Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
ABSTRACT

The problem investigated in this thesis arose from my professional practice as a consultant with regard to educational reforms in a number of countries, including Samoa. This created an initial interest in why different policy options were chosen by different countries in response to similar problems. Observation of the implementation of reforms in various contexts also created questions as to why the implementation of reforms often seemed to lead to new formulations of the original arrangements, resulting in development but little change.

A prior review of evaluations of educational reform programmes showed that many educational evaluations are confined to matters of technical advice inputs, resource management and the achievement of milestones. This study however, considers other factors relevant to the successful achievement of an educational reform programme situated within a particular social, political and historical context.

In particular, this thesis reports on a critical evaluation of the development, between the mid-1980s and 1994, of a policy aimed at producing an education system “characterised by equity” (Department of Education, 1995) in Samoa and then on the results of the implementation of that policy between 1995-2005. The study focused first on the differences in the performance of student groups based in the national Year 8 secondary school selection examination and in their subsequent access to secondary schooling and to the achievement outcomes in Year 12 over the period between 1994 and 2008. Information was gathered through analysis of national examination results databases. Additional information was gathered through interviews and questionnaires from senior educational system managers and from the principals of a sample of four secondary schools. Questionnaires, aimed at gathering socio-economic data, were administered to 2000 students and their families from Years 9, 11, 12 and 13 at the sample schools. The evidence showed little change in the patterns of achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. The system had expanded but the patterns of inequity remained unchanged.

The reasons for the selection of the reform options that resulted in the maintenance of disparities through the 1995-2005 programme were found in the history, culture and political setting of Samoa.
Because of the small size and ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the population, the evaluation was based on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s concepts of field practice and habitus showed how the policy options included in the reform programme were influenced by an underlying habitus that generated the desire for change but also constrained the achievement of the stated aim of a “system characterised by equity”.

The research showed how the historical background to the patterns of advantage within the system and the structure and patterns of advantage that resulted from the reforms continued beyond the reform.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A conversation with Dr Edna Tait, Head of the UNESCO South Pacific Office in Apia at the time, in the transit lounge of Fuuamotu International Airport, Tonga during a mid-night aircraft refuelling stop was the stimulus for this research. It seemed like a good idea to my sleep deprived, jet-lagged brain. It has proven to be a wonderful journey of personal growth and understanding.

I wish to first acknowledge the support for this research given by the late Tautapilimai Levaopolo Tupae Esera, Director-General of Education in Samoa during this period. His interest in the study and his willingness to share his recollections, thoughts and experiences provided a base of assurance to this work. Tupae was well aware that although much progress had been made in educational development in Samoa there was much more to do. He was also aware that transformational change takes time. “We need to leave something for the next generation to do” was one of Tupae’s favourite summations.

I also wish to acknowledge the support and openness of the Assistant Directors of the Ministry and of the principals of the schools who were part of the study. They all provided time for me and shared their thoughts and perspectives willingly and assisted me to understand different ways of seeing the world. Their enthusiasm and passion for the development of education in Samoa is inspirational.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the many dedicated professional colleagues working in educational development in difficult settings who have sat through my many outbursts, rambling explanations and diagram sketching sessions in airplanes, bars, restaurants and offices in many places. I particularly wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by Ms Elaine Lameta who translated all my questionnaires and acted as a sounding board, cultural guide and translator during the project formulation, data collection and processing.

I have appreciated the support that I have received from my supervisors. I have been a difficult candidate. I have no doubt that they were frustrated by my working overseas in places where communication can be difficult. Yet they patiently guided my efforts. Professor Wayne Edwards and Professor Richard Harker helped me to get started and Associate Professor John Clark and Dr Penny Haworth have been invaluable in steering my fumbling efforts to a conclusion.
Finally I wish to acknowledge the support of my wife, Erena, and my children Rebekah and Christopher. I cannot really express what their support has meant. They have allowed me to follow an unusual profession assisting the development of education in developing countries. Erena has provided daily support though many international phone calls and emails and has listened for hours to my inner monologue of self-doubt as I have searched for ways to express the fleeting glimmers of ideas. Rebekah and Christopher completed their own university careers during the process of this study. They showed me the standard I should aspire to through their own diligence and academic excellence.

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