**THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS OF EDUCATION**

Talk at the Pohnpei Education Forum, April 2, 1993

1) **Educate for tomorrow, not yesterday.**

It is unclear whether the young Pohnpeians we educate today will be spending their lives on Pohnpei, Oregon or Guam. Be sure to provide an education that will help them in whatever circumstances they find themselves in the future.

As times change, our education should change also. The education we offer today should be different from that offered in the 1950s and 1960s.

The goal of our education should be to turn out young people who will feel equally comfortable in the nahs and at a cocktail party.

2) **School is not the only way to get an education.**

Education is a far broader term than merely schooling. It consists of formal education (largely schooling) as well as informal education (a broader range of learning experiences).

Informal education goes on in villages and towns--wherever people sit down for sakau, or a father shows his son how to climb a coconut tree, or a mother teaches her daughter how to wash clothes in a stream.

Trust in formal education. You have no choice. Some who opt out of school will get a decent education regardless, even if they never get their degree.

3) **Don't teach in school what can be better taught outside school.**

Some knowledge and skills, although very valuable, should be taught in informal settings. Examples are spoken Pohnpeian, customs, dancing and local arts.

Some educators, in their zeal to "preserve the culture," feel obliged to introduce these things into the school curriculum. Their efforts, however, are misguided and usually unsuccessful. If the society does not teach these things to the young, that is an indication that people probably don't regard these things as important any longer. Attempts to save them are futile.

The school day is short and there is not time to do everything (although some interests groups in the US and Guam, among other places, seem to ignore this obvious fact). Be selective in what you attempt to do in school.

4) **Do more by doing less.**

Don't be distracted from your main purpose as educators by trying to do too many things. Focus on basic objectives--those skills that provide an essential foundation for future growth.

The emphasis should be on helping students "learn how to learn." This means a clear focus on the 3 R's: "reading, writing and 'rithmetic" (or literacy, computational skills, ability to think). This has always been the strategy of the best school systems everywhere in the world.

These basic skills can be taught through a vocational program as well as an academic one, providing that the emphasis is on basic skills and development of thinking is not neglected. Good vocational education is never simply job training.

Remember the limits within which educators operate. As David Ramarui once said, "We are educators, not magicians."

5) **Education should be preparation for life, not livelihood.**

School is not responsible for providing jobs, although it can certainly help train people for employment. When government leaders see education as nothing more than manpower training, they fail students.

Education can provide the groundwork necessary to acquire job skills, but it is about much more than operating machines, using a wrench, and learning computer programs. The most important survival skill of all is the ability to think, no matter where they live and what they do. Human evolution should teach us this obvious fact.

There is much mindless talk these days about how to go about training local people to replace foreign workers. Remember that the Filipinos and other Asians are not here simply because they know more than our people. They are here because they work more cheaply and more steadily than local people. This is not a slur against Pohnpeians, for they are known as hard workers when they travel abroad. Everyone works harder when they are abroad because there are fewer cultural "distractions" and they have nothing but their work to support them. This accounts for the success of the outer islanders (Mokilese, Pingelapese and Mortlockese) on Pohnpei.

6) **Keep your school system "open", but don't ever count on universal secondary education.**

Look at the experience of other places. Chuuk once built for universal high school education, but never got more than 60% of the high school age population. In the Marshalls, 75 out of every 100 students finished elementary school; 50 entered high school, but only 25 completed their degree.

In your desire for an open system, balance the costs. Keep slower students insofar as possible, but don't resort to teaching kindergarten subjects in high school to do so. Be sure that you don't imperil the brightest students for the multitude. If you do, you threaten your future.

7) **If Micronesia's wealth is its people, then cultivate this wealth carefully.**

If, as political leaders often say, Micronesia's greatest resource is its people, no effort should be spared to develop this resource. There is a lot riding on education, so do it well.

Be honest. Be sure to concentrate on the student's education rather than the educator's job security. Good educators should be rewarded; poor ones should be encouraged to find some other profession.

Remember that our limited resources have to go a long way. And remember, too, that you have the future of generations to come in your hands.