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**'AN EDUCATION SYSTEM CHARACTERISED BY EQUITY':  
A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL CHANGE IN SAMOA  
1995-2005**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of**

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## **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.

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# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
List of Figures .....	x
List of Tables .....	xi
List of Appendices .....	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 OUTLINE .....	3
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH .....	5
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	5
2.2 SAMOA.....	5
2.3 THE CASE.....	11
2.4 THE PROBLEM .....	17
CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF THEORETICAL ISSUES .....	18
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	18
3.2 DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.....	18
3.3 EQUITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS.....	20
3.4 DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTS OF EQUITY IN EDUCATION.....	27
3.5 SOCIAL POWER AND THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL ARRANGEMENTS.....	31
3.6 THEORISING CHANGE.....	35
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY .....	42
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	42
4.2 APPROACH: A CASED CRITICAL EVALUATION .....	43
4.3 CASE SCOPE, FOCUS, ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITS .....	46

4.4 DATA COLLECTION .....	50
4.4.1 Statistical data.....	50
4.4.2 Interviews.....	50
4.4.3 Questionnaires.....	52
4.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	58
4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	58
CHAPTER 5: HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM ‘CHARACTERISED BY EQUITY’ .....	62
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	62
5.2 PRE-EUROPEAN CONTACT TRADITIONAL EDUCATION .....	62
5.3 ESTABLISHING FORMAL SCHOOLING .....	64
5.3.1 Missionary Period 1830-1900 .....	64
5.3.2: Establishing the government system 1900-1914.....	68
5.3.3 Formalising the national schooling system: League of Nations Mandate .....	69
5.4 Attempts to improve equity in the secondary school system 1953-1995.....	71
5.4.1 Attempted reform of secondary education 1986.....	72
5.4.2 Second reform attempt 1995-2005 .....	76
CHAPTER 6: APPRAISAL OF SECONDARY SYSTEM REFORM BY EDUCATION MANAGERS AND PRINCIPALS.....	82
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	82
6.2 PROCESS.....	82
6.3 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRES .....	83
6.3.1 Outcomes for students .....	83
6.3.2 Beliefs about issues impacting on achievement.....	85
6.3.3 Evaluation of changes in the system.....	93
6.3.4 Changes that the respondents thought had occurred.....	96
6.3.5 Changes the respondents thought should occur .....	97
6.4 Summary .....	99



CHAPTER 7: THE EFFECTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL REFORMS ON THE EQUITY OF OUTCOMES	100
7.1 INTRODUCTION .....	100
7.2 ACHIEVEMENT PATTERNS AND THE RESULTS OF REFORMS .....	101
7.2.1. Factors affecting Year 8 examination achievement.....	101
7.3 Summary of the trends in achievement at Year 8 and Year 12 .....	127
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY OF REFORM PROGRAMME RESULTS .....	130
8.1 INTRODUCTION .....	130
8.2 RESULTS OF THE PROGRAMME .....	130
8.2.1 Expansion but no advantage.....	130
8.3 Summary of the trends in achievement at Year 8 and Year 12 .....	134
8.4 Assessment of the programme of reform-inclusions, exclusions and results .....	135
CHAPTER 9: CRITICAL EVALUATION .....	140
9.1 INTRODUCTION .....	140
9.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS.....	140
9.3 HAS EQUITY BEEN ACHIEVED? .....	141
9.4 WHY HAVE THE PATTERNS AND STRUCTURES OF INEQUITY REMAINED UNCHANGED?.....	143
9.4.1 Habitus, structures and repetitive practice .....	144
9.4.2 Habitus and resourcing system.....	147
9.4.3. Habitus and the symbolism of the system.....	148
9.4.4 Habitus and the contest for the symbolic system .....	153
9.5 CHANGE – RECONFIGURING HABITUS.....	155
9.5.1 Programme .....	158
9.6 CONCLUSION.....	161
CHAPTER 10: POSTSCRIPT: REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY .....	163
10.1 INTRODUCTION.....	163
10.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY .....	163
10.2.1 Evaluation of the approach and methodology .....	163

10.2.2 Significance of the research.....	165
10.3 DEVELOPMENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE 1995-2005 PROGRAMME .....	166
10.4 POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH.....	167
APPENDICES .....	169
REFERENCES.....	223

## List of Figures

Figure	2.1	Samoa: geographical setting	5
Figure	2.2	Population distribution by age and gender for the statistical regions	8
Figure	2.3	Structural characteristics of the government school system 1994	12
Figure	2.4	Structural characteristics of the government school system 2006	16
Figure	3.1	Influence of Cultural and Economic Capital of Field Dispositions	37
Figure	3.2	Relationship of Bourdieu's components of practice and symbolic phenomena	39
Figure	7.1	Selection Trends from Government, Mission and Private Schools 1994-2009	104
Figure	9.1	Multi-Layered Structure of the Education System	146
Figure	9.2	Comparison of the impact of the reform models on the symbolic system	150

## List of Tables

Table 6.1	Ministry managers ranking of student success factors	87
Table 6.2	Principals 2 and 3 ranking of student success factors	88
Table 6.3	Principal 1 ranking of student success factors	88
Table 6.4	Principal 4 ranking of student success factors	89
Table 6.5	Beliefs about equity of access to learning and school funding	90
Table 6.6	Reported yearly fees per student for sample schools (\$ST)	95
Table 7.1	Summary of increased participation rates in Year 8 examination 2002-2008	102
Table 7.2	Sources of Samoa College Year 9 selections 1994-2009	103
Table 7.3	Gender proportions of Samoa College Year 8 selections 1995-2002	105
Table 7.4	Description of Year 8 examination results 2002-2008	105
Table 7.5	Value of R for Year 8 2002-2008	107
Table 7.6	Value of R Square Change for Year 8 2002-2008	107
Table 7.7	Relative value of socio-economic variables in Year 8 scores 2004	109
Table 7.8	Increasing Year 12 enrolments 1994-2007	111
Table 7.9	Changing proportions of Year 12 enrolments 1994-2007	112
Table 7.10	Increasing number of schools offering Year 13 programmes	114
Table 7.11	Increasing enrolments in Year 13 1994-2007	114
Table 7.12	Changing enrolment proportions 1994-2007	115
Table 7.13	Subject offerings Years 9-11 in government schools 2008	116
Table 7.14	Subject offerings Years 12-13 in government schools 2008	117
Table 7.15	Presentation of candidates in Year 12 from government schools 2008	118
Table 7.16	School funding for sample secondary schools	121
Table 7.17	Relative value of funding per head 1999 (\$ST)	122
Table 7.18	Year 12 examination grade characteristics by gender	123
Table 7.19	Year 12 examination grade characteristics for rural and urban schools	113
Table 7.20	Year 12 examination grade characteristics for government senior colleges and district secondary schools	124
Table 7.21	Year 12 examination grade characteristics for government, mission and private schools	125
Table 7.22	R values for Year 12 examination results 2002-2008	126
Table 7.23	R Square Change values Year 12 examination results 2002-2008	127
Table 8.1	Summary evaluation of the effect of the 1995-2005 reform programme	136

## List of Appendices

APPENDIX	A	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DIRECTORS QUESTIONNAIRE.....	170
Appendix	A1	MESC Executive Questionnaire Information Sheet (English).....	171
Appendix	A2	MESC Executive Questionnaire Information Sheet (Samoan)....	173
Appendix	A3	MESC Executive Questionnaire Participant Consent Form (English).....	175
Appendix	A4	MESC Executive Questionnaire Participant Consent Form (Samoan).....	176
Appendix	A5	MESC Executive Questionnaire (English).....	177
APPENDIX	B	SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS QUESTIONNAIRE.....	184
Appendix	B1	School Principals Questionnaire Information Sheet (English).....	185
Appendix	B2	School Principals Questionnaire Information Sheet (Samoan)....	187
Appendix	B3	School Principals Questionnaire Participant Consent Form (English).....	189
Appendix	B4	School Principals Questionnaire Participant Consent Form (Samoan).....	190
Appendix	B5	School Principals Questionnaire (English).....	191
APPENDIX	C	STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES QUESTIONNAIRE.....	199
Appendix	C1	Student and Family Questionnaire Information Sheet (English)...	200
Appendix	C2	Student and Family Questionnaire Information Sheet (Samoan)..	202
Appendix	C3	Student and Family Questionnaire Participant Consent Form (English).....	204
Appendix	C4	Student and Family Questionnaire Participant Consent Form (Samoan).....	205
Appendix	C5	Student and Family Questionnaire (English).....	206
Appendix	C6	Student and Family Questionnaire (Samoan).....	212
APPENDIX	D	INTERVIEWS.....	218
Appendix	D1	Interview Information Sheet (English).....	219
Appendix	D1	Interview Participants Consent Form (English).....	222