkin (anthropologist, Australia), and Thomas Jesse Jones (Phelps-Stokes Fund, New York), as well as a range of internationalists and educators, such as directors of education in Hawaii, New Zealand, Western and American Samoa, the Philippines, and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. A small number of Native American, Maori, and

other non-European representatives were also involved, as were a handful of graduate students who were nearly all teachers from the University of Hawaii.³⁹ Notable participants from Honolulu itself included Dr. Peter Buck (Te Rangihiroa)—a Maori scholar, former Yale graduate, and director of the Bishop Museum—who would speak of New Zealand as a progressive example of educational reform among Pacific island peoples. Significantly, the presence of local Indigenous people is most visible in their contribution to the leisure and cultural-awareness aspects of the conference’s social program. When one of the Australian delegates to the 1936 conference, South Australian ethnographer Norman Tindale, wrote about his experiences, he recorded many times over the hula dances performed not only by native Hawaiians but by a range of ethnic groups, including Japanese Americans, in expression of their integration into Hawaii.⁴⁰

The 1936 seminar-conference illustrates how progressive ideas shared within and across expert communities were part of a modern and professional response to the future of colonized populations, promoted by imperial nations but also by Indigenous communities. Native peoples contributed to these debates not only because they represented peoples who were the subjects of humanitarian intervention and/or colonial governance, but also as individuals with expertise in educational and colonial reform in their own right. While the Pacific offered rich opportunities for the experimental application of progressive programs and agendas among subject peoples, those populations were also deeply concerned with the future of their children and their people in the Western world, and in the relationship between

³⁹ Felix Keesing, “Introductory” and “The Seminar-Conference ‘Who’s Who,’” in Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937) 1–5, 195–199.

⁴⁰ Journal of Anthropological Visit to the United States and Europe, 1936–1937, Tindale Papers, South Australian Museum Archives, AA 338/1/46/1 (hereafter cited as Tindale Journal), 97.

cultural tradition and the impacts of contact. Strikingly, several delegates who were celebrated as “native” representatives spoke in contrast about their personal experience of living under colonial rule and of racial discrimination, as well as the desire for educational opportunities among their people. For example, the Native American spokesperson M. A. Ataloo, a Chickasaw Nation representative and renowned educational reformer, informed the conference that she was one among many, pointing out that while “I am of Indian blood . . . I am naturally limited by my own experience. I do not speak for all Indians.”⁴¹ She lamented that there were not more “of the minority groups personally represented at this conference, since the ultimate solution of educational problems rests with the natives rather than the administrators.” Nevertheless, Ataloo expressed some optimism that progress toward greater dialogue would ensue from the fact that the lives of some of delegates at the conference had “become so interwoven with those of the minority groups,” such that they spoke “the same language after all with only ‘cultural-dialect’ differences.”⁴² While maintaining the necessity for the native or minority voice, she also spoke for the language of cultural integration.

In his report, Keesing included Ataloo’s comments (attributing them anonymously, as he did whenever claiming to quote from exchanges at the seminar-conference—in this case to “an American Indian member of the group”) in which he condemned the behavior of white

⁴¹ For discussion of Ataloo’s life and work, see Lisa Kay Neuman, *Indian Play: Indigenous Identities at Bacone College* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013). We thank an anonymous reviewer for alerting us to this book. Ataloo is not only unusual as a woman among Indigenous spokespeople, but is also remarkable for winning a Rockefeller grant to write a book on the American Indian; the grant is mentioned in *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report 1936* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1937), 299. [Changed this so it didn’t sound like the name of the book she wrote was the annual report—it doesn’t look like she ever wrote the book.] For a discussion of Native American women on the world stage, see Frederick E. Hoxie, “Denouncing America’s Destiny: Sarah Winnemucca’s Assault on U.S. Expansion,” *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 4 (Dec. 2012), 549-67; and Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women’s Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 85.

⁴² M. A. Ataloo, “A New Program of American Indian Education,” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 321.

Americans on holiday near reserves and repeated “a saying that the early whites ‘first fell to their knees and then on the aborigines.’”⁴³ The inclusion of Indigenous spokespeople expressed an intention to be innovative and groundbreaking, registering a democratic and egalitarian impulse such as can be found in the inclusive claims of progressive education. Yet, as Ataloa’s comments suggest, native representatives were possibly less persuaded by the inclusive gesture and more committed to an educational politics of self-determination.⁴⁴

The purpose of spending several weeks in relative proximity was to learn from each other. The assembled experts were concerned with the “educability” of Pacific islanders and Indigenous peoples in the settler colonies and beyond, looking to models and approaches in other colonial settings. These included Africa and Latin America, as well as new educational programs among non-Western nations like Japan and China. Distinct British and American models of managing race and cultural difference remained, however, at the center of things. In a discussion paper he wrote soon afterwards for Keesing reflecting on his experiences at the conference, Mayhew wondered about the possibility of carrying through with the conference recommendation that a mixture of the two was essential for the future of native education. Putting his doubts aside, it was the tenor of the proceedings that he remembered most fondly, describing them as representing “a fine example of international cooperation.”⁴⁵ Perhaps he meant also between races and peoples. The limits of that cooperation had been evident from the outset in the framing

⁴³ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1938), 10, 84.

⁴⁴ Similar sets of contradictory effects can be seen in the League of Nations, for example, where colonized peoples petitioned the Permanent Mandates Commission directly but to varying success. See Pedersen, “Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations.”

⁴⁵ Mayhew, “Seminar-Conference on Education: Review by Mr A.I. Mayhew,” 11; [Is this two references? The period confused me, especially since we earlier mentioned a shortened form of “Felix Keesing Papers, UHM”. The two different shortened forms are in green. Please see note relative to footnote 1] Correspondence, Education in the Pacific Report—August 1936, Special Collections, University of Hawaii, Manoa (UHM), Felix Keesing Papers, Folder 1, A1999:003.

of the conference and in the premise that the education of Pacific peoples was an essentially benevolent project, led by nonnative experts.

According to Keesing, from pooling experience and knowledge at the conference “there will be evolved a set of basic principles for native education generally.” Given the “international authorities behind it—educationists, psychologists and anthropologists,” he and his colleagues confidently believed that the outcomes would “provide much needed guidance.”⁴⁶ To this end, as well as publishing his own account, Keesing ensured that the mimeographed proceedings were circulated to all participant countries following the conference.

Whatever the radical potential of drawing delegates from a variety of colonial and colonized constituencies, a key aim of the gathering was to combine world expertise on the question of how to educate native people in order to “help” them to best negotiate an increasingly globalizing world. One conclusion some delegates drew, and which we consider below, was the value of applying new, progressive conceptualizations of education as a way of engaging children’s world views, and thus of educating and thus modernising some of the more capable native and Indigenous peoples. At the same time, however, conference speakers emphasized that peaceful progress toward self-rule and forms of future decolonization should be advanced in ways that would embed forms of modernity sensitive to cultural diversity. Education should direct Indigenous and colonized peoples, and those in charge of them, toward that goal.

Ending colonialism, as Tomoko Akami has noted, was never on the agenda of the Pan-Pacific internationalism.⁴⁷ Nor was it fundamentally questioned by the League of Nations or the Permanent Mandates Commission, which, as Susan Pedersen has argued, saw in the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific*, 200–1.

combination of British imperial know-how and American enthusiasm, the continuation of the “civilizational” discourse in which the nonwhite races in the dependencies were understood to be variously incapable of self-rule.⁴⁸ Thus the *future* of colonial rule was one of the major issues of the day. Keesing had been involved in the IPR’s own study program regarding the “Dependencies and Native Races,” and he and his wife, Marie, were leading figures within this network in calling to modernize, through social science research, the ways in which the mandated and colonial powers carried out their duties toward less advanced others. In this sense, a discussion of the educability of natives was also a discussion about the construction of new colonizing subjects capable of administering, sometimes cooperatively with locals, the processes of global capital and modernization in process around the world. In striving to realize these aims, participants in 1936 applied new ideas in anthropology, psychology, and sociology to the question of the relationship between colonialism, native peoples, and world culture in determining the future of human affairs. In his conference report, Keesing observed that

It was emphasized again and again in the gathering that a much closer alliance is needed between education and the human sciences, especially anthropology, in order that the secrets of human nature may be mastered, and the educator may be as far as possible on sure ground.⁴⁹

Equally, as discussed below, assumptions rehearsed in 1936 about the unequal capacity for educability among a hierarchy of native cultures and peoples saw Aboriginal Australians as the supposed baseline. These two orientations, one favoring a common or universal education and the other a differentiated and supposedly culturally appropriate form, were debated at length

⁴⁸ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.

⁴⁹ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937), 15.

among delegates at the Honolulu conference. While these apparent contradictions of approach represent long-standing tensions in educational provision, they took on a particular cast in the time and place of this conference in the Pacific, where the claim of the social sciences in leading the reform of colonialism, and supplying effective insight into the mentality of colonized peoples, was at stake.


Speaking for the Pacific

The conveners had much at stake in this regionalist, yet ostensibly global, project, not least because they were transnational subjects with international careers. Keesing was born and educated in New Zealand, and undertook further studies at the London School of Economics and Yale University. By 1936, he was already known for his anthropological studies of the Pacific islands as a professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Hawaii.⁵⁰

Loram was born a British South African and educated in South Africa, the UK, and the United States. After holding teaching and administrative posts in South Africa, he became Inspector of Schools, then Chief Inspector of Native Education in Natal, and a member of the South African Native Affairs Commission.⁵¹

Many of the key players at the 1936 conference were, therefore, continuing a conversation and renewing personal connections that had begun several years earlier. They were the authors and readers of a shared literature that included scholarship from the Keesings, Mayhew, and Loram, and enjoyed access to philanthropic funding and membership in overlapping international networks. Loram, for example, was appointed to the Board of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu following the 1934 Yale conference, telling Frederick Keppel, Carnegie Corporation

⁵⁰ Paisley, "Applied Anthropology and Inter-War Internationalism."

⁵¹ Arthur Mayhew, "Obituary: Charles Loram," series 111A, box 206, folder 2, CCNY. 

president, that the Yale “Summer School had helped a great deal” in securing this position: Carnegie had also provided funds for the 1934 conference.⁵⁷ The connection with the museum would remain strong during the 1936 conference, when delegates visited to see its collection under guidance of the director, Peter Buck, also a conference participant. Loram had previously visited Honolulu in 1933, meeting with colleagues in race relations. A letter back to Keppel conveying news on this Carnegie-supported visit reveals the extent of international networking operating at this intersection of race, education, philanthropy, and colonialism.⁵⁸ Loram mentions Arthur Mayhew from the Colonial Office in London, noting his encouragement of others to attend the 1934 conference at Yale. Loram also hoped to interest Keppel in Stanley Porteus, another 1936 delegate, describing him as “an American Australian on the Faculty here [at the University of Hawaii]. He seems to me,” Loram continued, “to have done the best work in inter-racial psychology that I have seen. He is just the man we want for South Africa and I am trying to arrange a visiting Professorship for him.”⁵⁹ As we note below, according to Keesing’s report, the conference as a whole would not feel as warmly as Loram toward Porteus’s psychological work, suggesting a degree of difference in opinion between the two conveners.

The reputations of Keesing and Loram were undoubtedly integral to the success of the conference seminar, each attracting leading figures and sufficient funding from Carnegie and their respective universities.⁶⁰ But, even with Keesing and Loram’s extensive networks,

⁵⁷ Charles T. Loram to F. Keppel, Oct. 7, 1934, series 111A, box 206, folder 2, CCNY.

⁵⁸ The range of participants was also, of course, limited in other respects, and the nomination of them dependent on national and international networks and in their having access to funds, often, but not only, philanthropic, such as via Carnegie, as well as via government support (colonial and education). The nomination of Australian participants is a case in point, as discussed below.

⁵⁹ Charles T. Loram to F. Keppel, July 4, 1933, University of Hawaii, , series 111A, box 206, folder 2, CCNY.

⁶⁰ For correspondence between Keesing and the Carnegie Corporation to secure funding for the Honolulu conference and documentation of other sources of support, see “University of Hawaii Conference and Seminar on

reputations, knowledge base, and friendships with men like Mayhew, the goal of involving as wide a range of Pacific nations and peoples as possible remained dependent upon colonial powers in the region and the willingness of governments to suggest delegates, particularly from those territories under colonial or mandated authority.⁶¹

The professional backgrounds of the two conference directors also reflected the intertwining of anthropology and education at the conference. This is clear in the Australian delegation, with the selection of participants heavily weighted toward anthropological expertise, conveying the extent to which this knowledge system was regarded as crucial to native education. At the request of the Carnegie Corporation, Australian representatives were selected by ACER, itself funded by Carnegie; ACER Director, Kenneth Cunningham had close personal ties with the influential Carnegie president, Frederick Keppel.⁶² The chosen participants, selected by Cunningham or on the recommendation of colleagues, were prominent anthropologist A. P. Elkin, University of Sydney, and his research assistant, Mary Collier; William Groves, former head teacher of government native schools, Territory of New Guinea, and then a Research Fellow in New Guinea for the Australian National Research Council; Francis Williams, government anthropologist, Territory of Papua; Norman Tindale, ethnologist, South Australian Museum, and member of the Board for Anthropological Research, University of Adelaide; and Edgar Stocker, identified as a lecturer on Aboriginal life, and a

Education in Pacific Countries," 1934–1938, CCNY, series 111A, box 168, folder 3; for Keesing's correspondence with the Rockefeller Foundation regarding payments for a fellowship he held 1928–1930, see Rockefeller Archives, NY, RAC RF RG1.1, series 418S, box 2, folder 14, New Zealand Social Sciences, Keesing, Felix, 1930–1934.

⁶¹ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1938), 1.

⁶² White, "Carnegie Philanthropy in Australia in the Nineteen Thirties—a Reassessment"; and Glotzer, "A Long Shadow."

cinematographer and recorder with various anthropological expeditions, Sydney.⁶³ Elkin was a vocal contributor to the conference and wrote several reports and articles en route to the conference and on his return.⁶⁴ Historian of Aboriginal policy in Australia Russell McGregor has argued that attending the conference led Elkin to consider more directly the question of education in relation to Aboriginal policy in Australia.⁶⁵ In January 1937, *The Argus* reported that Elkin believed the conference would be regarded as a “landmark in the education of native peoples,” summarizing that the conference considered problems of “national culture and educational policies for native races and the aims and philosophy of such education.”⁶⁶



Fig. 1. Delegates to the 1936 seminar-conference, including Elkin (sixth from left) and Tindale (tenth from left). (Photo courtesy of Journal of Anthropological Visit to United States and Europe, 1936–1937, Tindale Papers, South Australian Museum.)

⁶³ “The Schools: Educational Research,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 9, 1936, 16; “Education Conference at Honolulu: Representatives of Australia,” *Canberra Times*, June 3, 1936, 4.

⁶⁴ A. P. Elkin, “Education of Native Races in Pacific Countries: Report of a Conference,” *Oceania* 7, no. 2 (Dec. 1936), 145–68; A. P. Elkin, “Native Education, with Special Reference to the Australian Aborigines,” *Oceania* 7, no. 4 (June 1937), 459–500.

⁶⁵ A. P. Elkin to T. Paterson, Minister for the Interior, quoted in Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 220.

⁶⁶ “Native Education Problems,” *The Argus*, Jan. 16, 1937, 16.

Conference as Pedagogic Event

Turning now to the conference event itself, we can see how the session structure and the program notes served to create a distinctive atmosphere of enquiry, one that sought to marry concerns about native education with questions about the larger purposes of education.⁶⁷

These fundamental questions were plainly intended by the organizers to be at the forefront of conference discussions, with explicit guidance in the program for delegates to remain attuned to such matters, even while they dwelt on the particularities of educational provision in different regions and countries. The program instructions were adamant that, while exchanging information on national issues and strategies was useful as a starting point, it was not the ultimate purpose of the gathering: the trajectory of the conference was to be toward discussion of an educational problem “in its more general significance.”⁶⁸ Keesing acknowledged the challenge this presented to participants, a group of “educators and social scientists with varying experience and contrasting national viewpoints,” who were asked “to find mutually satisfying definitions as to the best future development of Pacific peoples and of humanity as a whole.”⁶⁹ This difficulty, however, was not to stand in the way of the conference’s higher ambitions.

The program notes, conceived as a “syllabus” with educative purposes of its own, emphasized that “the sample region is not the subject of discussion, but the problem it illustrates.”⁷⁰ This advice was reiterated throughout the program.⁷¹ Based on his interpretive report and previous work, it is reasonable to assume that Keesing had a strong guiding hand on

⁶⁷ Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*.

⁶⁸ “Revised Program Covering Morning Sessions: July 15–July 24,” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 27.

⁶⁹ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937), 31.

⁷⁰ “Revised Program Covering Morning Sessions,” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 27.

⁷¹ “Proposed Syllabus of Study,” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 20.

the structure of the program and advice provided to participants. He was particularly concerned that participants understood the method of enquiry framing conference discussions—the detailed syllabus reveals a very directive pedagogy, with an unequivocal sense of the most desirable method for the productive exchange of ideas. The daily timetable was also revised over the course of the conference in response to emerging topics or problems not thought properly resolved, underscoring the explicitly educative intent of the discussions.⁷²

Conference participants had been asked to forward papers ahead of time, and the syllabus provides a summary of individual presentations with suggested topics for discussion, leading from the specific focus of the paper to larger questions, and drawing connections across countries and between papers. The program sequence is telling in this regard. The opening sessions elaborated the rationale for the event, including a formal welcome from the University of Hawaii president, David L. Crawford, and a presentation from Keesing on “Peoples of the Pacific: a Background Survey.”⁷³ This was followed by a presentation from Loram entitled, “Forerunners of the Hawaii-Yale Seminar-Conference,” in which he both asserted the significance of the Yale connection, even though the conference was in the Pacific and more visibly affiliated with the University of Hawaii, and situated the 1936 event in an even longer story about native education and race relations in which he claimed to have played an important role.

⁷² “Program” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 20, 27.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 21.

The first two weeks began with a focus on national- or system-based issues, looking to “education in its wider human setting and with national educational policies.”⁷⁴ Delegates heard presentations on national systems and challenges, such as “Culture Change and Education in Mexico” (George I. Sanchez) or “Culture Change and Education in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands” (H. E. Maude); these were then matched with follow-up “topics for wider discussion.”⁷⁵ In the paper from the Mexican delegate, suggested topics included “Are cultural fusion and stabilization easily achieved? Are revolutions and other crises avoidable?” In relation to Elkin’s paper on “The Changing Australian Aborigine, with Special Reference to Education,” the topics for wider discussion included:

(i) How does this compare with the experience of other isolated and specialized folk: Melanesians, the Ainu, pygmies and other remote folk of Malaysia, Eskimos etc; (ii) What place, if any, can such people have in the modern world? (iii) What peculiar needs and difficulties have they which would call for special types of education?⁷⁶

The final weeks were devoted to exploring “the problems common to the Pacific as other regions” and this was to be undertaken in a systematic way: it was “well that every member have a clear idea of the method underlying this section.”⁷⁷ Presentations were to begin with a brief discussion of how a “particular problem manifests itself in a specific area and how it is being dealt with,” offered in the “nature of [an] illustrative sample,” with the substantive

⁷⁴ “Revised Program of Study” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 27.

⁷⁵ “Proposed Syllabus of Study” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 23

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23

⁷⁷ “Revised Program of Study” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 27.

analysis attending to its more “general significance.”⁷⁸ On Thursday July 16, the morning’s topic was “Assimilation versus Indigenous Development in Education.” The syllabus noted different national policies on these matters and the “degree to which indigenous elements are encouraged.” Two introductory presentations stimulated discussion: “The New Program of American Indian Education” by Ataloo, and a presentation from A. Keir (Inspector of Schools in Malaya, educated in Scotland) on “Native and Western Elements in the Educational Systems of British Malay.” From these presentations the general topics for discussion included: “What justifications are there for emphasizing in educational and other matters (a) the indigenous culture, (b) the culture of the politically dominant group, or (c) the general heritage of modern civilisation?”⁷⁹ Other sessions took a more explicitly philosophical direction, considering, for example, “Problems Arising from Conflicts in Morality, Religion, and Philosophy, Especially as Relating to Education.”⁸⁰

At the heart of the conference deliberations remained concerns about the form and content of educational purpose and provision, and whether it was desirable to have a common or differentiated education for native populations. Addressing this matter inevitably brought into the frame questions about the racial basis of the limits and capacity for educability. These were not easily answered or, rather, there was no easy consensus achieved across the conference. While Keesing wrote in his report that none present supported the “still potent colonial doctrine that so-called backwards peoples are destined to remain in an inferior position,” there

⁷⁸ Our larger project is addressing issues raised at the 1936 conference from the perspective of those coming from beyond the Anglo-American world, including those from Latin America and Asia as well as European colonial powers. For the significance of such two-way transnational exchanges about the recontextualization of progressive ideas, see Ruben Flores, *Backroads Pragmatists: Mexico’s Melting Pot and Civil Rights in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

was no agreement as to “what this benevolent ideal implies.”⁸¹ Indeed, he identifies a persistent division in the discussions, one that even the most careful syllabus planning and pedagogic guidance could not alleviate. Keesing described a yawning gap between those who took an expansive and idealist view of education, whereby an effective program of education was “to formulate a comprehensive philosophy of life,” and those who adopted a more practical or pragmatic view of education as a “process ‘fostering intelligent adaptation’ to life’s problems as they are.”⁸² The latter opinion was more in line with Keesing’s own view.



Fig. 2. Delegates at the 1936 Hawaii seminar-conference. (Photo courtesy of Journal of Anthropological Visit to United States and Europe, 1936–1937, Tindale Papers, South Australian Museum.)

These divergences of point of view were not, however, allowed to dampen the conference spirit, which was enlivened by numerous convivial occasions for the exchange of opinions in social settings. Formal sessions were usually programmed for three hours in the morning, allowing for less structured recreational and leisure time in the afternoons, with the occasional

⁸¹ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937), 31.

⁸² *Ibid.*

evening lecture.⁸³ Among those presenting to public audiences in this way were Mayhew on “India and Its Problems,” and Dr. T. Jesse Jones on “Social Security and Civilization.”⁸⁴ Tindale kept a diary of his experiences, including the importance of social and cultural events to the success of the conference as a potentially transformative site. Participants were to become the seeds for change, and not surprisingly it was the noncolonial or nonnative delegates who were expected to undergo a process of realization. They were to admit the flaws in their own government’s approaches, learn from the successes of others, and come to a synthesis of opinion about what was best for native peoples. This meant enacting a capacity to think through the eyes of delegates living under settler/colonial authority. The proceedings, including social events, convey an optimistic sense of the possibilities for progressive reform in native education, seeing these as integral to the realization of progressive ideals in education more broadly and as an expression of a humanitarian attitude toward colonized and Indigenous people.

This characteristically internationalist vision was also directed toward the self-conscious cultivation of understanding and international sensibilities among delegates themselves.⁸⁵ Delegates were provided with many opportunities to learn from each other as experts in seeking solutions to specific and practical problems of educational administration and as fellow travelers in pursuit of more elevated perspectives on the modernizing mission of education outside imperial and metropolitan centers. The location of the conference was supposed to enhance opportunities for engaging in intercultural interaction through observing the supposed

⁸³ Appendix B, “The Day to Day Program,” in Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937), 200–12.

⁸⁴ The latter, for example, on the evening of Tuesday, July 7 was reported favorably in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* on the following day, Tindale Journal.

⁸⁵ Keesing, “The Day to Day Program,” 200–12.

success of America's experiments in Hawaii, educational and otherwise, in "interracial harmony."⁸⁶

In his opening address Loram impressed upon delegates the value of forging friendships throughout the conference, exhorting them to embrace "comradeship in a great and glorious task." A sense of solidarity arising out of the conference would help them all to feel, he believed, that

We are [not] alone in this task of educating non-western peoples. No longer need each of us think of himself as an Atlas bearing on his or her shoulders the weight of this task. Views will be exchanged, not only in the formal discussions but also in the often much more valuable informal discussions.

He mused that the deep friendships formed would instill "that feeling of brotherhood, kinship, social solidarity which have helped so much the peoples we would like to serve."⁸⁷ In calling forth a feeling of social affinity among the delegates, Loram positioned this as evidence of the larger quality that bound together the predominantly European delegates with the native peoples with and for whom they strove on the basis of their shared humanity.

The conference itself had a distinctly pedagogical flavor, a mode of engaging with participants that fostered a view of education that was supposedly characterized by reasoned discussion but also emotional and embodied practices of reflection and self-discovery. Holding the conference in Honolulu, at the heart of the Pacific, promised an immersive educational experience consistent with the progressive education dictum of learning by doing and from direct experience of the world. How better to understand the challenges of native education

⁸⁶ Warwick Anderson, "Racial Hybridity, Physical Anthropology and Human Biology in the Colonial Laboratories of the United States," supplement, *Current Anthropology* 53, no. S5 (April 2012), S95–S107.

⁸⁷ Charles Loram, "Forerunners of the Hawaii-Yale conference Seminar," in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 48.

than to inhabit the Pacific, and to see that world firsthand?⁸⁹ Honolulu was undoubtedly important to opening up the mind to new possibilities, if only from the point of view of the tourist. When Tindale set sail for the next stage of his anthropology world tour (itself funded by Carnegie)⁹⁰ he and other delegates threw their flower leis into the water “in accordance with a Hawaiian belief that he who does may come again to the island of Paradise.”⁹¹

Publishing Education in Pacific Countries (1937, 1938)

Following the conference and distribution of the mimeographed proceedings, it took another year or so before a report of the conference was first published in late 1937 and reissued in 1938. In its pages, Keesing sought to synthesize the discussions, providing his own “interpretation” on the “ideas, agreements, and disagreements” that arose throughout the five-week event. His report did not follow the strict sequence of presentations; rather, he chose to thematically analyze the recorders’ prepared papers and notes, forming from them a detailed analysis of what he termed the “whole conference thought,” and fitting things together “in what seemed . . . the most unified and useful order.”⁹² In this sense, Keesing was a participant observer, actively utilizing a form of ethnographic writing. Given that Marie was often the silent partner in his other writings, perhaps here too she provided notes from each day, along with those of the appointed recorders that became absorbed into Keesing’s overview.

⁸⁹ Warwick Anderson, “Liberal Intellectuals as Pacific Supercargo: White Australian Masculinity and Racial Thought on the Border-Lands,” *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 3 (Sept. 2015), 425–39.

⁹⁰ According to Tindale’s obituary, he was funded by Carnegie to undertake a world tour to study anthropology and museums. See Philip G. Jones, “Norman B. Tindale – An Obituary,” *Records of the South Australian Museum* 28, no. 2 (Dec. 1995), 159–176.

⁹¹ Tindale Journal, 125. [This should say “Tindale Journal” since it was mentioned earlier.]

⁹² Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937), vii.

Keesing was at pains to garner other opinions of the conference and asked several of its key figures to write summaries reflecting their experiences. Loram and Mayhew also commented on the draft manuscript. The resulting book was lively and engaging in its address, clearly meant for a general as well as academic readership. In addition copies distributed to the delegates, many other requests arrived for copies of the proceedings and, after the publication of Keesing's synthetic interpretation, letters came from around the world thanking him for the book. For example, the Native Affairs Bureau in the United States was planning to supply copies to all its officers.⁹³ And the Carnegie Corporation continued its support for the event by funding the distribution of copies of Keesing's report to Australian and New Zealand audiences.⁹⁴

Keesing's interpretive report aimed to make clear that conference discussions had been expansive, combining philosophical reflections on the purposes of education with practical advice on the administration of colonial and native schools: "To what extent, it was asked, are present policies looking towards common ends? Can any basic philosophy of education be formulated?"⁹⁵ In his ambitious efforts to capture the flavor of those exchanges, Keesing set out to summarize the overarching concerns guiding discussions, while aiming to keep a sense of the sentiments of those who had contributed to them.

One of these strongly felt points of exchange was the role of racial theory in the context of applied anthropology, or the real world in which acculturation was already in process, even in the areas of least contact. As it would turn out, despite the presence of Porteus from the

⁹³ Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Keesing, March 12, 1937, [Correspondence](#), Sept.–Dec. 1936, [Felix Keesing Papers UHM](#), folder 2. [Same question as earlier about this looking like two different citations. See note in footnote 1.] Answered at fn 45.

⁹⁴ Correspondence, Frederick Keppel to Felix Keesing, Aug. 19, 1938, University of Hawaii Conference and Seminar on Education in Pacific Countries, 1934–1938, series 111A, box 168, folder 3, CCNY.

⁹⁵ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1937), 31.

University of Hawaii, well-known for his work on testing intelligence (supposedly without cultural difference interfering in the results), and his colleague, Professor Romanzo Adams of the Department of Sociology at the university, support for racialism was not an outcome of the 1936 seminar conference. According to Keesing's account, most of the delegates were unimpressed by Porteus's presentation on intelligence testing, collectively asserting that rather than measuring a set of capacities aligned with race, the important point was that ultimately "all peoples are capable of responding *more or less* to the educational process."⁹⁷ In his informal report for Keesing following the conference, Mayhew wrote that, while the discussion about the relevance of psychology to educational theory was interesting, "The view of the psychologist member seemed to be that the psychologist has the right to challenge on psychological ground any particular aim or method, which may seem to him impracticable or unwise." In his opinion, although "the educator is bound to take into account the facts revealed by psychological research . . . the psychologist as such was not qualified to define educational aims or to prescribe methods."⁹⁸ Tindale, in rough notes appearing to represent his own statement on this matter, asserted his preference in relation to Australian Aboriginals was that even such a primitive people have "intelligence of a different type rather than to judge its quality as high, medium or low."⁹⁹

Despite these differences of opinion, according to Keesing, the conference recommended neither the British line of separate administration nor the American of assimilationism. No

⁹⁷ Exact attribution is difficult to make, as Keesing does not name each speaker he quotes. Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1938), 56 and quote on 57.

⁹⁸ "Seminar-Conference on Education Review by Mr A. I. Mayhew," **Felix Keesing Papers UHM; Correspondence**, Aug. 1936, folder 1, typed sheets, no date, no page. **[Same question as earlier about this citation. See note in footnote 1.] Answered at fn 2.**

⁹⁹ Tindale Journal, inserted note between pages 123 and 125.

doubt inspired by Buck, his colleague at the Bishop Museum, Keesing recommended a combination of the two, as presented in his report about the recent development in New Zealand of a cultural renaissance led by Maori leadership who were “reaching back to recapture worthwhile values in Maori heritage.”¹⁰⁰ Even if traditional life was somewhat superseded, then certain of its enduring qualities could be revitalized as a bridge in the process of modernization between the past and the future. At stake was how to mitigate against what, according to Keesing, many at the conference saw as the “unwarranted . . . aura of universal validity that come[s] to surround the ethics of the western peoples,” who should spend more time apprehending the real urgency of the question of education, in what form it should take and for what purpose, given the profound significance of cultural life to “native folk themselves.”¹⁰¹

Conclusion: Constructing Nonnative and Native Educational Subjects in the Pacific

The 1936 Honolulu conference posed a distinctive set of questions regarding the education of native populations within the Pacific, yet elements of its philosophical focus, transnational character, and program format resonated with the structure of other international education conferences held during these years. Like the NEF conferences of this era, organizers and delegates to the Honolulu conference understood themselves as progressively minded, seeking practical directions for what they saw as a politically forward-thinking agenda; that is, to deliberate on how best to educate “native peoples” in the Pacific region. Here, however, education was conceived as less centrally about creating world-minded citizens or fostering the inner life of children, and more about the very possibility and extent of educability. In the 1937 NEF conference, and progressive education more generally, questions were raised about the

¹⁰⁰ Keesing, *Education in Pacific Countries* (1938), 23.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

manner in which formal institutionalized learning might stifle the inherent creativity of children and inhibit their freedom—the push being away from officialdom and regulation. In the 1936 conference, matters of administration loomed larger, with repeated questions about the responsibility and role of national and colonial education systems in bringing native people into the project of formal institutionalized education. Part of this administrative project was to explore what exactly that education could and should embrace and what its limits were, with particular concerns about the cultural relevance of education provision to the future of the (settler) colonial relationship.

In a handful of conference presentations, modest attempts were made to draw out the significance of progressivism for approaches to the education of native people. New Zealand delegate D. G. Ball, a Senior Inspector of Native Schools, described the powerful influence of Dewey's philosophy and the NEF on the administrators of Maori education in New Zealand, which had led to a "fairly drastic alteration not only in the subjects of the curriculum but also in their presentation." He spoke of educational changes that "strove to reach the emotional life of Maori" and of developing programs on the conception of "creative activity by the child, growth and development from within."¹⁰² While celebration of the inner life and the emotional richness of children was commonplace in progressive discourse, it was far less evident at the 1936 event. Yet, in Ball's reflection we see tentative acknowledgement of this relative absence in relation to native people as educable subjects. The government anthropologist from the territory of Papua, F. E. Williams (part of the Australian delegation), similarly touched on this in mentioning the possibilities for personal growth through education. He observed "two rival

¹⁰² D. G. Ball, "New Zealand Native Policy in its Educational Aspects," in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 208.

aims of education that find expression in this conference. One is that of fitting the individual to take his place in the environment, physical and cultural, to which he is destined to live. The other is that of the full, and at the same time balanced, development of personality.” For him, the “really progressive aim” is toward “developing the individual personality,” and with that, he mused, the “pupil may take wings and fly over you.”¹⁰³

Most clearly the influence of the NEF can be heard in the words of Charles Loram. In his opening paper to the 1936 conference, Loram reflected on how attitudes to Indigenous and non-Western peoples had changed in the wake of war and peace. These changes were evident, he observed, in the work of the League of the Nations, and the acceptance “in principle at least” of the theory of national self-determination. These had given rise to a “critical attitude towards the education that had been accepted by or imposed upon non-western peoples,”¹⁰⁴ citing the NEF conferences as one example of discontent with the educational status quo. While not discounting the value of Western education, believing that the “coming world civilization will be largely western in pattern,”¹⁰⁵ Loram pleaded for

an appreciation of the cultures of other peoples, a critical attitude towards our western civilization and a realization that our western school system is top-heavy with the accidentals of education and needs to be analysed and simplified if it is to become integrated with the culture of other groups.¹⁰⁶

He wholeheartedly endorsed the words of Mayhew, who at the 1934 Yale Summer Seminar on race relations had declared:

¹⁰³ F. E. Williams, “Rival Aims of Education,” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 2, 289–90.

¹⁰⁴ Charles T. Loram, “Forerunners of the Hawaii-Yale Conference Seminar,” in Keesing and Loram, *Seminar-Conference on Education in Pacific Countries*, vol. 1, 42.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Belief in the potential equality of all races of mankind, respect for all local forms of culture as modes of growth, a desire to assist in these modes of growth by offering the best that western experience can contribute in the form best adapted to local conditions.¹⁰⁷

Education was to be both a form of cultural adaptation and a means to achieve it. There was but one education, not separate “‘educations’ which we can call English or African or Chinese.” Even so, he concluded, “It is surely as unwise to give an identical education to these different peoples as it is give the same education to the rural and the urban child in our own countries. Educational adaptation is what we would stand for.”¹⁰⁸

If Loram explicitly endorsed the aims and agenda of the NEF, little reciprocal traffic can be found. Indeed, in the NEF, one of the most extensive and influential networks of progressive education, the work of Loram, Keesing, and others looking at the education of native peoples appears to have been largely overlooked. At its root, a central difference between the two international education agendas is the notion of “freedom” in the production of educable subjects: the inherent not-yet freedom of the native subject contrasting with the imagined white subject whose freedom was presumed and not to be crushed by overly institutionalized education. While some echoes of progressive education are heard in the language and issues embedded within the 1936 conference, its distinctive presence serves to emphasize the underlying tension within the whole project of modernizing colonialism—authority over others in the name of their eventual autonomy. Historian of education Roland Sintos Coloma argues that “empire must be considered as a relevant analytic category in educational research,” seeing education as part of empire’s soft power, the indirect means by which power is asserted

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 44.

to achieve outcomes, not by command but by co-optation.¹⁰⁹ He proposes that education “is a technology of attraction and persuasion by the soft power of empire,” and we have argued that a similar process was at work in the imagined role of education in managing and modernizing changes in colonial governance displayed at the 1936 seminar-conference in Hawaii. In terms of rethinking the history of education from a regional perspective, our contribution has been to show how the Pacific was not simply an extension of the American empire, but a site in which British, Australasian, and European interests also played out in the project of managing and modernizing colonialism. Here we have elaborated the significance of education in mediating and realizing these ambitions. Against the free-floating traveling ideas of transnational and/or regional histories, we have pointed to the ways in which educational concerns and strategies offer a focal point for tracing the movement of colonial expertise and for situating and exploring its effects in specific fields of practice.

¹⁰⁹ Roland Sintos Coloma, “Empire: An Analytical Category for Educational Research,” *Educational Theory* 63, no. 6 (Dec. 2013), 643.