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Structures, history and hope: A case study of mechanisms that maintain advantage in education

Alan Male

Massey University, New Zealand
amale@xtra.co.nz

International partners must always realise that local education systems interact with local social environments. Local perspectives are active agents in shaping the effectiveness of educational change. Underlying cultural, symbolic and social structures set the elastic limits of change and impact the formulation and implementation of policy arrangements.

This paper evaluates the results of educational reforms in Samoa aimed at changing the patterns of advantage in the education system. It examines the social and political environment in which the reform package was developed and implemented focusing on the dispositions of different social actors. It analyses the lack of change in the patterns of advantage. It argues that underlying social assumptions meant key change options were not included in the package resulting in the reproduction of the structure of inequity.

Formulating effective educational change strategies requires the partners to link technical developments to change in the replication of social and symbolic environments.

[Keywords: equity, distributive justice, social replication]

Introduction

This paper is based on a critical evaluation of the development and implementation of a package of education reforms in Samoa aimed at delivering an education system “characterised by equity, quality, relevancy and efficiency” (Samoa Department of Education, 1995). The evaluation explored the changes in the patterns of access and achievement in secondary school education in Samoa that resulted from the 1995-2005 reform programme attempt to create an education system characterised by equity (Samoa Department of Education, 1995).

The education reforms grew out of increasing dissatisfaction with the distribution of opportunity in the secondary schooling system amongst community and educational professionals in the early 1980s. A reform model was proposed in the mid-1980s, but it was seen as too radical by the community and subsequently rejected. A second, more moderate model was developed and implemented in the

period 1995-2005. This paper describes the second reform process. It then uses the concepts of distributive justice to evaluate the results of the reform. Finally, it uses the concepts of social reproduction to explain why key system-changing reforms suggested by the partners were not implemented as part of the process. This paper begins by examining the pre-1995 conditions that set the scene for education reform in Samoa.

Reform of the Samoa secondary school system

In 1990, following the destructive cyclones Ofa and Val, a World Bank team was invited by the Government of Samoa to assess the refurbishment of school infrastructure. This also provided an opportunity to determine what other reforms should be considered within the structure, scope and purpose of the education system. The World Bank (1991, 1992) determined that the Samoan education system was unsatisfactory in many ways. The system was characterised by low participation rates, high attrition rates, a narrow curriculum and teacher-dominated pedagogy. It was also characterised by policies, practices and structures which favoured some participants, but actively discouraged others.

The secondary system was described as inequitable and inefficient. It had a dual-stream structure made up of an advantaged track of three government operated senior colleges offering Year 9-13 programmes, and a less advantaged track through a further 22 government junior secondary schools offering Year 9-11 programs. Access to government senior secondary education was highly selective with entry based on performance in the national Year-8 selection examination. The junior secondary schools had an inferior curriculum, were staffed by less-qualified teachers and received no operational funding from the government, thereby relying on local district funding for resources.

The Junior Secondary Schools programme terminated with the Junior Secondary School Certificate examination in Year 11. At the same time, the senior colleges, fully funded by government, terminated at Year 13 with the Pacific Senior School Certificate. Good performance on the Certificate resulted in access to the University Preparatory Year.

The combination of the selection process, poor facilities and many inadequately trained teachers contributed to poor quality performance throughout the secondary system (Samoa Department of Education, 1995). Wastage in the system was high. In 1995, 16 per cent of the Year 8 cohort dropped out before entering Year 9. Of the students who entered Year 9, 54 per cent dropped out before entering Year 12. The World Bank recommended that significant system restructuring was necessary as part of the reconstruction effort as a way of expanding the system and improving the quality (World Bank, 1992).

With support from NZAID, a reform package of policies and activities was developed through extensive public consultation. In 1995 the Government of Samoa published a 10-year framework for the development of education in Samoa. The stated intent of the reforms was to develop an education system

“characterised by equity, quality, relevancy and efficiency” (Samoa Department of Education, 1995).

The consultation showed a consensus that ‘equity’ contained the idea of equal opportunity, the notion that providing all individuals with equal access to schooling ensures a fair system, but also that all students must also be treated fairly (Coxon, 2003). Fair treatment was seen as resulting from the removal of policies that advantage some groups and disadvantage others resulting in differential outcomes (Coxon, 2003). The limited opportunity to access secondary schooling by rural students was an example of the existence of such inequities. A focus on a more appropriate distribution of educational resources was seen as a central issue in the achievement of equity.

Samoa’s education policies stated that the concept of equity required the system to treat all individuals fairly and justly in the provision of educational opportunity. It required the avoidance of policies that advantage some social groups and disadvantage others. It prioritised the promotion of policies that addressed the existing inequalities in access, treatment and outcome (Samoa Department of Education, 1995). In particular it stated the following objectives:

Access:

- structures which enable equitable access through the secondary system to all students so that no student enters a course of study which has been defined as terminal;
- access to a comprehensive range of educational experiences which will enable students to make informed choices about their future;
- and equal access to educational programmes for special needs students.

Treatment:

- a comprehensive and enriching programme which provides opportunities and challenges for students of varying interests and abilities, and allows for individual differences;
- the opportunity for all students to achieve educational potential regardless of socio-economic status, gender, geographical location or previous educational experiences;
- and adequate instructional time and effective instruction by well qualified and trained teachers across all subject areas and at all levels of the system.

Outcome:

- assessment and evaluation policies, procedures and practices for both school-based internal assessment and external examinations, which are perceived as fair and objective measures of achievement, and which reflect the principles and purposes of the curriculum. (Samoa Department of Education, 1995, p.20)

Implementation of the policy framework started in 1995 through a programme of parallel and interrelated projects financed by the Government of Samoa in partnership with NZAID, AusAID and the Asian Development Bank. The existing dual-stream curriculum was replaced by single-stream curriculum covering Years 9-13. The curriculum included a range of new subjects. Teaching materials were developed and supplied to support the curriculum. A programme

of refurbishment and re-equipment of rural secondary schools was initiated to improve the capacity of district schools to deliver educational services to higher levels and with greater curriculum coverage. An extensive programme of teacher in-service training was implemented to increase the capacity of teachers to be able to provide programmes in support of the new curriculum and the inclusive goals of the reform programme. The redundant Year 11 Junior Secondary School Certificate was discontinued as students were able to progress to the Year 12 Samoa Secondary School Certificate.

Theoretical Frame for Evaluation

Any evaluation of the attempt to achieve the stated policy goal of equity must consider whether the programme results in transformation of the system or whether it is merely a replication of the current systems of advantage. One way of theoretically exploring equity is through the framework of distributive justice and social reproduction.

Distributive justice

Distributive justice relates to the way social goods, generated by cooperative action, are distributed to the members of a society (Rawls, 1999). There are different distributive arrangements in different societies. Those different arrangements have had a range of beneficiaries and supporters. However, these arrangements may not necessarily be just or equitable.

Although often used synonymously in conversation equity and equality are different terms and are open to markedly different interpretations. Equality is frequently interpreted as individuals or groups with the same characteristics being treated in exactly the same way. In this case equality is essentially justice as regularity (Rawls, 1991, p.441). Equity, in contrast, places emphasis on notions of fairness and justice, even if that requires unequal distribution of goods and services (Valli, Cooper & Frankes, 1997).

Rawls (1999) argued that defining a just basis for the way in which major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determines the division of advantages from social cooperation was a basic step for any society (p.6). He argued that a society needs to a set of principles to determine the division of advantages and the proper distribution of shares (p.4). He proposed two principles: first, that each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others; and second, that social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons, as well as attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1999, pp.53-65).

Consequently, Clark (2006) argues that the members of particular social groups are entitled to the social goods of that group by right. Some social goods are universal and some are legally granted. In this sense, fairness lies not in the realisation that marginalised groups need to have more resources allocated to

them, but in understanding that if they are members of a group that has certain social goods as a right then their realisation of that right is only fair.

On this account a society, such as Samoa, that had granted all children the right and legal obligation to attend school and had made equity of access, treatment and outcome a goal for the schooling system, would then need to take action. It would need to arrange the system in such a way that it facilitated the least advantaged most to ensure they gained access.

Utilitarians, in contrast, hold a different basis for justice. Mill (1863) argued that justice must be understood as that which is most 'useful' to society as a whole – or, to use his terms, that which generates the highest 'utility' – the greatest good or well-being for the greatest number. Utilitarianism argues that while the happiness of each person is valued equally and all people have an equal claim to all the means of happiness, happiness is conditioned by "the inevitable conditions of human life and the general interest in which that of every individual is included set limits to the maxim" (Sterba, 1980, p.103). Mill argued that unequal access to the 'means of happiness' is justified but only when it is in the interest of society as a whole. In this case a society that held the utilitarian view may tolerate inequality if it produced greater good for society, regardless of its implications for the poor (Howe, 1997).

Nozick (1974) argues that inequality does not necessarily indicate injustice if it results from a process that treats people fairly and equally. Nozick argues that such a process may be unfortunate for certain individuals but that does not make it unfair (Howe, 1997). Nozick disputes the notion of communal responsibility and rejects the idea of a role for the state in rearranging society to compensate the disadvantaged.

Pereira (2006) makes a case that merit ranking of individuals on the basis of academic performance through examinations is consistent with the meritocratic aspects of Samoan culture, and by this reasoning Samoans support selection and advancement on the basis of examination achievement. The Year 8 selection examinations are widely regarded as a meritocratic tool for selection. There is community support for ensuring that the meritorious are advanced to appropriate levels in society as this brings benefit to all.

Social reproduction

Critical perspectives assume that, in the arrangements and dispositions of any society, there are underlying system constraints that shape advantage. Critical approaches attempt to reveal how inequities are structured and reproduced through entrenched power structures and belief systems which then reproduce the inequities of the status quo (Apple, 1995; Bourdieu, 1989, 1998; Bourdieu & Champagne, 1999; Mills, 2008).

Bourdieu (1998) theorised that one of the most important influences on practice is *habitus* – the habitual way of thinking that is the consequence of the constantly recurring patterns of life-beliefs, values and conduct. *Habitus* gives people the sense of what is and is not normal or acceptable. Bourdieu (1989) also argued

that symbolic phenomena, including schemas and institutions are a strong influence on the human agent, providing an unconscious guide as to what might be acceptable by society. By symbolic phenomena, Bourdieu meant the mental structures of an individual or individuals (Jain, 2006). In other words, in any situation we do what we think is best and what we think is best is generally the same as, or similar to, what we thought was best in preceding similar situations. This continuity conforms to our symbolic schemas and the unconscious evaluative criteria. This process legitimates the decision which in turn legitimates the result thus perpetuating both the material and social environment and the symbolic schemas.

Bourdieu also stipulated that the groups with the greatest cultural capital defined what was acceptable for success. Those groups that had, or could acquire, the characteristics of that cultural capital would succeed, while other groups would not (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). These theoretical concepts provide a framework for analysing education reform in Samoa. The remainder of this paper applies these concepts to the study.

Data Collection

The research assumed that the implementation of the equity policy, designed to broaden opportunity and remove barriers to achievement and advancement, would result in changes to the national patterns of achievement and advancement. It was expected that there would be increased participation by groups that had been previously marginalised at the secondary school level. It was also expected that there would be increased participation and higher achievement by these groups in the Year 8 and Year 12 examinations. Data was gathered from government databases, questionnaires and interviews.

Statistical data for student achievement in the Year 8 and Year 12 examinations for all primary and secondary schools in Samoa for the period 2000-2008 was extracted from the Samoa Ministry of Education school census database, known as Manumea, and from the Ministry's examination records database, known as Examiner. Changes in the national patterns of examination participation and achievement were analysed using variables of gender, geographical location, rural or urban area, and type of school (government school, village or district school, mission school or private school).

Samoa College is recognised as the premier government senior college, and the highest ranked students in the Year 8 examination are selected for entry. As a consequence, selection into Samoa College was used to test equitable outcomes for marginalised groups in the Year 8 examination. In addition, four secondary schools were sampled to allow detailed exploration of the impact of the reforms on school operations and the outcomes of the reforms for the students.

In 2006, at the end of the 1995-2005 reform programme, a questionnaire seeking socio-economic data was administered to all the students and their families in Years 9, 11, 12 and 13 at the sample schools. The socio-economic data for the 2006 Year 9 students were then matched against the students' Year 8 examination results from 2005.

Hierarchical regression was conducted on all aggregate Year 8 and Year 12 examination marks between 2000-2008 against the variables of island location, urban/peri-urban location versus rural location, and school controlling authority. Hierarchical regression was conducted for the sample Year 8 students against socio-economic characteristics such as parental occupation, wealth and language use to identify the factors influencing achievement.

A questionnaire was administered to the school principals to gather data related to the equity policy in particular changes in school operations, budgets, and student outcomes. The principals were also asked to comment on the changes and to identify obstacles that restricted the reform. A similar questionnaire was administered to five key members of the Samoa Ministry of Education Executive Management Committee. This questionnaire sought comment on their understandings of the equity policy and the changes that resulted from the implementation of the equity policy.

Interviews were held with three individuals from the Samoa Ministry of Education that had been involved in the development of the policy and its implementation. They were also asked to elicit their understanding of the policy development process, to evaluate progress and to identify the obstacles that existed to change.

Results

Year 8 selection

The Year 8 national selection examination remained unchanged by the 1995-2005 reform programme. As a result changes in the patterns of participation and achievement in the national Year 8 selection examination illustrate the impact of policies related to increasing access, participation and achievement across the primary school sector. Overall, since 1995 high achievement and advantageous selection of urban-located, English-language competent, female students from professional, prosperous families have been increasingly dominant trends.

Participation in the Year 8 examination increased over the reform period. Overall numbers increased by 14 per cent in the period 2001-2008 (Samoa Ministry of Education Manumea Database)¹. Participation by students from the island of Savai'i increased by 23 per cent while numbers from Upolu increased by 11 per cent. Urban-based participation increased by 72 per cent while overall rural participation decreased by 4 per cent. The effect of increased social stratification is shown by the impact of the expansion of participation by students from private schools.

Female participation increased by 12 per cent while males increased by 9 per cent. Female candidates have outnumbered male candidates since 2006. Females, as a group, consistently have higher mean scores than males. The average mean

¹ All statistics are sourced from the Samoa Ministry of Education Manumea database and the Ministry's Examiner database unless otherwise stated

score for females in the period 2002-2008 was 222.72 while the average mean for males was 194.51. However, females also have a smaller range of grades with lower high scores but higher low scores than males.

As described in the previous section, Samoa College received the highest-ranked students from Year 8 examinations, and was used as a test case for measuring equitable outcomes. Consequently, the changing characteristics of the selected students can be used as an indicator of the social patterns of achievement outcomes across the nation.

Females represent an increasing proportion of the students selected into Samoa College. In 1995, 57.9 per cent of the selections were females with males accounting for 42.1 per cent. Female selections trended upwards to 64.9 per cent in 2002 and averaged 60.1 per cent in the 1995-2002 period. Males declined to 35.1 per cent in 2002 and averaged 39.9 per cent in the same period.

The source location for students selected to Samoa College has also changed. Selections sourced from the island of Upolu have increased from 67 per cent in 1994 to 85 per cent in 2009 with 70 per cent coming from the Apia urban area.

Selection from government schools declined from 100 per cent in 1994 to 70.63 per cent in 2009. The selections from private primary schools have increased from 0 per cent in 1994 to 28.57 per cent in 2009. This is an important social change. All the private schools are located in the Apia urban/peri-urban districts of Faleata and Vaimauga. The schools have attracted students who come largely from families with sufficient income to pay the fees. There is a higher likelihood that such families are well educated and have urban-based professional occupations.

Analysis of examination results of all Year 8 candidates shows that gender is the most important factor in achievement in the Year 8 examination followed by attending an urban school on the island of Upolu, preferably a private primary school or if not then a government primary school located near the centre of the Apia urban area. Analysis of the Year 8 examination results of the socio-economic data gained through the questionnaires administered to the students and their families in the sample secondary schools shows that students who come from families that are relatively prosperous, English-language competent and where the mother has a paid occupation tend to have the highest examination grades. The mother's occupation is an indicator of family participation in the urban cash economy and lifestyle.

Secondary school

The impact of the implementation of the 1995-2005 reforms was immediately evident. In 1994 there were only three schools – Samoa College, Vaipouli College and Leifiifi College – with Year 12 enrolments. However, in 1996 six district secondary schools reported Year 12 enrolments for the first time. Five of the schools were located on Upolu and one on Savai'i. Within three years the change of policy had resulted in 20 district schools across Upolu and Savai'i offering ongoing Year 12 programmes.

This resulted in expanded enrolments in district secondary schools. In 1995 the senior colleges held 87.69 per cent of Year 12 enrolments. However, rapid increase of enrolments in the district secondary schools saw a rise in the proportion of Year 12 enrolments in district secondary schools from 0 per cent in 1995 to 65.85 per cent in 2007 while senior colleges accounted for only 22.94 per cent in 2007.

There was also an increase in the number of Year 13 students with the total rising by nearly 200 per cent (from 262 to 763 students) in the 1994-2007 period. The senior college share of enrolments declined from 100 per cent in 1994 to 48 per cent in 2007 with the district schools increasing the enrolment share from 0 per cent in 1994 to 34.73 per cent in 2007.

However, while the senior colleges provide a complete range of curriculum offerings for the Years 12 and 13 programmes, the district secondary schools continue to be restricted in curriculum offerings due to lack of sufficient specialist subject teachers, facilities and equipment. While most of the schools maintained the senior levels of the Year 9-12 core curriculum, fewer were able to offer specialist subjects at the senior levels. The shortage of specialist teachers and the lack of necessary facilities and equipment reduced the available options.

Funding systems still favour the established senior colleges. While the government provides a salaries budget for all schools, only the senior colleges are provided with an operational budget. The district secondary schools have to raise the operational budget through fees and other fundraising activities. The senior colleges charge fees in addition to the budget grant. The district schools also charge fees but at a much lower rate. Data collected from the Ministry of Education and the principals of the sample schools showed that during the three financial years 2004/05, 2005/06 and 2006/07 the average per capita budget for the senior college was ST² 1687 per annum while the sample district secondary schools had a per capita budget of ST 935, ST 779 and ST633 respectively.

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview responses shows that the school principals and Ministry of Education managers are aware that the differential funding allows the senior colleges to buy more and better resources/materials for teaching. The effect is that the students from the prosperous, urban, English-language capable communities who then do well in the selection examination are the beneficiaries of relatively good resourcing and broader curriculum opportunities.

Pattern of secondary school outcomes

The evidence suggests that the Year 12 outcome pattern is similar to the pattern exhibited in the Year 8 selection examination. Females, as a group, continue to out-perform males as a group. Females consistently had higher average scores in the Year 12 examination than males over the 2002-2008 sample years. Female scores are more tightly clustered than males with narrower ranges of scores and

² The Samoa Tala (SAT) is the unit of currency in Samoa. At the time of writing it was equivalent to USD 0.44.

lower standard deviations. Students at urban schools present higher examination scores than rural schools. Rural means are significantly lower than those of urban schools.

Government senior secondary colleges continue to perform better than government district schools. Senior colleges have considerably higher average scores but also have a wider range of scores and a higher standard deviation. Private secondary schools outperform government and mission schools. The mean scores of private schools are consistently higher than both government and mission schools by a substantial margin, as are minimum and maximum scores.

Hierarchical regression analysis of the Year 12 examination results for all candidates from all schools for 2002-2008 period identified variables that had the greatest influence on academic outcome: gender of the candidate, the urban location of the school, and whether or not the school was a government senior college. These are the same factors that influenced achievement in 1995. There have been significant changes in the secondary school system with increased opportunities for students in district secondary schools. Participation has increased at all levels but analysis shows that while district secondary candidates are entering examinations in greater numbers, achievement at Year 12 still seems to be most readily available to those that are in urban schools. The system has expanded in size but the system appears to have remained structurally the same.

Achievement of a system characterised by equity?

The programme of reforms resulted in some beneficial changes but did not bring about the transformation of the patterns and structure of inequity. The system continues to advantage the same groups that it did prior to the reform programme. The current arrangements do not meet Rawls' measures of equity nor do they meet the ideals of utilitarian meritocracy that may be more acceptable (Pereira, 2006).

The dual-track pattern that existed in 1994, which resulted in greater access to the most advantaged secondary school track by students who attended urban-based government schools, continues to structure inequity. The pattern continues because key system-changing reforms were not actioned. These include the discontinuation of selection into the senior colleges and the discontinuation of reform in the Year 8 examination format and processes. This inequitable pattern also includes the reform of preferential school resourcing systems to provide operational resourcing that compensated for disadvantage. These practices are the core practices that maintain the inequities within the education system and remained substantially unchanged and unchallenged at the end of the 1995-2005 programme.

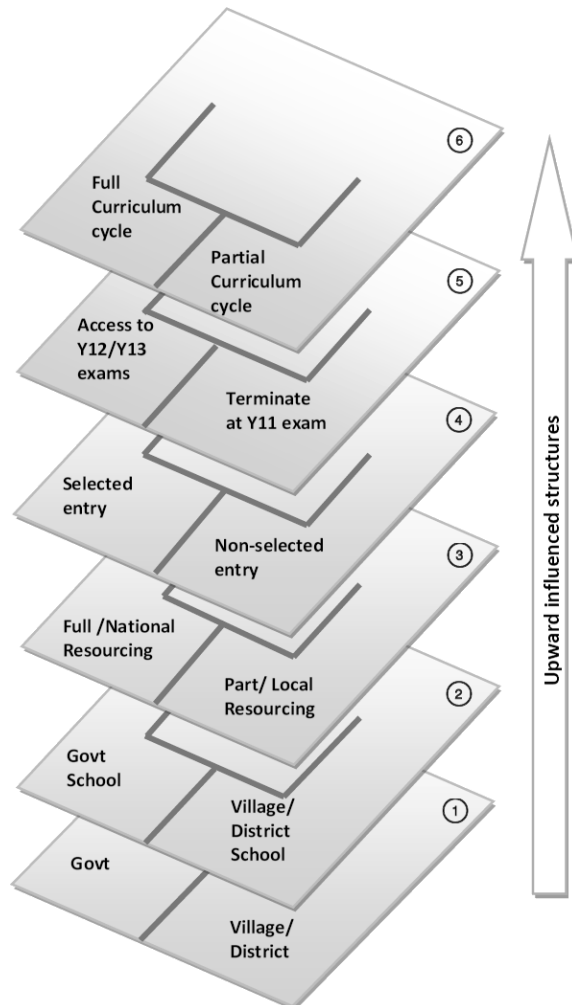
Why no change?

There is a genuine desire by the government, the community and the educators in Samoa to make the education system more equitable. However, the *habitus* – the widely accepted notions, beliefs and valuation of the education system within the

community – made it difficult to formulate a transformational, policy framework by all partners.

The historical development of the education system in Samoa has emphasised duality, as illustrated in Figure 1. The original schools were village-based pastors' schools. Higher-level schools were first established by the government on government land. Even though the district junior secondary schools were established, they were seen as the second-rate track. The government schools were provided with a better-quality curriculum and more resources, entry was by selection, the students completed the highest examinations and progressed to advanced standing in the community. This division is not superficial. It is an underlying division of resources and opportunity between government and village and is a constantly replicating duality at every level of the education system. It is characterised by differential resourcing, entry standards and access to curriculum, examinations and outcome. While superficial changes have been made the underlying duality continues to structure inequity.

Figure 1. Multi-layered dual structure of the education system



This structure is supported by the belief that the Year 8 examination is fair and that the selection into the senior colleges, particularly Samoa College, is meritorious with the rewards justified (Pereira, 2006). However, the evidence presented through this research shows that differences in achievement are not necessarily the result of individual merit but are rather the result of urban location, language competency and gender. They are the result of differential cultural capital.

The 1995-2005 policy framework was actually the second attempt at reform. The first was attempted in the mid-1980s. The 1981-1985 education development plan called for a two tiered secondary school system to replace the dual parallel track system of the senior colleges and junior district secondary schools, in addition to abolishing the Year 8 selection examination. All students would have attended upgraded Year 9-12 comprehensive district junior secondary schools. Selection for Years 13 and 14, to be provided at an upgraded Samoa College, was to be based on the results of Year 12 national exams (Giombi, 1986).

A number of groups, including past-pupil groups, teacher groups and community groups, protested against the proposed reforms. The protests coincided with a period of economic hardship, political volatility and social unrest including strikes, street demonstrations and six governments in the 1980's (Lawson, 1996). The new government needed to reduce the public unrest and this, along with criticisms of this radical model, resulted in the reforms being abandoned and the pre-reform structures being re-established.

The second, more moderate model was developed against the background of political unrest and protest. However, while the 1980s period of instability had a part to play in the rejection of the radical model and the adoption of a more moderate model, this study suggests that this process was based in the perceived acceptance of an appropriate pattern of secondary education. The underlying symbolism of the education structure and the values placed on that system by the community were important factors in shaping the selection of the policy options. The study also shows that the policy options not taken, combined with increasing social stratification has given the students from Apia's urban-based, English-language competent, professional environment an unfair advantage. The meritocracy is now a 'geotocracy' where the urban-located, dominant socio-economic groups define the standards for success.

Conclusion

The education system of Samoa is the product of the interaction of local community and international influences since colonial contact. The distribution of opportunity within the system is structured by the history and symbolism of the system. The system purports to favour merit but it actually favours the cultural capital of the urban, professional, English-competent groups. The data presented shows that students in urban schools, as a group, achieve at higher levels than students in district and rural schools and urban females achieve more highly than urban males. As a result the distribution of achievement is skewed to the urban students. This trend is well established and increasingly pronounced.

The study also shows that disparities of treatment continue with no change to the pattern of school resourcing which continues to advantage the already advantaged.

The reforms that have taken place have brought some benefit in terms of access, but achieving equity will involve reconfiguration of the fundamental arrangements for the distribution of opportunity and outcome. This involves questioning the underlying assumptions of the education system.

This study highlights the need for all partners involved in a reform process to understand that mindsets are an important influence on change; and, effort needs to be spent on clarifying and understanding the unstated distributive justice related assumptions, values and hopes of the partners involved. Practice can only change with a change in underlying mindsets.

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