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# Transforming Kanak Knowledge to Teach Students and Train Teachers in New Caledonia

# 14

Eddie Wayuone Wadrawane

## Abstract

The reconfiguration of New Caledonian schools and curricula seems to be essential in times of complex political and environmental changes. It should rehabilitate the memory of the Indigenous Kanak cultures and genealogical itineraries. Six fundamental elements of Kanak culture (*éléments fondamentaux de la culture Kanak*, or EFCK) are therefore currently integrated into school curricula following their official introduction in 2016 in the New Caledonian Education Project (PENC). Their implementation in schooling contributes to innovative teaching and teacher training techniques and will progressively lead to socio-school rebalancing. The transfer of Indigenous Kanak knowledge into so-called academic contexts can contribute to a greater balance between humans and their environment. Based on qualitative methods in human and social sciences, I will demonstrate the possibilities for teaching Indigenous knowledge and life skills. Examples for the transposition of Kanak knowledge and cultural practices include the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony on Maré island and a yam calendar produced by teacher candidates in their second year of training. I conclude that schools and universities should encourage teachers, teacher candidates, educators, and students to critically reflect the didactic resources of Kanak and Oceanic cultures.

## Keywords

Marginalization · Rebalancing · Contextualization · Kanak knowledge · Didactic transposition · *Aengeni hnameneng* · Yam

## 14.1 Introduction

Greater cultural awareness of youth in primary and secondary education is a philosophical, social, and educational necessity. The socioeconomic balancing politics introduced by the Matignon-Oudinot Accords in 1988, described elsewhere in this book, also involved formal education. The teaching and scientific research on Kanak languages and cultures, which began in 1971 and was later broken off by political decisions, were re-launched by the Accords in 1988. The Nouméa Accord in 1998 accentuated and reinforced Kanak languages and cultures both at the University of New Caledonia (UNC) and the teacher training centers, and in other institutional structures such as the Academy of Kanak Languages, the Tjibaou Cultural Center, and the Kanak Customary Senate.

## 14.2 The Current School Context

For the start of the school year 2021, the New Caledonian government announced that 65,980 students were expected from kindergarten to high school, including 26,340 students at public primary level, 22,898 students at public secondary level, 7415 students in private primary schools, 8902 students at private secondary level, and the remainder, 425 students, in private noncontractual learning arrangements. Some 341 public and private schools were operating, including 258 primary schools, 57 middle schools, 5 general and technological high schools, 12 vocational high schools and 3 vocational high school branches, 5 multipurpose high schools, and 4 rural family homes.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Isabelle Champmoreau, member of the government in charge of education, Érick Roser, Vice-Rector, Director General of Education, Romain Capron, Director of Education, and Jean-Luc Bernard-Colombat, Director of Agricultural Training. Press conference of 10 February 2021, on the start of the 2021 school year, Government of New Caledonia.

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### 14.3 Some Worrying Facts About the Current Education System

Despite some smaller modifications, school curricula have remained almost unchanged since the beginning of formal schooling in New Caledonia. At present, the curricula appeal more to students from metropolitan France and less so for those from the French overseas territories (Wadrawane 2022). Indigenous Kanak and Oceanian knowledge is not sufficiently taken into account in school curricula. After analyzing two locally produced geography textbooks for primary and secondary schools, Stastny and Kowasch (2022) come to the same conclusion that Indigenous Kanak knowledge is marginalized, or described as backward and unprofitable. And ecological practices mostly do not take place in Indigenous milieus. The contextual harmonization of Kanak languages teaching is still delayed, although there is a choice of the four main languages for the high school degree. Each province has its own language teaching policy. But in 2019, the Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of New Caledonia (ISEE) estimated that there were 210,981 speakers of Kanak languages aged 15 and older in New Caledonia (see Chap. 13 by Leblic in this book).

Training and evaluation tools for pre-service and in-service teachers are still very eurocentric. This eurocentrism is omnipresent in teacher training and student teaching institutions. This context makes it difficult to implement a policy of the “oceanization” of schooling, supported by politicians. Decolonizing minds is more laborious than one would think. Other constraints remain in the country’s educational landscape, around resourcing and facilities, but the orientation of teacher training is my focus here.

The intensive update and modification of teaching programs remains a highly politicized issue despite the efforts of research and certain institutions to teach Kanak and Oceanian languages and cultures. Language teaching is still underdeveloped. There are just not enough permanent teachers specializing in Kanak languages and cultures for primary and secondary schools. The pedagogical advisors for aiding classroom teachers, and the inspectors for the evaluations of their teaching, remain insufficient. There is also a lack of reflection on the transformation and the didactization of everyday Kanak and Oceanian knowledge in schooling. Apart from some initiatives in private education, this field of research remains deficient for the moment.

Sometimes, parents of students raise concerns about secondary school curricula and schooling, despite the adoption of the territory’s educational project in 2016 (NC la 1ère 2020). They highlight an overlap in the timetables between Kanak languages and other disciplinary sessions, for example, making attendance difficult or impossible. Their concerns and resistance to them is hardly surprising since Kanak

languages are still considered as foreign languages. It is thus difficult to affirm the sustainability of Kanak and Oceanian languages and cultures in the educational system.

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### 14.4 Religion in the History of Schooling

The first rudimentary schools in New Caledonia-Kanaky appeared between 1843 and 1846 on the Loyalty Islands. Between 1854 and 1858, the first two boarding schools were opened in the Rhô community on Maré. The missionaries there set up religious education within Kanak communities (Salaün 2005; Wadrawane 2008) and started to teach fundamental skills from the Roman school: reading-writing-counting. The links between school teaching and religious instruction rapidly led to some Kanak wanting to master this new and unfamiliar knowledge. The knowledge of faith entered the history of schooling at this stage. The missionaries of the London Missionary Society then deciphered and translated the biblical texts into Kanak languages, welcomed by Kanak communities. According to the missionaries, the faith of the Kanaks would arise through the reading of the Holy Scriptures in their own language (Rognon 2018). However, this work of translation was not viewed favorably by the colonial administration of the time, which was wedded to teaching in French.

The arrival and appointment on 17 March 1862, of the Fourierist and anticlerical administrator, Governor Guillain (1862–1870), did not help to settle these disputes. The governor sought to slow down the missionary expansion project. He did not like the Mission, and as a result, he was probably not much loved in return (Merruau 1871). The secular public schools established in 1863, reserved for the children of settlers. Guillain tried to reduce the influence of the missionaries. One of the most famous measures he took was to prohibit the teaching of Kanak idioms and [Kanak languages] in all public and private schools.

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### 14.5 Strong Results, Despite the Ban on Kanak Languages

Despite this prohibition, the Kanak continued to learn the fundamentals of scholarship, including writing. Dauphiné (1990) describes a scene where Governor Guillain authorizes the wife of the great chief Boula to write to her husband (a four-page letter written in Drehu language in 1864):

It was the first time that I saw a woman so close to the Negro race, posed with such ease in front of a writing table, with a pensive and thoughtful physiognomy, writing herself on the paper, her ideas, her reflections and drawing a line of conduct to her husband, the great chief of Læssï. I could not help but say to myself sadly, that even today, after ten years of our occupation,

it would be impossible to find its equal in the whole of New Caledonia; and it must be recognized that if the Protestant missionaries have done much harm in the aim of detaching the natives of the Loyalty [Islands] from us, they will have contributed notably to the first education of a large number of them. (Vernaudon 2013, pp. 113–114, translated by author)

Missionary Jones also reported the enthusiasm of Kanak on Maré island for reading. He relates the case of a young man who learned by heart in 15 days several texts from the Gospel of Luke (Leenhardt 2020). The missionary ethnologist Dubois notes the presence of the Kanak Lues Saiwene from the Rhô community as an interpreter. Noticed by Cave in 1876 (in Dubois 1975), he went to study in London. Would he be one of the first Kanak students to be invited to seek knowledge elsewhere?

The decree of 3 August 1905, underlined that only French will be used in primary schools. In 1921, Kanak languages were also banned from publication (Rivierre 1985). The aim was to transmit the civilizing will of the colonizers. This forced the relationship with Western civilization and knowledge, and had very debatable consequences for Indigenous Kanak people, with repercussions throughout the history of the New Caledonian school system.

#### 14.6 From the Refusal of Curricula Modification to the Civil War

In 1971, local elected officials demanded Kanak specificities to be taken into account in education, relying on the Deixonne law, which had organized the teaching of regional languages in metropolitan France since 1951. When consulted on the admissibility of the request, the vice-rector in Nouméa replied in 1975 that the practice of the French language must be constant in elementary school and that the presence of Kanak languages among the high school exams could not be envisaged in the short or medium term (Salaün and Vernaudon 2011).

After the civil war in the 1980s and the signing of the Matignon-Oudinot agreements in 1988, eyes were turned with much more interest and benevolence toward Kanak cultural recognition. This recognition was accentuated with the Nouméa Accord (1998), which gave rise to major sociopolitical, structural, and cultural reorientations. The teaching of Kanak cultures and languages, claimed since the 1970s, were specified: “Kanak languages are, along with French, languages of teaching and culture in New Caledonia. Their place in education and the media must therefore be increased and be the subject of in-depth reflection. Scientific research and university teaching on Kanak languages must be organized in New Caledonia. The National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations will play an essential role in this. To find their rightful place for these languages in pri-

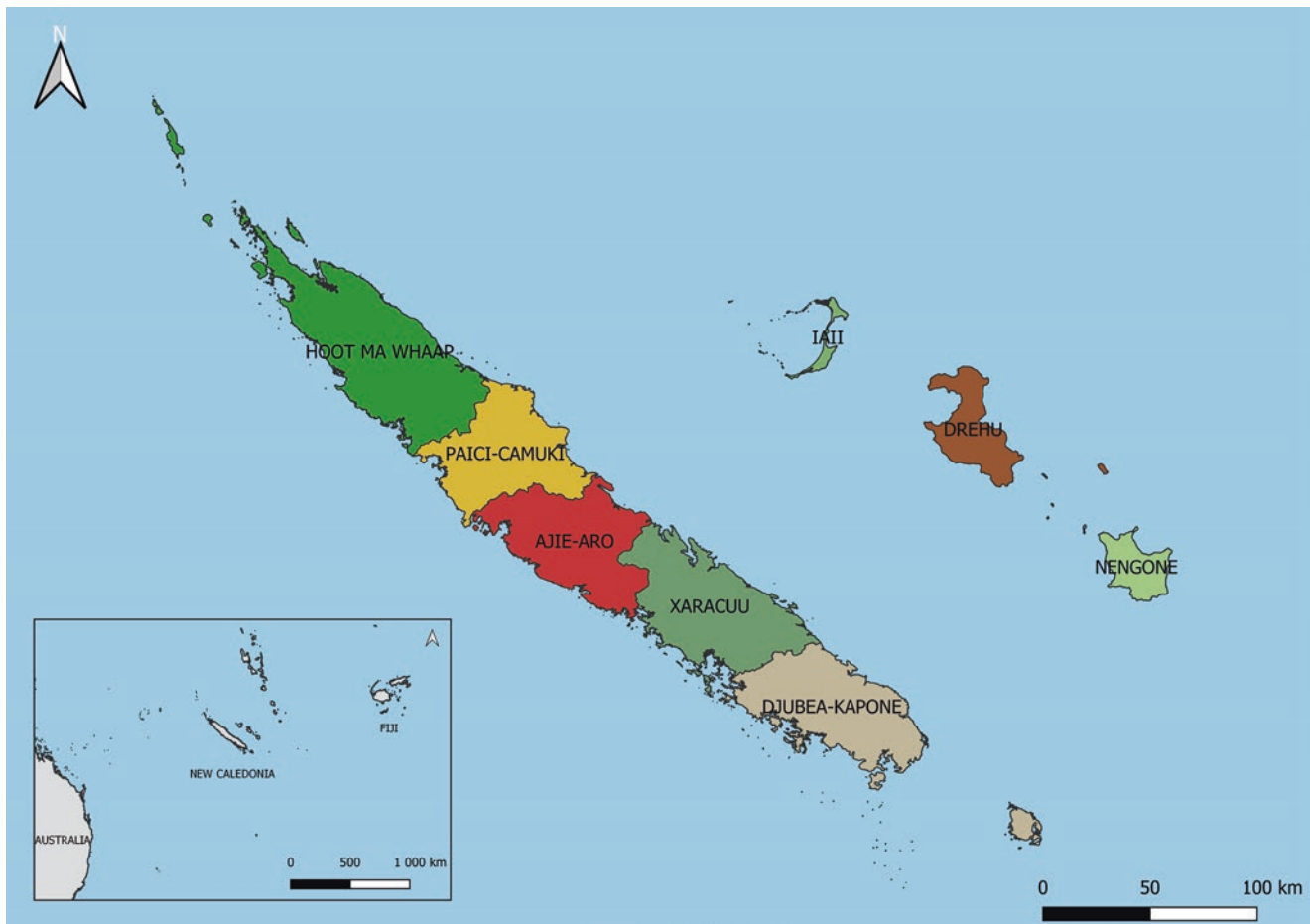
mary and secondary education, a major effort will be made to train teacher educators” (JORF 1998). Today, local languages and cultures are included in school curricula.

The terms “common destiny,” “community of destiny,” “shared future,” and “living together” entered the official discourse (see Chap. 19 of Guiart in this book). Teachers now strive to use them as the new nomenclature in their teaching activities. “Living together” becomes a leitmotif in terms of teaching sequences. The teaching of Kanak cultures and languages is not only supported by pro-independence political leaders but also by progressive New Caledonian counterparts.

#### 14.7 Changes in the New Caledonian Educational Context

In 2000, the French government transferred the competences of primary education to New Caledonia. On 27 July 2006, a decree of the New Caledonian Government was promulgated, opening a special external competition for the recruitment of twelve school teachers for the teaching of Kanak languages and cultures. In 2012, a department of Kanak languages and cultures (*Service de l’Enseignement des langues et des cultures kanakes*, SELCK) at the Vice Rectorate was created. New Caledonia now controls its own private primary and secondary education. On 5 January 2016, the New Caledonian parliament adopted its educational project (*éléments fondamentaux de la culture kanak*, or EFCK), making the teaching of the fundamental elements of Kanak culture compulsory.

Since the beginning of 2017, a practical interdisciplinary teaching programme (Epi) on the fundamental elements of Kanak culture in the four course educational cycle (fifth, fourth, third) was made mandatory in middle schools. Currently, under the aegis of the Vice Rectorate of New Caledonia, a university-labeled training program in Languages, Oceanian cultures, and learning (LCOA) is being conducted by the University of New Caledonia’s (UNC) Teacher Training School. In 2020, internal teacher training exams in Nengone (Maré) language were organized by the Vice Rectorate in Nouméa. During the visit of the French President Emmanuel Macron in May 2018, the Minister of Education, Michel Blanquer, announced the creation of a certificate of teaching at secondary school level in Kanak-French languages. In 2022, a laureate in Drehu language was registered, while other candidates were already preparing for teacher training exams in Paicî and Ajië languages (see Fig. 14.1). The training courses for the competitive recruitment for the languages of the North Province are currently being conducted by the UNC Teacher Training School. The new qualifications translate a certain will to extend the field of language competencies.



**Fig. 14.1** Customary and linguistic areas. (Source: <https://georep.nc/>, cartography: Eibl 2022)

However, the recognition of Kanak cultures and languages in the educational context evolves very slowly and timidly. The didactic translation of Indigenous knowledge is still underexplored. Sociopolitical recognition is certainly important but insufficient for intensive modifications of the educational system. The missionaries, because of their commitment to evangelization, introduced knowledge and learning techniques from Western societies in the Pacific islands. But faced with the complex demands of Indigenous communities to rebuild their identity, this utilitarian model was exhausted and reached its own limits. The moral wear and tear of religious knowledge can be seen through behaviors in the social world.

#### 14.8 A Rather Disturbing Record Despite a Rebalancing Policy

Today, the period of the Nouméa Accord granted for contextual and institutional rebalancing is coming to an end, and it is time to evaluate various engagements. Different perspec-

tives are in play. For example, the Kanak and Oceanian youth in general are concerned about their social-economic situation and are claiming their place in a changing society. Richard and Niester (2018) highlight the difficult quest for a “common destiny” (see also Chap. 19 by Guiart in this book) and the persistence of social-economic inequalities. In the prison “Camp-Est” in Nouméa, more than 90% of the inmates are Kanak. Inequalities appear on an unflattering balance sheet after some 30 years following the Accords. The daily newspaper “*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*” (2019) added that young people and Kanak in general are the most affected by social inequality. People under 30 have an unemployment rate of 28.3%. Among young people, as in the general population, this rate is strongly linked to school qualifications. It is 41.3% for people under 30 without a qualifying degree. This percentage drops to 26.6% and 20.5%, respectively, with a professional degree (CAP/BEP) and high school diploma. In fact, 20% of Kanak people have a high school diploma or higher, compared to 33% for the total New Caledonian population. Some 34% of Kanak are under 30, compared with 29% for the population as a

whole. Their level of employment is 59.1% (compared to 64.7% for the total population). Finally, the unemployment rate among Kanak women is lower than of Kanak men (17.9% compared to 18.7% in 2019).

The psychiatrist Schonholtzer (2017) alerted public authorities to high suicide rates. He highlights that Indigenous peoples are more affected than others by mental health problems and suicide because of generational gaps and the rapid social transformation process that has increased vulnerability and risks. Social-economic inequalities have encouraged Kanak people to move to the dormitory districts of Nouméa built between the 1960s and 1970s, reinforced by the so-called nickel boom of 1969–1972 (see Chap. 9 by Demmer in this book). The children born in these neighborhoods form a new uprooted youth. They often end up with illusory identities, confined, and lacking perspective.

Schooling can play a major role to give those youth new perspectives and to bring about societal reforms in general. The EFCK is an opportunity to synergize a number of potentialities to produce material, cognitive, and cultural hybridity. Indigenous Kanak knowledge should be integrated into curricula. That institutional presence will allow for the development and reinforcement of the symbiotic relationship between research and teaching. But in what way can the EFCK constitute an opportunity to integrate Indigenous knowledge in New Caledonian education? And how can it become part of anchoring for an educational and social rebalancing through teaching and teacher training? These are two questions that lead to the following hypotheses.

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## 14.9 The EFCKs for Innovative Perspectives

The EFCKs opens up a path toward innovative perspectives, both for teachers and students. The inclusion of EFCKs in school curricula allows for the recognition of Indigenous knowledge and contributes to the psychological repair of oppressed cultural practices, promoting reconciliation. The symbiotic approach between research and teaching (Astolfi 1992) converging toward the practices and techniques of Indigenous Kanak life will allow the anchoring of schooling in the social environment, and promote curricular mixing in the material, cognitive, and cultural sense. The inclusion of the EFCKs in the New Caledonian educational context strengthens “Oceanicity” and provokes the reversal of being “on the margins of” ... it thus leads to a restructuring of identity that uncovers Indigenous potentialities.

In the following, I will focus first on the ethno-sociological reasons for teaching EFCKs. Second, I will use examples to show how certain Indigenous knowledge can become academic knowledge, through transposition.

## 14.10 For a New Ethics and a Cultural Common Good

Koninck (2004) has shown that it is possible to democratically construct an ethic and a common good whose denominator in the life of each group is culture. Whatever the material situation—rich or poor—the cultural spirit of people can, through education, participate in fighting against global environmental and social crises. We should thus restore what history has tried to eradicate in indigeneity, through its dispossession and by its dehumanization.

Kanak Indigenous perspectives and practices and the construction of epistemologies are important for the development of New Caledonian society. In return, Kanak people should accept, with a spirit of co-responsibility, to be confronted with issues of globalization and be capable of managing ontological upheavals that the society is going through. This path of noble reflection can contribute to reducing unconscious conflicts of social imagination (Wadrawane 2022). On the other hand, a detotalization of the Indigenous context can provoke “disadherence” with the educational sociopolitical models that perpetuate societal binaries. The aim is to attempt an innovative renegotiation of endemicity that is neither based on an outdated essentialism nor referring to the imaginaries of “civilizing missions” and “progress” common to European nations (Clément 2021, p. 82).

The issue is not to tear oneself away from one’s own world nor from the world of the other, but to combine through education what can be retained from colonial history and what is maintained and transmitted as Indigenous cultural knowledge. Education contributes to a decolonisation of the mind. The reconciliation between Western and Indigenous educational cultures will only be possible if each accepts to break by negotiation certain parts of their social ideology.

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## 14.11 Knowledge from the Communities to Rebalance “Differently”

The former New Caledonian vice-rector Jean Charles Ringard-Flament initiated the introduction of the EFCK in secondary schools in 2018 and the creation of the teacher education exam (CAPES) in Kanak languages in 2020. He emphasizes the need for a constructive “break”: “We must [be able to] overcome this osmosis between the school and the community by rehabilitating knowledge in a different way” (Interview, 20 June 2018). The inclusion of EFCK in the New Caledonian education project is therefore an opportunity to rehabilitate Indigenous knowledge in a different way, through a transposition process.

The statement of Ringard-Flament translates what the local Kanak schools (*Écoles populaires kanak*, EPK) were

demanding. They requested and campaigned for procedures to develop an educational rebalancing. FLNKS leaders encouraged parents to boycott public schools, which were described as colonial.

On 9 February 1985, the second FLNKS Congress in Nakety on the east coast of New Caledonia-Kanaky decided to create EPKs as part of this boycott (Leblic 2018). At a didactic level, the EPK wanted to create “a dialogue between traditional wisdoms [...] and contemporary sciences. [...]” (Gauthier 1996, p. 133). Salaiün and Vernaoudon (2014) highlighted that Indigenous education as a practice of resistance questions common knowledge that such schools should enable.

The EPK experience is an important part of the history of education in New Caledonia-Kanaky. By challenging the educational system, EPK seeks an educational alternative, a different way of schooling. There are similarities here with European popular education movements and Freire’s (1974) pedagogy of the oppressed. Teaching in EPKs occurred in Kanak languages, in French, and in English. Indigenous knowledge and Kanak culture were central to the project, which aims to train the citizens of tomorrow.

The attempt to dismantle conventional schooling by the introduction of Kanak knowledge and ways of thinking was quickly aborted, but the strategy of vigilance developed by EPK forged ahead, and its overall pedagogy did not go unnoticed. For example, in language teaching, EPK succeeded in abolition of monolingualism (Wadrawane 2017). Currently, New Caledonian and state educational institutions try to keep a double articulation between national heritage and local Kanak specificities.

The EPK cannot therefore be reduced to a simple historical period of Kanak struggle for independence and against educational domination, with some of the schools closing by the end of the 1980s. First, they explored how to rebalance education between the two co-present heritages. Secondly, they showed interest in using the (Kanak) languages of students for a better appropriation of knowledge. The EPK model confirmed the relationship between orality and learning. Seeking balance or rebalancing is therefore an important sociological fact. I will now consider ethnological data from fieldwork to show the importance of balance issues in New Caledonia’s social space.

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#### 14.12 The Indigenous Ethnological Conception of Social and Spatial Balance

The school of Rhô on Maré island serves as our first example. The second example is the school of Năcaao (Netchaot), which is located in the center-east of the main island Grande Terre in the Kônghè region.

The Rhô community on Maré in the customary district of Guahma was in the spotlight when Protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society arrived. The first school infrastructures were built in this community. The current school in Rôh was built in 1966 on a border zone between two conflicting family plots of land: the school is located almost at the edge of the community (see Fig. 14.2). The church is halfway, in the middle of the community, while the school infrastructure is pushed further away. The school is thus in a consensual position. It borders the land plants of the Hnassil and Huemone families.

This spatial positioning of the institutional infrastructure has led to a lasting appeasement, and the community has benefited from this rebalancing provided by an exogenous object. We can see above (Fig. 14.2) how the school was positioned on a plan drawn up by the Tadin gendarmerie in 1966.

At the school in Năcaao (Nechaot) (SANC 1962), I conducted interviews with two elders, and I was surprised that this public school straddles an imaginary line dividing the Catholic zone from the Protestant zone of the community. The school thus offers another consensual position. Children of both parishes share the same secular space, where the rules remain the same for everyone. Figure 14.3 shows the location of the school between two confessional zones.

The essential aim is to restore balance. The example of consensual school locations in the community illustrates how power struggles are avoided. When the missionary and anthropologist Leenhardt (1974) used the term “nata” in Nengone language to refer to the pastors, he may not have imagined its impact, both in terms of Protestant proselytizing and in terms of the desire to learn, to transmit new things, and to communicate knowledge.

The aim of rebalancing power relations may be surprising but it is present within broader society, for example giving away a child (a girl or boy) to rebalance a clan (Leblic 2004). The search for balance is also present in the world of education. Wakolo Pouye (Interview, 11 April 2000) said that the older teachers often manage to mix the newest pedagogical advice communicated at official inspectors’ visits with their learning techniques from the local social milieu. They pass on school knowledge (an “exogenous imprint”) by using didactic local environmental tools (a “local imprint”). They prepare youth to claim, without ostracism, social progress and the culture of their identity.

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#### 14.13 Polarization of Spaces and Imbalance

Despite the Kanak construction of a “double footprint,” school administration has maintained a polarization of spaces in the educational world. The beginnings of a dual school orientation appear: children of settlers orienting

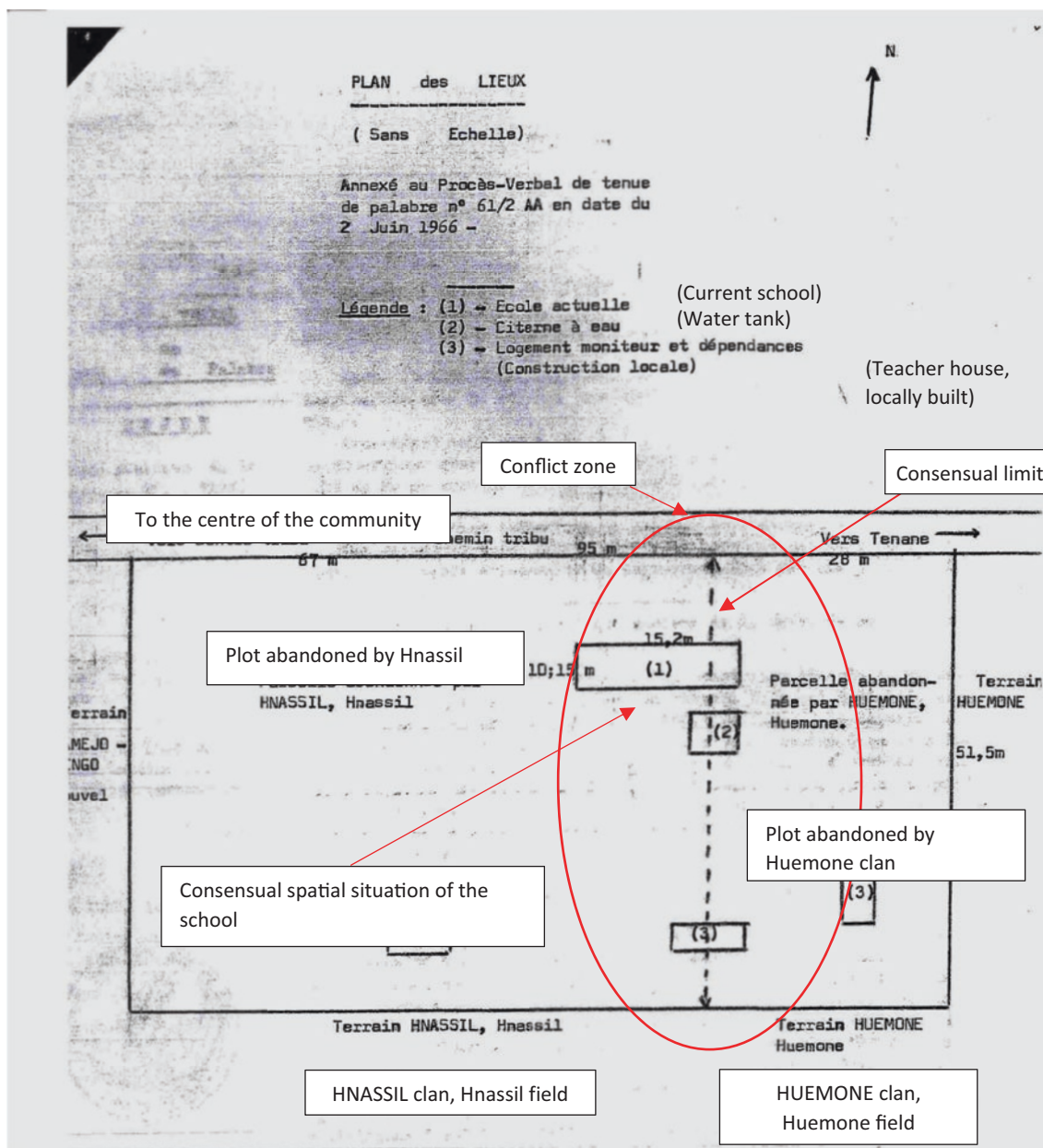


Fig. 14.2 Localization of the current Rôh school on Maré island. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

toward general curricula and Kanak children toward vocational paths (Hadj et al. 2012). The democratization of these educational paths has struggled.

The polarisation of spaces and the marginalisation of Kanak culture developed during colonisation has been denounced by various researchers in social sciences. Wittersheim (2006, p. 87) for example notes:

The Melanesians have experienced a major trauma through colonization, which is still a central element in their personalities and in their identity constructions, as well as in their family or historical memory. The relationship with a family memory intertwined with history continues to be a major issue for people who were born well after this period.

However, marginalisation in the colonial period did not prevent the acquisition of new knowledge. After the establishment of missionary schools in communities, a training center, called “School of Indigenous teachers at Mont-Ravel” opened in Nouméa in 1913 (JONC 1913) and lasted until 1942. The creation of the two associations AICLF (*Association des indigènes calédoniens et loyaltiens français*) and UICALO (*Union des indigènes calédoniens amis de la liberté dans l’ordre*) allowed the new Kanak elites to assert themselves at the political and social level. The members of these two associations also sought to harmonize the transmission of both conceptual knowledge and their collective social heritage. In spite of this good will, the training





**Fig. 14.3** The school in Nācaao (Netchaot) as a consensual element. (Credit: Wadrawane 2022)

of young islanders to gain qualifications remained marginalized. The failure of young Kanak people in schooling reinforces the point of view of the supporters of independence that schools were colonial (Kohler and Pillon 1982).

Education anthropologists and sociologists (e.g., Ogbu 1985) have shown the ignorance of educators with regard to the culture of their students. Patrice Godin (2019) from the University of New Caledonia notes that efforts must be made to understand Kanak society deeply, because it is often defined around myths, while dialogue and conversation is an important and common practice. The introduction of Indigenous knowledge and its use in teaching can contribute to valorizing the place of formerly marginalized Kanak people in society, and contribute to shared values.

#### 14.14 A New Societal Imaginary for New Caledonian Schools

Section 3 of paragraph 4 of the Preamble of the Nouméa Accord emphasizes that it is necessary to lay the foundations of a New Caledonian citizenship. This cannot be done without the school, which trains and educates future generations. EFCKs are one element of identity formation in school.

The opportunity to develop research, teaching and training, however, provokes a tussle between different teacher groups—teachers used to the spirit of the secular school since the beginning of their history in New Caledonia, and those who think that it is time to innovate and re-build the institution, taking into account complex local cognitive and cultural realities. The latter position is supported by scientific research and the media. The school however tends to alienate its pupils from their culture and way of life. It is thus seen and experienced as a destructuring colonial object.

The teaching of Kanak and Oceanian cultures and languages, as well as various contextual changes to curricula, the proposal of a new national education project, and the compulsory teaching of EFCKs have all been produced through contestation. The actors include ideological and marginal progressives, independence proponents, and supporters of the EPK initiatives. Paradoxically, and contrary to popular belief, those who criticize formal education are often those who also advance it. The PENC (New Caledonian Education Project) was voted on by the Congress in 2016 and made the teaching of EFCKs compulsory. But this reorientation of schooling was ultimately one of the consequences of the handshake between Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur in 1988 and bears a kind of “double imprint” of colonization and indigeneity.

## SIX FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF KANAK CULTURE

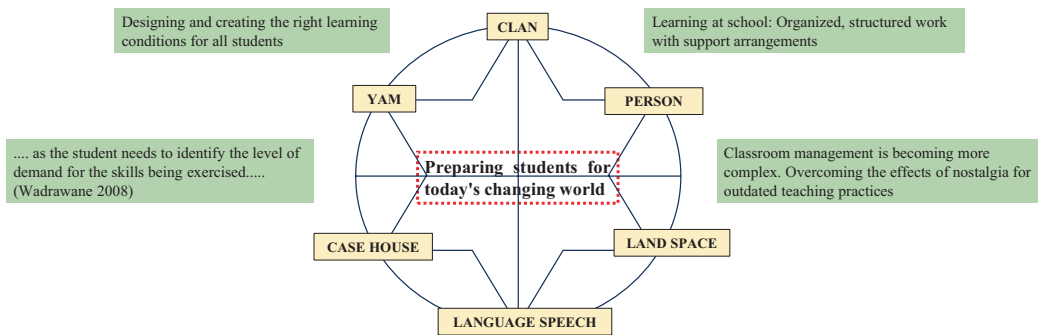


Fig. 14.4 The six fundamental elements of Kanak culture. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

### 14.15 Rehabilitating Cultural, Social, and Traditional Cohabitation in Schools

The reinvention of identity in the New Caledonian school should occur with the EFCKs. Certain practices and techniques of Indigenous life favour a symbiosis between research and teaching. The EFCKs are an opportunity to promote and strengthen this “double imprint”. Moreover, the EFCKs progressively amplify the development of “Oceanicity” through the curricula. Teachers therefore contribute to the rehabilitation of cultural, social, and traditional cohabitation. Ethno-sociologically, the inclusion of the EFCK in the curricula can help reverse situations of being “at the margins of...”

It is essential to make choices when we want to develop the relationship between school and custom. The risk lies in the enclosure of one’s own culture. The procedure of didactic transposition therefore seems to represent a way to avoid sinking into “populism” and allows control of the methods of transmission, learning, and acquisition of new knowledge by students. Often, knowledge from the missions is preferred to the detriment of knowledge from public education. The didactic transposition of Indigenous knowledge can thus lead to balance religion and administration.

### 14.16 EFCKs Grasp and Understand Reality: What is their Pedagogical Contribution?

Depending on the fields of research, one of the competences of the scientific expert is to deconstruct reality in order to select, reduce, and build up knowledge. Expert knowledge contributes, on the one hand, to the rational influence of research and, on the other hand, to the modification and perhaps improvement of social life. Knowledge

establishes new social perspectives. Indigenous Kanak people discover the scientific validity of certain cultural elements, and this is one of the benefits of scientific research and pedagogy.

I suggest that the transition from Indigenous knowledge into teaching should include documenting social practices and then transforming them into rationalizing objects by the researcher. The transposition into classroom activities is also essential. All these breaks represent a procedural phase before the final status of academic knowledge or knowledge taught through school activities is valorised.

If EFCKs allow to the grasping of Kanak realities, they should not be used in the classroom without first carrying out various transformations so that they can be explained and used. The six fundamental elements of the EFDK<sup>2</sup> are: yam, person, clan, traditional house, land and space, and language and speech (Fig. 14.4).

I will illustrate the EFCKs by examples taken from field-work showing that it is possible to transpose Kanak cultural objects into academic knowledge. I have therefore selected two EFCKs as objects of study:

- Language and speech used to describe the intellectual development of children
- Spatial practices, through the practice of *Aengeni hnameneng*

I then present two education elements:

- An illustration of modes of transmission, based on Bruner’s theory
- The yam calendar produced by teacher candidates in their second year of training

<sup>2</sup>The new curricula for 2019, voted on 10th January by the Congress of New Caledonia, once again emphasized the value of Kanak cultures by considering EFCKs and other New Caledonian cultures.

### 14.17 Language and Speech: Intellectual Development and Learning Strategies

The study of Indigenous languages is advantageous for discovering and naming the world. Languages are the best mirror of the human spirit (Alin 2010). In Nengone language on Maré island, for example, there is a specialized lexicon to describe the stages of intellectual development in relation to learning. A school child, between 3 and 5 years old, who has mastered a certain number of skills is called *Thu-ni*. The term *Thu-ni* means “who can do.” The question “*Bo thuni?*” can be translated with “Can you do?” *Inu thuni co yeno* means that I know how to learn well. Etymologically, *ni* is “the fact” (what is done)—an Indigenous treasure and wealth (Dubois 1980). When a child is at the *thu-ni* stage, it means that he or she is able to learn and to initiate reasoning. Gradually, according to the tasks and responsibilities he or she receives, he or she builds up the *Ngome nata* stage. During this progression among peers, the child learns to strengthen his or her modes of reasoning by linking several types of social knowledge. In Nengone, *Ngome* designates the being or a person (*Ngome* as an emphatic form playing the role of increment, which increases the value of a constant). *Nata* is a mature person, normally the qualification of a religious man. *Ngome nata* means intelligent, skillful, and good at war. The expression *bane yeno ngomenata* can be translated as teaching wisdom.

The *ngome nata* status corresponds to the school situation of a student at the end of the third year at primary school. And it will evolve until the early years of university. The term *yanata* refers to the expression of skill level.

*Ya* is different from *Ye*. *Ye* = to say, *yeye* = to read. *Ye*, which attaches, *ye-edin* (the wood which attaches the outrigger to the main hull of the dugout). *Yeiwe re koe* (wood that attaches to the outrigger). *Yara*: implies repetitive. *Ya* = to lead, to guide. *Nata*: mature, right, right side, history, experience. *Ya* = contracted form of *yawe* = therefore, or again. According to Dubois (1969), *yanata* is constructed from the *Ya* of *yawe*. The *yanata* is the one who is able to tutor and function as a transducer. This function of *yanata* was used many times at Sunday schools by Protestants and in community schools by the old instructors. The student Bob Teddy remembers that, in school, “there was one teacher, and it was a one-room schoolhouse. We had a very long bench, and we were at the very back of the classroom. You could hardly see what was happening on the blackboard. We learned more by repetition, and it was all done orally. There was a big guy who knew a bit more than us, and he helped us to learn by repeating what was on the board” (this is the role of the transducer).

A person is said to be *yanata* because he or she overcomes the slightest difficulties that arise in the school career to build the stage of *ngome nata*. *Yanata* can also be understood in terms of conditions, positions, and circumstances. The condition of *yanata* (Fig. 14.5) may constitute a benchmark for measuring the progress of *ngome nata*. Assessments can be undertaken at different levels to determine the degree of mastery of these cognate skills. When a person is said to be *yanata*, it is because he or she possesses and uses sub-skills to achieve or strengthen the main ones. Also he or she has, in an autonomous way, the capacity to use discernment and to assist students, in the sense of tutoring. The *yanata* child is mostly described as “clever” or “autonomous.” It is also the one who learns to cross boundaries. In Nengone, knowledge is caught.

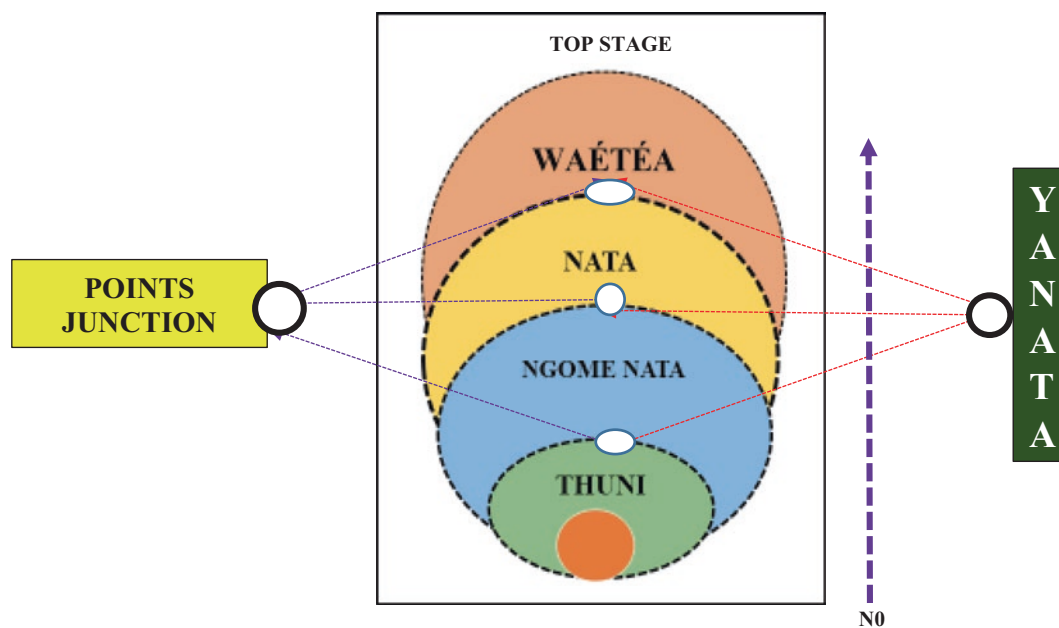


Fig. 14.5 Children’s intellectual development and learning strategies. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

To accentuate the development of *ngome nata*, adults begin to entrust youth with discursive acts. Youth begin to handle speech in the form of discourse and learn to control both cognitive and kinesthetic stress. By extension, autonomy is strengthened. Jokes are used to soften these moments when they learn to handle adult speech.

To sum up, the environment initiates children to leave behind the appearances of immediate experience. The school thus reinforces this “escape” to other spaces, which are attributed to the scholar known as *Waetea*. The term “*Waetea*” comes from “*Wa*” meaning “end” or “old,” “*ete*” meaning “stone,” and “*a*” meaning “to shout” or “te declaim” (Dubois 1951). An intelligent person in Maré language is called *Ngome nata*. As for the scholar, he is called *Waetea*. *Natas* elders, pastors in the Protestant world, Catholic seminarians, and some elders who manage the affairs of large chieftaincies were often referred to as *Waetea*. Language can therefore help to reconcile the different worlds of “intelligence.”

The expressions *thu-ni*, *ngome nata*, *nata*, and *yanata* are very close to the field of metacognitive psychology, referring to the schemas developed by Piaget (1967) and affirmed and extended by Vergnaud (1990) and Vergnaud and Récopé (2000). Such cognitive perspectives gradually draw the contours of *Waetea*, and this way of thinking about ontological elements by cultivating and using discernment when it comes to discussing and analyzing alliances or agreements in custom.

### 14.18 Space: The Multiplexing of the *Aengeni hnameneng*

I have conducted participant-observation in customary ceremonies. This fieldwork practice puts the researcher in direct contact with custom, in this case a wedding on Maré island in which the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony takes place (see Fig. 14.6). The *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony shows that the groom’s house is an important part of the Maraean wedding. It can last a whole day. The fieldwork showed how customary practices are thought, and permeate the social context.

At the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony, yam gifts from paternal and maternal siblings and from allied clans are arranged in a circle evolving toward the main gift from the groom. This shows how the clans are interdependent and linked by filiation, alliance, and exchanges. The construction of filiations and alliances is reformulated at every customary ceremony, and this is also can be used in a transposition to education.

At the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony, we can observe a strong presence of acting, seeing, and saying (speech) in terms of practices and strategies. This conceptual trilogy of transmission in Kanak social life is similar to Bruner’s (1960) work on cognitive development in education. Bruner highlights mental strategies that social actors put into interaction in their cultural environment. Such strategies are also expressed at customary ceremonies, included as metaphors

#### MODE OF “LINKING” THE *AEHNGENI HNAMENENG*



Fig. 14.6 Socio-ethnological space of the *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony. (Credit and source: Wadrawane 2021)

in customary discourses. Several bundles (paternal, maternal, etc.) channel various simultaneous information (the son on the paternal side, son on the maternal side, nephew of, from the clan of, etc.).

The *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony, which occurs in the presence of the bride's family, is thus organized as a form of communication system where modes (dialogal) and systems of operation (connections) function simultaneously. They sketch the contours of a sociological cartography of the groom's family. The genealogical cartography is spatialized through the hierarchical presence of the yam gifts. This spatialized expression is the interface of what the groom's (inter-relational) house represents.

The interconnections between clan geographical relations are organized in a mode called "multiplexing" (Fig. 14.7). The "multiplexing" mode translates the relationship concerning close family members and other affiliates (siblings, agnate, cognate), concerns (relationships, political geography, allies, resident, and co-resident), and modes of upbringing (values, rights, spiral). Everybody is interconnected in a social network illustrated by various contributions of gifts for the ceremony.

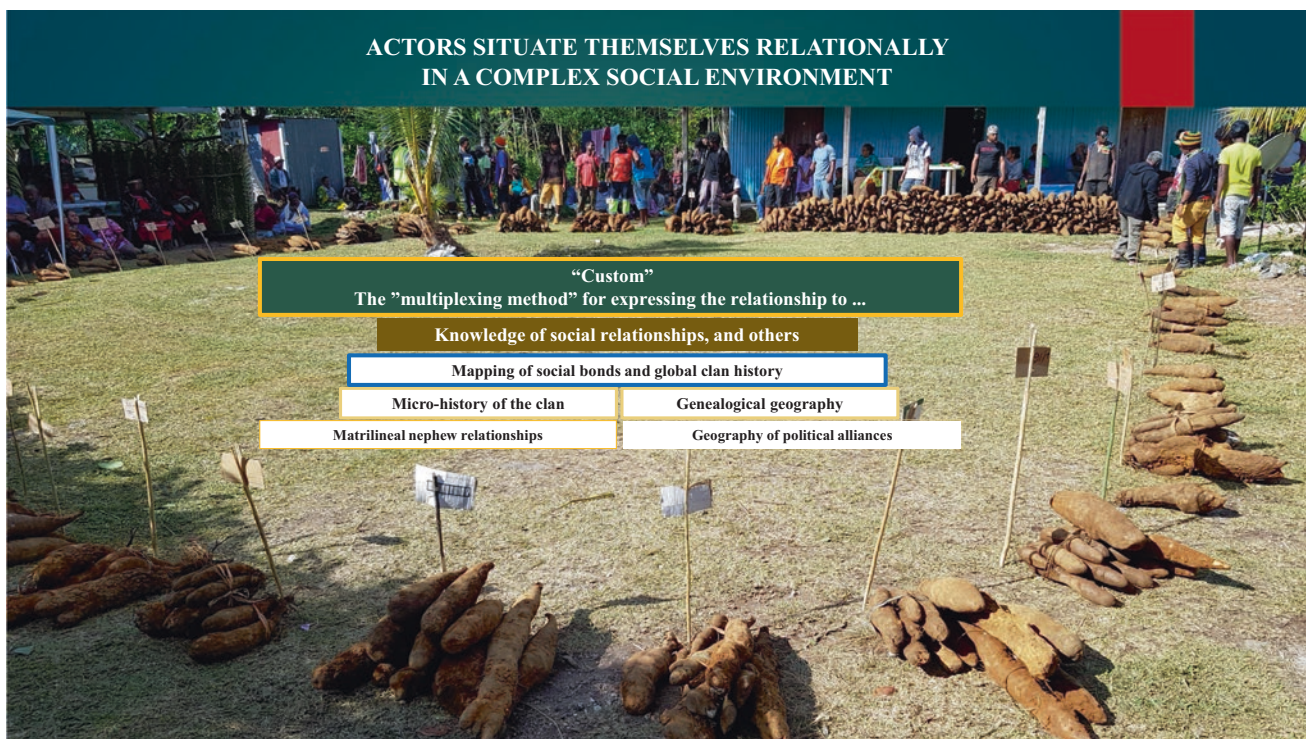
The *Aengeni hnameneng* ceremony (Fig. 14.7 and 14.8) is a space where gifts to share are first gathered, then positioned, and finally synthesized before being returned to each identified group (unit) entitled to receive shares.

In short, the Kanak custom of *Aengeni hnameneng* on Maré island is organized in a multiplex mode. The development of the concept "multiplexing" was mentioned on local radio stations that announce deaths in families. The messages reveal the interconnections of clans, families, and individuals. Spatialized custom relationships are therefore preserved, maintained, and reiterated when clans are placed in a position of customary contractualization.

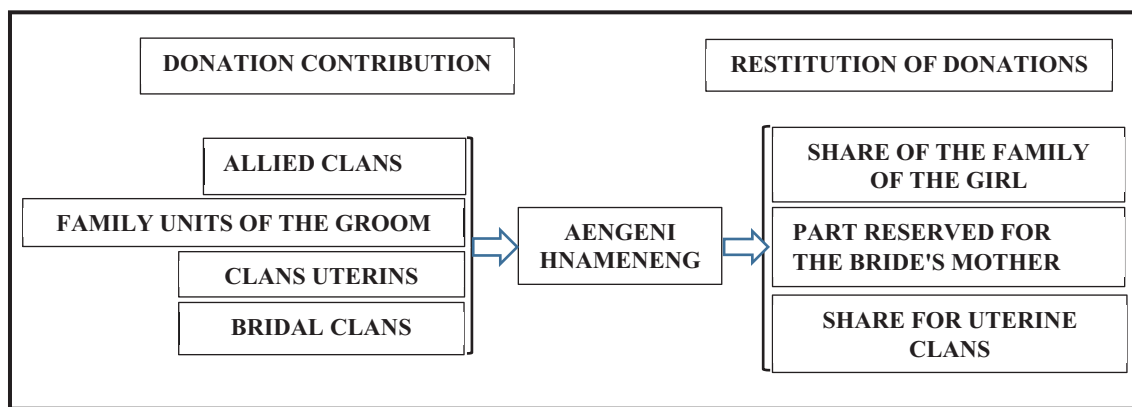
## 14.19 Culture in the New Caledonian Educational World

This cultural relationships and modes of thinking outlined above can be of great interest to the world of education. Bruner (1960) uses a metaphorical spiral configuration to signify the modes of thinking linked to culture and particularly the relationships to pedagogy and learning. Abstraction is constructed in a spiral according to three stages for transmissions of customary knowledge, noted by Britt-Mari (1985): doing (practical action), seeing (image), and saying (words). This is unsurprising for those with knowledge of cognitive strategies.

Referring to Bruner (1960), Britt-Mari (1985) points out that the three modes complement each other and that their interaction is crucial for learning. Bruner's spiral identifies



**Fig. 14.7** The multiplexing of the *Aengeni hnameneng*. (Credit and source: Wadrawane 2021)



**Fig. 14.8** Schematic—multiplexing—in *Aengeni hnameneng* custom. (Source: Wadrawane 2021)

different phases of knowledge acquisition. By moving from one mode of representation to another and by absorbing data in different modes and in different contexts, thinking evolves toward greater abstraction. The conversion of knowledge into a form that can be transmitted to learners is therefore linked to the structuring of knowledge, and to respect for the modes of representation. “The limits of intellectual development” depend on the way “a culture helps an individual to use intellectual potential” (Britt-Mari 1985, p. 53) leading to the geometry term of “fractal” (Fig. 14.9a–c).

The fieldwork carried out by archeologists shows the materiality of the spiral figure (Fig. 14.9a) expressed on ancient Kanak petroglyphs (Fig. 14.9b, c). There is also an inventory that was carried out by Sand and Monin (2015) in Païta district in southern New Caledonia, which shows the numerous expressions of axial, radial, and bilateral symmetries exposing a fractal geometry (Fig. 14.9a). It is not uncommon to see the expression of the spiral in social practices. Spiral configurations thus also appear in traditional mourning ceremonies. We can again draw on this customary knowledge for transposition into formal education. Figure 14.9b also shows how school children discover with enthusiasm this sociohistorical heritage.

## 14.20 Modes of Transmission: “Doing-Seeing-Saying”

In 2019, I applied the practice-image-speech trilogy at a training session in a Kanak community. For the transmission of cultural knowledge, family and clan members use the conceptual succession as presented in Fig. 14.10. First, there is the observation of a “Do” (*Kuca*) performed by an expert. Then someone performs “under the gaze of...” (*Goeën*). This moment is crucial since the performer attempts a realization according to a constructed and memorized representation. The assistants observing can participate through giving advice. Representations, proposals for modeling, and algo-

ritms appear. The last step consists in fixing the knowledge through the word (“Saying”). This is also a crucial moment because the knowledge is rooted, accompanied by jokes. Hilarity and irony support the cultural transmission.

In 2013, some trainee teachers benefited from such a training session. In an interview, Julia Duparc highlighted that this “immersion” in a customary context in the North Province for a week was a great adventure (Interview with Julia Duparc 2013). It allowed the discovery of teaching conditions in several municipalities and to understand the realities in community schools, “lost in the greenery.” This training course also brought teacher candidates closer together: living together for five days created links that could result in greater collaboration in training and in the preparation of classroom lessons. The purpose of this trip was to immerse participants in living and teaching conditions where the expression of Kanak culture is much more prevalent than in the New Caledonian capital, Nouméa. Duparc argued that they all benefitted from experience, and the meetings were very touching, whether it was with the inspector, the school directors, the teachers, and the students, but also with the chiefs and their families who spend time exchanging ideas and even welcoming the teacher candidates in their homes. In the opinion of Duparc, the course is essential to get an experience and a feeling for the working conditions in schools well beyond the greater Nouméa area and the South Province in general. It should be repeated for future classes of teacher candidates (Interview with Julia Duparc 2013).

Following these different examples of customary knowledge transposition, we can see how Kanak society is organized and maintains social links. Customary practices constantly update these relationships. The permanent update and recreation of relationships by referring back to experiences already accomplished, is at the center of social and cultural construction. The different examples have shown how the social world assiduously uses analogical processes and modes of reasoning. In our opinion, this is of great pedagogical interest.



**Fig. 14.9** (a–c) The spiral and fractal configuration in a plural context: Geographical inventory of petroglyph sites (Païta region, South Province) (left), school children discover the petroglyph site of Necharihouen in the Ponérihouen valley (right above), example of a

spiral on a slab (Tchamba community, North Province) (right below). Sources: Sand and Monin 2015 (left), Sand et al. 2008 (right above), (right below)

### 14.21 The Yam Calendar

Our last example took place in 2022. This yam calendar (Fig. 14.11) was developed by trainee teachers in their second year. The exercise was to transpose the yam calendar and the Gregorian calendar. They were able to translate, through the yam calendar, both the Gregorian annual chronology, the symbolism of plants and animals corresponding to the development of the tuber, and the physiological modifications of the fauna and flora.

The teacher candidates greatly appreciated this course. On the one hand, it allowed them to experience the expression of the EFCKs in context. The interactions developed

from the cultural activities strengthened mutual and interpersonal relationships. Many of them discovered potentialities (sculptures and arts) and data collection that could be used in the classroom when teaching about Kanak languages and cultures.

The acquisition of new conceptual tools from Kanak cultures revealed the ability of these young teachers to master and evolve their representations and mental constructs. The situation of cultural dualism is not only rich, but it is also a way to push beyond one's own limits and to apply principles of social inclusion.

This kind of project, in which interesting outcomes emerge from school and adult education, helps to draw new

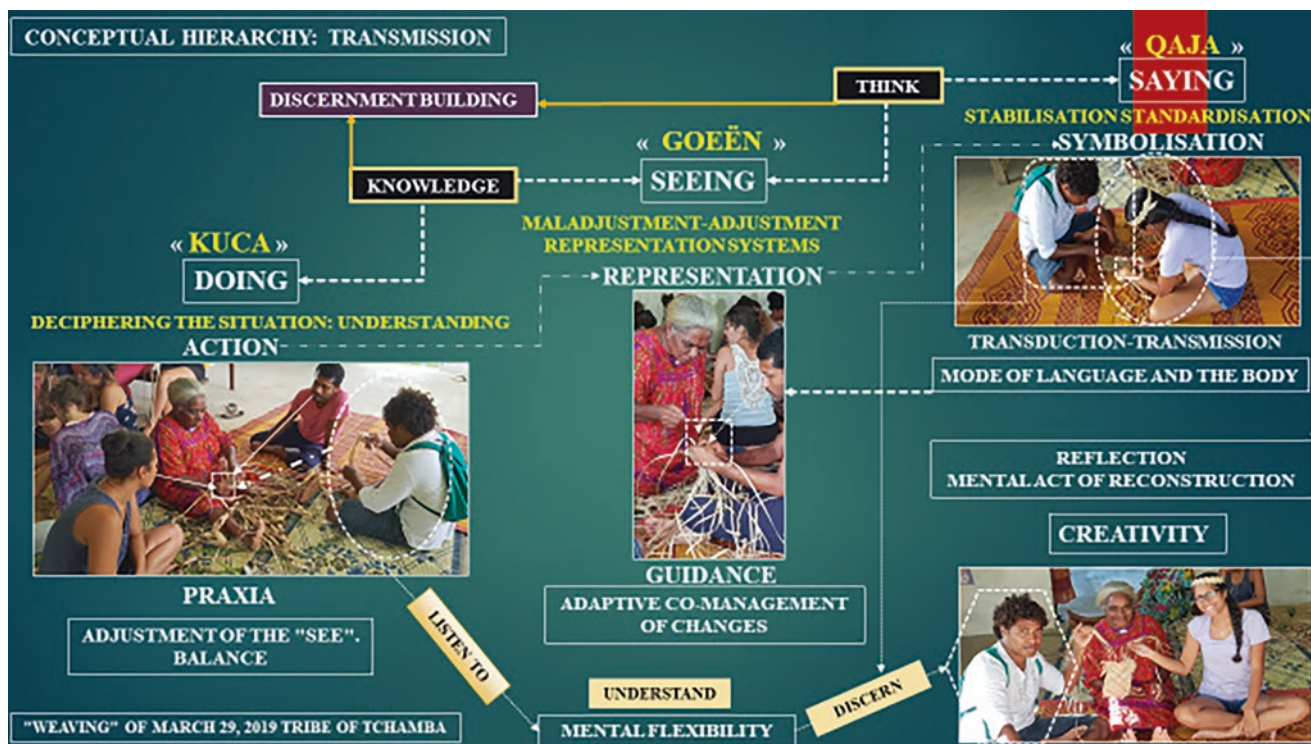


Fig. 14.10 Training session “doing-seeing-saying” on weaving practice. (Credit and source: Wadrawane 2021)

June/July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
Clear and weed Burn Prepare the broth	Plant Lifting of dormancy	The yam flower comes out of the ground	Plant the reed stem intended to guide the yam on the stake pole The tuber is formed	The tuber grows larger	The westerly wind, which brings sudden heat, threatens to dry out the part of the yam above ground	The yams with the first fruits fade	Harvesting yams with the first fruits	Yam collection If the creeper dries before the leaves, the harvest will be good			
The “wābwa” and the niaouli trees are in bloom in Gomen and Poya municipalities The leaves of the “wābwa” turn yellow in Poindimié and Poya	The small branches of gualaic dry out and become brittle Erythrin loses its leaves, lilac and mango are in bloom in the mountain chain	The “wābwa” grows its new leaves at the same time as the yams The song of the green pigeon mocks the farmer who is still planting	Fruit bats have their young Under their wings, the erythrin is in bloom, the river shrimp disperse, the kingfisher returns to the seaside	The banyan tree turns yellow, it's time to plant banana trees The gum trees are in bloom, the fruit bats are letting go of their young	Endemic crows nest in rotten wood	The “puhi” is in bloom in Bopope community The hunt for notou begins	The leaves of white banyan trees fall Guava tree, orange tree and mandarin tree bear fruit	Fruit bats are fat, young deer have soft horns The reed begins to bloom Dawa fish is fat, as are turtles and spangled emperor fish It's the time of full low tide			

Fig. 14.11 Yam calendar developed by second year trainee teachers. Tutorials during the first year university diploma course at the Teacher Training Institute of New Caledonia (IFMNC-UNC). (Credit and trans-

lation: Larissa Robert “L’igname, patrimoine d’avenir,” cartography: Kowasch 2023)



contours of an emancipated and decolonised school. Referring to Elie Poigoune (Interview on 1 May 2001), I argue that we should make schooling better than it is now (see also Wadrawane 2010). It is therefore necessary to continue to nurture creativity and innovative intelligence on a human scale (Bensa 2010). It is imperative to co-construct educational references to develop New Caledonian citizenship, a mark of the “double footprint.”

## 14.22 Conclusion

On 7 September 2011, the program “*Comité 30 ans Pierre Declercq*” was broadcast on Radio Djidoo, the local pro-independence radio station. Afterwards, Gérard Sarde, a senior government official and member of the local section of the League of Human Rights, emphasized: “This formidable humor of everyday life, very frequently practiced by Kanaks to such an extent that it is undoubtedly constitutive for you, has a resilience function.” Illouz (2000, p. 195) noted that we can associate the power of humour with the Nengoné language, so that Maréans pass without transition “from serious mutism to hilarious prolixity.” This society has the art of discerning the interlocutor and strategically accommodating solemnity and self-mockery. The hilarity and the irony were undoubtedly good companions of Kanak people during the lack of balance and violence under colonial rule.

During the 1980s, the independence supporters derided Republican schools as colonial, and many supported the more radical alternative, the EPKs. Even if the attempt to readjust the school system by demanding recognition of Kanak knowledge and ways of thinking was aborted when many EPKs disbanded after a few months or years, the introduction of elements of Kanak culture has since occurred. Currently, New Caledonian and French State educational institutions are attempting to work alongside each other.

The clumsy and sometimes fatal arguments that are still produced today around the teaching of culture, and particularly Kanak languages, show the lack of understanding of the relationship between Indigenous cultures and learning. The EPKs confirmed didactic relationships which are now thought to be fundamental. The EPKs cannot be reduced to simple instances of the struggle of Kanak people against educational domination. If New Caledonian society is truly aware of their insights, it will then be possible to establish a more inclusive school that, through its curricula, will impel the foundations of a true “common destiny” contributing to a New Caledonian citizenship. The EFCK programme is taking this forward.

Alongside political and trade union activists, social and cultural actors, Kanak and non-Kanak teachers are invited to seize these schooling principles, in an institution of transmission and transformation, to re-establish new philosophi-

cal positions. Culture can be reinterpreted, reconstructed, and taught, beginning with the foundations of Kanak and Oceanian civilizations in order to train future citizens of the country that will endure the end of the Nouméa Accord. Youth will be central to developing a new social and scholastic imaginary. But this perspective will depend on the willingness of adults and elders to accept the creation of new social links for the realization of a New Caledonian citizenship.

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