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**Continuity and change: Education policy and
historiography of education in Western Samoa**

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Master of Education in the Faculty of Arts, Education and Social
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Abstract

This thesis explores the theme of continuity and change in Western Samoan education. It does so by looking at recent policy documents and at accounts of the history of education in Western Samoa written over more than a century. It compares the treatments of continuity and change in the policy documents and in the histories to show the extent to which both reflect a similar view of the place of continuity and change in Western Samoan culture and education.

The study documents and analyses current education policies and strategies in Western Samoa through the two key documents which outline the broad policy directions for education and the strategies for achieving them, respectively, supplemented by Department of Education Annual Reports. It outlines the process of redeveloping policies from early to mid-1990s and the general character of the policies as a whole, and looks more closely at statements of the purposes of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and outcomes of the policies in terms of the distribution of educational provision and participation in education. Throughout, these policies are shown to reflect concern with both the maintenance of traditional Samoa culture – the *fa'aSamoa* – and the need to change to adapt to the demands of a modern global economy.

It also examines a range of historical accounts of Western Samoa and, in particular, the history of education through four periods of development: traditional society, the missionary period, colonial rule, and early independent Western Samoa. It uses three types of account: accounts that are written in, or close to the periods to which they refer, such as missionary accounts of Western Samoan society and education in what is identified as the missionary period; late twentieth century histories of Western Samoa; and historical overviews used to frame late twentieth century official reports. The analysis of these accounts focuses on the purposes of education in different periods, curriculum and pedagogy, and the outcomes of education, again in terms of the distribution of educational provision and participation in education. It analyses these histories in terms of continuity and change, and argues that such histories suggest that Western Samoan history has always been characterised by a balance between continuity and change: the *fa'aSamoa* has adapted to changing circumstances in ways that have allowed it to maintain core values, but resisted changes that would threaten those core values.

Finally, the thesis compares the understandings of the ways in which continuity and change have been balanced as suggested in the histories with those to be found in the policy documents. It argues that throughout its history, Western Samoa has maintained the strength of its indigenous tradition and cultural values. At the same time, since the arrival of the missionaries, it has selectively welcomed and adopted western practices and values, simultaneously adapting itself to them, and them to its own traditional practices and values. Current policies appear to continue this tradition of selective adaptation to change while continuing to maintain core values of the *fa'aSamoa*. This suggests that the policies are well calculated both to hold the support of the Western Samoan people, and to enable Western Samoa to hold its place in the global community.

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Introduction

Defining the Problem

This thesis documents current educational policy in Western Samoa. It shows how that policy relates education to themes of continuity and change, tradition and modernisation (or westernisation), and it seeks to construct desirable possibilities for a Western Samoan future. It also explores the ways in which accounts of the history of Western Samoa, and of Western Samoan education in particular, provide understandings of the *fa'aSamoa* which reveal themes of continuity and change. The thesis reveals how the *fa'aSamoa* itself has progressively assimilated missionary and colonial influences into the education and upbringing of children. The thesis focuses on three main aspects of education, namely, the purposes of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and the outcomes of educational policy and practice. It is argued that while it acknowledges the importance of the traditional Samoan way of life – the *fa'aSamoa* – the current educational policy is strongly oriented to change. Furthermore, historical accounts about the education and upbringing of Samoan children indicate a generally positive view of the changes which followed the establishment of close contact with the West following the arrival of missionaries in the early nineteenth century.

These histories recognise both strong continuity in Samoan culture, and the processes of mutual adaptation of westernised changes to traditional practices and values. They see change and continuity as essentially harmonious and as enriching rather than disrupting or threatening the core values of Western Samoan culture and society. Where they are strongly critical of changes introduced by westerners, as during the period of German government in the early twentieth century, these changes are seen to have attempted to undermine and disrupt traditional practices. This interpretation of Western Samoan histories provides a context for understanding both current policy and current debate over policy. It suggests that Western Samoan society and culture has a long tradition of adopting, and adapting to western influences, without significant social disruption, and that a key to this relatively harmonious development has been the capacity to adapt such changes to the *fa'aSamoa*. Lastly, but not the least, the thesis will argue that this historical perspective on the present suggests that the continuing process of modernisation will

need to continue to recognise and respect the strength of Samoan traditions if it is not to introduce undue and unwanted tensions, disharmonies and disruptions into Western Samoan society.

Currently, there are two opposing schools of thought among Western Samoans, especially among parents, regarding various aspects of Westernisation in contemporary education. Coxon (1996) noted the divisions over education, and the direction of educational development at the time of the 1988 elections, with one party (the incoming government) promising to revert to the pre-1987 system (p. 188). Some parents believe that contemporary education has brought dramatic negative influences to the lives of their school children as for example, the imposition of English language for wider use in schools instead of the Samoan mother tongue (Dunlop, 1986; Spolsky, 1991; Denoon, 1997). The exposure of children to a variety of lifestyle images on television and video presents another dilemma for parents. Ahlburg (1991), among others, claims that parents and some government officials are against contemporary education methods, because they can lead to the problem of 'brain drain' or loss of professionals from the local labour force.

According to such parents, the present system of education appears to be incompatible with Samoan ideas of nature, nurture and indigenous culture; they claim that the new technologies and contemporary education have weakened the vitality of *fa'aSamoa* or the Samoan way of life and its values. Further, they suggest that these developments have contributed to new problems such as high suicide rates, murder, theft, family break-up, anti-Christian attitudes and other anti-social behaviour.

Other parents hold the view that life is not static but always in motion. For them, the old Western Samoa and its 'backwardness' has faded away and the new modernised Samoa should be welcomed. They have come to accept that new technological knowledge, curricular and pedagogical strategies and other aspects of modernisation in contemporary education can improve the present and the future for their children. Such indigenous acceptance of current education in Western Samoa has further driven the aspirations of modern parents for their children to do well in their studies in order to get overseas scholarship awards or for them to migrate abroad in order to receive a better education.

From the perspective of government, it is crucial to develop policies that tread carefully between these opposite views, so as not to alienate parents from

educational developments, but to cultivate their support, and the participation of their children. At the same time, government must develop policies, strategies and practices that satisfy the developmental demands of outside bodies, such as the World Bank and the Asia-Pacific Development Bank for modernisation, as conditions of continuing aid and economic support.

Researcher Standpoint

My approach to the topic, and my initial perspectives on it, are shaped by my social, cultural and educational positions. As an indigenous Western Samoan, I have drawn on my own personal experiences of being born, raised and educated in a Samoan milieu. I have experienced, and benefited from, the availability of education in the village in which I was raised, where elders, chiefs and parents taught traditional cultural values to their children. Here, through close observation and imitation, I learned the structure, rules and regulations of Samoan society, and learned to appreciate their value for us as a people. Here, too, I was immersed in practices that demonstrate both continuity and change in the *fa'aSamoa*, in a Samoan approach to society and life which I came to understand had its roots in a culture which existed well before the arrival of Westerners, but which also showed the impact of the culture they brought.

As a Samoan chief holding the title of *TuiSalevao*, conferred upon me by the *Faleula o Samoa* (Auva'a, 1995), I have a deep appreciation of and respect for Samoan traditional social structures and knowledge, an appreciation further developed in my position as Secretary of the Department of Education Committee of High Talking Chiefs responsible for officially overseeing the operation of the chiefly, or *matai*, system and the historical and genealogical lineages it embodies. As a graduate in History and Samoan Studies of the National University of Samoa, I have a strong sense of the importance of the oral traditions of the Samoan people, our pre-Western history, and our experiences since contact with the Europeans.

As a Christian, I have a special appreciation of the value of our Western inheritance, not only for the broad influence of Christian religion in Samoan society as a whole, but more tangibly and specifically in terms of the role of the missions in providing education. I look back with appreciation on the Christian expectations of my parents and the village community, and the learning done in Sunday School sessions and Family Evening Service (*Lotu Afiafi*), where parents and all of their

children attended to worship their God in heaven, for thanksgiving, forgiveness and blessing. As an ordained minister of a Pentecostal church for four years, I add to this sense of the value of the church in village life, my knowledge of the role of the church in nurturing individual members of the congregation.

I also remember the subjects that were taught at the Pastor's School, or *Aoga Faifeau*: Bible reading, memorising the Samoan alphabet and writing simple sentences, basic Arithmetic and general history. Competition among students and the anxious and excited reactions of parents to their children as exam candidates were common. For about ten years, I was employed as a government secondary teacher, as a temporary employee in the main office of the Department of Education, and as a public servant for the Government of Samoa. As a result of my involvement and participation in education, I have a deep interest in the future direction of education in Western Samoa. Thus, while the research attempts to represent fairly and accurately both the policies and the histories which are used to provide perspective on the policies, the questions posed reflect my interest in the balance between continuity and change, and my own experience in this regard.

These varied experiences inevitably shape my understanding of the *fa'aSamoa* as embracing both continuity and change – tradition and modernisation – and of the relations between Western and indigenous elements in Western Samoan society and culture and education, both in the past and in the present. Inevitably, therefore, my research cannot be described as value free or unbiased. Nevertheless, it aims to be scholarly and rigorous, and to make an informed contribution to the debate on future directions for Western Samoan society and education. The work aims to provide a reflection on education and society, past and present, as a basis for considering what needs to be done for the future. It does this with a view to appreciating both the continuities and discontinuities, and understanding ways in which the *fa'aSamoa* has absorbed and utilised missionary, colonial and postcolonial influences on the education and general upbringing of children. These changes and developments, I suggest, indicate possibilities for educational policies that embrace change without losing the culture, tradition and values of the *fa'aSamoa*.

Sources and Methods

The thesis involves textual analysis of two types of documents: policy and related texts, mainly since the mid 1990s, and a variety of texts which provide accounts of the history of Western Samoan society and education. These texts are analysed to show themes of continuity and change, highlighting the importance of both the traditional *fa'aSamoa* and modernisation, and showing how the *fa'aSamoa* has adopted changes from 'outside', simultaneously adapting them to itself, and adapting itself to them, both in present-day Western Samoa and in what is understood to have happened in the past. The documents are analysed in particular to show the purposes portrayed for education, preferred approaches to pedagogy and curriculum, and the outcomes of Western Samoan education. These are further examined to show how they can be seen as embodying continuity and change, and how notions of continuity and change are related to the *fa'aSamoa*. Finally, these accounts of continuity and change in the past and in the present will be compared to show the degree of correspondence between them, and to show how accounts of continuity and change create an understanding of potential needs in contemporary Western Samoa, and of the ways in which current policy might successfully balance them.

The key current policy documents are *Education Policies 1995-2005* (Western Samoa. Department of Education, 1995a) and *Education Strategies 1995-2005* (Western Samoa. Department of Education, 1995b). These are supplemented by the annual reports of the Western Samoan Department of Education (Western Samoa. Department of Education, 1996; 1997; 1998, 1999b; 2000b) and other recent government reports (Western Samoa. Department of Education, 1999a; 2000a). Some scholarly commentary on current policy and developments is also used to indicate the context in which policy is being shaped (Ahlburg, 1991; Afamasaga, 2000; Coxon, 1996; Denoon, 1997; Dunlop; 1986; Macpherson, Belford & Spoonley, 2000; Spolsky, 1991; Tavana, Hite & Randall, 1997).

The thesis draws on three types of historical accounts of Western Samoa. There are numerous nineteenth and early twentieth century accounts, including, notably works by missionaries, travellers and government agents (e.g., Williams & Barff, n.d.; Barradale, 1907), many of which are not only primary sources for the period in which they are written, but provide a historical background to the time of

writing, often including impressions of what the past, especially the ‘traditional’ past, was like.

There are also more or less recent amateur and academic accounts of particular historical periods or developments. Among older studies are those of Watson (1918), Fletcher (1920), Keesing (1978 [originally 1934]), Ellison (1938) and Grattan (1948), while more recent accounts are provided by westerners such as Gray (1960), Davidson (1967), Pitt (1970), Gilson (1970) and Wood (1975), and Samoan historians such as Wendt (1966), Efi (1975), Va’a (1978), Sio (1984), Meleisea (1987a; 1987b; 1992) and Tuimalealiifano (1990). Many official reports (e.g., Western Samoa. Department of Education, 1980; World Bank Project, 1992) on aspects of society and education also include historical sketches to provide a sense of background and origins of the matters presently under consideration. For recent periods, there are also accounts of various aspects of education, such as those by Barrington (1976), Baldauf (1975), Banks (1977), Lowe (1981), Huebner (1986), Gannicott (1990), Io Bianco and Liddicoat (1991), Jones, Meek and Weeks (1991), Ma’ia’i (1957; 1960), Ala’ilima (1964), Galo (1967), Tavana, Hite and Randall (1997) and Tanielu (1997). These historical and educational accounts are supplemented by a variety of anthropologists’ accounts (e.g., Mead, 1928; Freeman, 1983) of what they see as surviving aspects of traditional Samoan culture and society.

Despite the large number of sources, the historiography of Western Samoan society and education is limited in several important ways. First, there is, and indeed cannot be, any comprehensive or thorough written account of Samoan society before the arrival of Europeans in the early nineteenth century. What written accounts there are necessarily offer backward projections of traditional society based on observations of what are deemed traditional practices in a much later period. Second, there is a Eurocentric bias and organising focus apparent in many of the histories. For example, accounts from and of the nineteenth century focus principally on matters of concern to missionaries and rely heavily on documents and perspectives of the missionaries. There is a similar Western perspective, this time from a New Zealand viewpoint, on histories for much of the colonial period. This perspective leads many of the Western accounts, including some relatively recent studies, to talk in deficit terms. Thomas and Postlethwaite (1984), for example, discuss ‘traditional’ Samoan education in terms of what it *lacked*, rather than in

terms of what it possessed, stating that it was conducted ‘*without* a written language, *without* a stated course of study, and *without* formal schools or professional teachers’ (pp. 205-206, my italics). Third, there is very little literature written in English concerning the period of German colonial rule. Finally, only a small number of indigenous Western Samoans have had sufficient levels of formal education to write histories from a Samoan perspective, and of those, only a small proportion focused on educational or social history.

Further limitations, from the point of view of this study, lie in the fact that the majority of Western writers have concentrated on government, the people, the economy and ‘exotic’ aspects of the culture, or on matters central to their own interests, such as religion, in the case of missionaries, while the systematic treatment of the history of education in Western Samoa has received little attention. Notable exceptions in this regard are studies by Pitt (1970) and Keesing (1978; 1975). Certainly, no comprehensive interpretation of the history of education in Western Samoa has been published. Similarly, there are no thorough historical studies of such central aspects of education in Western Samoa as purposes, curriculum and pedagogy and outcomes of Western Samoan education. Finally, there has been no attempt to conduct a systematic discussion of the relationship between historical understandings of continuity and change in Western Samoan society and education, and the approach to continuity and change in contemporary policy.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to draw out such themes through the history of Samoa, and to trace, from the histories, the gradual adoption of western ideas and practices in the development of Western Samoan society and education, and the adaptation of those ideas to its own traditional ideas and practices. This provides a framework for noticing and reflecting on the positions adopted in policy and related documents regarding continuity and change, tradition and modernisation, the *fa’aSamoa* and westernisation.

Structure

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction which sets the scene for this study. It outlines both traditional understandings of the origins of Samoan, and the main features of traditional Samoan society. It sketches the early Samoan contacts with Europeans, and the general changes in Samoan society through its nineteenth century contact

with missions and missionaries. It notes the pact between western powers for the division of Samoa between German and the United States and for German rule of Western Samoa, and outlines the impact of the German administration and economic intervention. It also examines the impact of New Zealand rule after the transfer of colonial control from Germany as a consequence of World War One, and the moves after World War Two to establish independent Western Samoan government. Finally, it documents developments in the early years of Western Samoan independence and the key features of contemporary Western Samoan government, society and economy.

Chapter 2 explores contemporary Western Samoan educational policy. It outlines briefly the approach to policy adopted in the thesis, and the process of policy development in Western Samoa since about 1990. It provides an overview of the main features of education policy outlined in the *Education Policies 1995-2005* and *Educational Strategies 1995-2005*, before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of their treatment of the purposes of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and the outcomes of post-1995 initiatives. Finally, it provides a general interpretation of the ways these documents deal with questions of continuity and change, tradition and modernisation.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine representations of each aspect of education in the traditional and missionary periods as well as colonial and early independence periods, as they appear in various histories and in recent policy and policy-related documents. Chapter 5 draws together these historical representations and contemporary policy statements. It explores the balance between continuity and change and expresses the view that while there continue to be strong social and cultural reasons to maintain the *fa'aSamoa*, outside pressures, and the need for change, cannot be avoided. It argues that the ways in which the balance struck in the policy documents corresponds to the balance which is seen to have been formed in earlier historical periods, and suggests that this indicates that current policies are formed within the historically demonstrated capacity of Samoan society to adapt to change, and are thus well judged to maintain an appropriate balance between the competing forces for both tradition and modernisation.