



## American Education in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

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IN THE western Pacific over the past two decades the United States has been engaged in a challenging venture in education.

"Micronesia"<sup>1</sup> is synonymous with the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. It consists of three major archipelagos<sup>2</sup> located north of the Equator in the western Pacific Ocean. It is one of the three great subdivisions<sup>3</sup> of the Pacific Islands and covers three million square miles of ocean. Scattered throughout the area are 2,100 small islands which have a combined land area of seven hundred square miles.<sup>4</sup> This trust area is approximately the size of the continental United States and from east to west would stretch approximately from San Diego, California, to Nashville, Tennessee. However, the vast majority of the trust is water, and to paraphrase a famous statesman, "If some nations have too much history then the Trust Territory has too much water."<sup>5</sup> The Trust Territory was formerly a Japanese mandate and is now administered by the United States

under a 1947 Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations.

The Trusteeship Agreement obligates the United States to:

1. Foster the development of such political institutions as are suited to the Trust Territory and . . . promote the development of the inhabitants of the Trust Territory toward self-government or independence . . .
2. Promote the economic advancement and self-sufficiency of the inhabitants . . .
3. Promote the social advancement of the inhabitants . . . ; and
4. Promote the educational advancement of the inhabitants and to this end . . . take steps toward the establishment of a general system of elementary education; facilitate the vocational and cultural advancement of the population; and . . . encourage qualified students to pursue higher education, including training on the professional level.<sup>6</sup>

The United States has been in Micronesia for over two decades and during this time has endeavored to build an educational program. The formal educational program now in existence is part of the large overall program for the development of the Trust Territory. Because of its importance in the developing world picture in Asia, the Amer-

<sup>1</sup> The name "Micronesia" was recommended by Domeny de Rienzi to the Société de Géographie de Paris in December 1831 to distinguish it from Indonesia to the west, Melanesia to the south, and Polynesia to the east.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands (excluding Guam).

<sup>3</sup> The more famous subdivisions are Polynesia (many islands) and Melanesia (black islands).

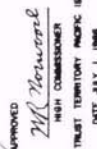
<sup>4</sup> It is smaller than the state of Rhode Island in land area.

<sup>5</sup> Mackenzie King once said: "If England has too much history then Canada has too much geography."

<sup>6</sup> *Trusteeship Agreement for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*. Article Six. New York: United Nations, 1957. p. 3.

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MARIANA, CAROLINE AND MARSHALL ISLANDS	
TOTAL INHABITED 'ATOLLS AND SEPARATE ISLANDS	92,373
OCEAN AREA APPROX	3,000,000 SQ MILES
LAND AREA	700 SQ MILES
	2.14 ISLANDS





ican program in education demands the careful attention of all educators.

In executing the provisions of Article Six of the Trusteeship Agreement, every educator should be aware that there are basic problems in the Trust Territory. First, the Trust Territory has a population of 92,000, of whom 30,000 are school age, strewn over 3,000,000 square miles of land and water devoid of any effective network of transportation and communication.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the hundreds of islands or islets are separated not only by water barriers but by cultural and language barriers. There are at least nine distinct languages, and the result is a babel of tongues making pupil-teacher relations difficult.

Third, logistical support for the educational programs is difficult. With the source of supply located over four thousand miles away, the problem of procuring building material and classroom equipment is compounded many times. In most cases, building material suited for mainland schools is not suited for use in a tropical island environment.

Finally, the recruitment of educational personnel who will adjust to another culture is a problem. Many teachers arrive in the Trust Territory without training in teaching English as a foreign language and have a difficult time working under very trying conditions. In 1965, thwarted by a shortage of trained teachers, Micronesia welcomed its first Peace Corps volunteers. It is too early to ascertain whether or not they will adequately fill the need for better prepared personnel in education.

## Educational System

The High Commissioner of the Trust Territory<sup>8</sup> has the final responsibility for the operation of schools. His responsibilities and authority are delegated to a Commissioner for

<sup>7</sup> Air Micronesia, operated by Continental Airlines, has tied the district centers together with weekly flights, but communication with and transportation to outer islands are uncertain to say the least.

<sup>8</sup> Appointed by the Secretary of the Interior.

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Education and two Deputy Commissioners, under whom are the educational directors of the six districts.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners for Education located at the headquarters level, there are various other personnel including a Coordinator of Elementary Education, a Coordinator of Secondary and Teacher Education, a Coordinator of Adult Education, Education Specialists in Mathematics, Science, English, Reading, Special Education, and Homemaking, a Library Supervisor, a Scholarship and Placement Officer, a Student Services Officer, and a Recruitment Officer.<sup>10</sup>

### **Aims and Philosophy**

The educational goal of the United States in Micronesia is to provide a free, universal, coeducational system encompassing grades one through twelve, with advanced academic and vocational training for those who will profit. In order to carry out such goals, progressive educators in Micronesia very early selected pragmatism as the unofficial philosophy most likely to accomplish the aims set for the Territory. They have not been concerned with whether western elements should prevail, but rather with producing minds trained to deal critically and effectively with the problems they will face.

One island observer of education has said:

Education must be a means of making life today richer and more adequately lived. Education must work from what is, for the first steps of the road. Hence it must have a respect for existing cultures. But nothing is to be depended upon as permanent. New generations will reshape things to meet their own needs. Ours is a philosophy of immediate education, not of final ends.<sup>11</sup>

This philosophy ultimately places the choices in behavior and ideas with the in-

digenuous pupils, not with the American teacher or educational director.

### **Language Question**

The wide variations in languages that exist in the six districts of the Trust Territory have plagued the United States from the beginning. Serious discussion of this problem continued unabated among American educators up to 1965, when the Congress of Micronesia solved the dilemma.

Two views were evident concerning the language question. One favored the use of English over the vernacular, pointing out the inadequacy of the indigenous tongues in the modern world. The second claimed that to disregard the vernacular was educationally unsound and would imply to the young people that their tongue was inferior. Ultimately a compromise was reached between the two viewpoints: the local languages were given priority over English in the first three grades, and English from grade four on became the major medium of instruction.

By the 1960's, English was well on the way toward becoming the *lingua franca* of the Trust Territory. In 1965, a new language policy was adopted establishing English as the language of instruction at the elementary level. This change was made in conformance with the desires of the Micronesian people as expressed by the Congress of Micronesia.

### **Elementary Schools**

The more than 20,000 pupils enrolled in over 300 public schools are taught by indigenous, contract, and Peace Corps teachers. Despite the addition of many new school buildings in the Trust Territory, great variations still exist, from open-sided thatch-roofed huts to concrete structures equipped with electricity and modern sanitation facilities. The ability, skill, and training of the indigenous population vary as much as do the physical plants.

The eight-year curriculum of the elementary schools is patterned after stateside systems. This raises the question as to whether or not a stateside system is the best model for a tropical island setting. The cur-

<sup>9</sup> The Marianas, Truk, Ponape, Marshalls, Palau, and Yap are the six districts.

<sup>10</sup> Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Personnel Listing, November 1, 1968, Saipan, Mariana Islands.

<sup>11</sup> Felix Keesing, *The South Seas in the Modern World*. New York: John Day Company, 1941, p. 253.



riculum includes language arts, science, arithmetic, and social studies, as well as special programs in art, music, and physical education.

"Pioneer work in elementary education began approximately one hundred years ago in church-sponsored schools."<sup>12</sup> The influence of these schools in making the community education-minded continues today through the instruction of over 4,000 pupils currently enrolled in elementary schools.

### **High Schools**

Until 1962, the only public high school in the Trust Territory was the Pacific Islands Central School (PICS) located in Ponape District.<sup>13</sup> A complete reassessment of the educational system in 1962 led to a decision by the High Commissioner to establish high schools in each district, and by 1965 all districts had four-year public high schools. Enrollment has reached over 3,000, with an additional 1,000 attending mission high schools in Truk, Saipan, and Ponape.

The high school curriculum provides the traditional academic training found in most stateside high schools as well as vocational education. For a vast majority of the students, the high school provides a terminal education with subject areas adapted to the

needs of their environment. It also includes teacher education as well as preprofessional training for those going on to higher education. Vocational subjects taught include carpentry, boatbuilding, and other skills which students will need for living in their own environment. Female students are taught rudimentary domestic skills such as food preparation, weaving, infant and child care, as well as other tasks. Agriculture courses are taught when land is available, and efforts are made at some of the schools to have students raise some of the food consumed in their dining rooms.

### **Teachers**


The supply of teachers in Micronesia has never been adequate. While stateside teachers are recruited under special contract with the Department of the Interior, many do not have the training in teaching English as a second language which is so vital to successful teaching in a different culture. It was not until 1965 that the first graduating classes of the high schools provided people for the teaching field. Consequently, the quality of Micronesian teachers still leaves a great deal to be desired. Upgrading of Micronesian teachers through in-service education and workshops in the Territory is one of the most important phases of the civilian administration program in education.

It is hoped that the arrival of Peace Corps volunteers will close the gap and provide a more adequate supply of teachers. Most of the volunteers work in the elemen-

<sup>12</sup> J. L. Taylor. "A Pacific Island Adaptation of American Public Schools." *School and Society* 73:292; March 12, 1951.

<sup>13</sup> J. L. Taylor. "Schools of the Trust Territory." *Hawaiian Educational Review*, February 1951, p. 39.

# **Instructor**

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tary schools.<sup>14</sup> A second phase of the Peace Corps program envisions volunteers at the secondary school level.

It is much too early to evaluate accurately the effects of the Peace Corps workers, as stated previously, but high hopes are held for their success.

### **Advanced Education**

There are no institutions of higher learning beyond the high school at the present time in the Trust Territory.

Advanced education outside the Territory is provided for those students who have demonstrated that they will benefit from further education. Funds for scholarship come from the United Nations, the Trust Territory, religious organizations, private individuals, and a few other sources.<sup>15</sup> The largest number of students on scholarships attend the University of Guam, while others attend colleges and universities in Hawaii, the mainland, and the Philippines, as well as the Fiji Medical School, which is run by the British to train medical officers. The major fields of study for most of these students show a diversity of interests, including humanities, education, fine arts, law, science (social and natural), engineering, medicine, and agriculture.

### **Adult Education**

No formal adult literacy program existed in the Trust Territory until 1965. Visiting United Nations teams noted this and said: "While the future of Micronesia lies with the children, the present and [the] im-

mediate future lie with the adults."<sup>16</sup> Since 1966, adult programs have been in operation in all districts. Some districts have American supervisors with Micronesian staff, while others have Micronesian educational personnel administering the program.

The typical curriculum offered at the adult level includes English, typing, business, algebra, government, general science, outboard motor repairs, home economics, and handicraft. Various media have been used to reach the population, with the most successful being educational broadcasting. Broadcasts in English and the vernacular reach thousands of people, even in the remote areas of the Territory.

After two decades in the Trust Territory, the following noteworthy contributions have been made by the United States in education:

1. Micronesia has a universal educational system encompassing grades one through twelve.
2. All districts now have a full four-year public high school.
3. The curricula of the schools are balanced, with opportunities in both vocational and academic areas.
4. A reassessment of educational needs in the early 1960's has resulted in an accelerated program which has provided more stateside teachers, facilities, and educational material.
5. Advanced training is provided through full or partial scholarships to schools outside the Territory.
6. America has demonstrated its good faith to the older population by attempting to reach them through adult education.
7. Micronesians are now moving into administrative positions and replacing American educators. □

<sup>14</sup> *The Peace Corps Goes to Paradise*, a pamphlet prepared by the Peace Corps. Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, (no date). p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of State. *Sixteenth Annual Report to the United Nations on the Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964. p. 265.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Trusteeship Council. *Reports of the United Nations Visiting Mission to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 1964*. New York: United Nations, 1964. p. 8.

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