Editorial: Teaching and Teacher Education in American Sāmoa

by Hunter McEwan

Two years ago, Don Young, who is presently the interim dean of the College of Education, suggested to me that it might be useful to devote some space in *Educational Perspectives* to the partnership between the College of Education and the American Sāmoa Department of Education. He felt that it was regrettable that few people in Hawai‘i, either at the college or at the university as a whole, knew much about it. He pointed out that the Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Project (TTTAP) represented one of the college’s most long-lived contracts and that its accomplishments deserved more exposure than they had hitherto received. When I discussed his recommendation with Peggy Haleck, the current director of TTTAP, a little less than two years ago, she immediately embraced the idea. It quickly became evident that the topic of teaching and teacher education in American Sāmoa deserved a much more extended treatment when she pointed out that a number of new and important reforms had recently been instituted in the TTTAP and that other measures were under way to address teacher preparation and professional development at the American Sāmoa Community College (ASCC) and American Sāmoa Department of Education (ASDOE). During a brief visit that I made to American Sāmoa in January 2005, Dr. Haleck and I were able to meet with Dr. Adele Satele-Galea‘i, the President of ASCC, and members of the ASDOE, who offered their support for the project.

Peggy Haleck and I agreed that it would be useful to assemble a number of papers, which we would submit, as a first step, to the 2005 annual meeting of the Pacific Circle Consortium in Sydney, Australia. Thus, earlier presentations of the papers by Peggy Haleck, James Kneubuhl, Steven Lin, William Greene, and Paul Tauilili were given on July 29, 2005 in the very grand setting of the lower house chamber of the New South Wales Parliament House—one of the conference locales. Since then, we have been able to assemble a number of other papers from contributors representing the voices of teachers and educators in American Sāmoa, and members of the faculty of the College of Education.

But first let me offer some background on the connection between the College of Education at the University of Hawai‘i and American Sāmoa. The college has played a large role for over 30 years in preparing teachers and educators in American Sāmoa. The connection may even extend as far back as 1961 when Dean Hubert V. Everly...
was part of a US congressional study mission to American Sāmoa led by Senators Oren E. Long of Hawai‘i and Ernest Gruening of Alaska. Everly (1962) reports in an article that summarizes the mission’s findings that teacher training began in American Sāmoa in 1922 as a post-eighth-grade class attached to the Poyer School. In 1931 it became a post-ninth-grade class, and in 1946 it became established as a high school with an elementary demonstration school attached. It was not until 1956 that teacher training emerged at the post-high-school level at the Feleti Memorial Teacher Training College, first as a one-year program and finally as a two-year program. The mission, however, reported that these arrangements were seriously inadequate to meet future needs. As Everly (1962, p. 16) reports, “With only a handful of students enrolled, the College is not likely to make an appreciable impact on the total problem.”

The principal aim of the mission, however, was to increase educational funding to American Sāmoa and “to remedy the effects of past neglect on a number of fronts” (Everly 1962, 17). This aim was most dramatically realized in 1964 when, with the help of Governor H. Rex Lee, an educational television system (ETV) was established to “improve instruction, enlarge educational opportunities for all the Samoan people, and upgrade the Samoan teachers in the schools and assist them in becoming qualified and competent in their special areas of education” (Bronson, 1964, p. 6). By 1970 the failure of ETV to deliver on these promises was increasingly evident and criticism began to mount (Southworth et al., 2004). Teachers were reduced to the role of television monitors; lessons were prepared with little attention to the needs of teachers and students; Samoan teachers were never involved in the planning of the system and the program was not evaluated until 1976 so weaknesses in the implementation of the system were not addressed.

The article by Peggy Haleck in this issue picks up where this narrative of the history of teacher education in American Sāmoa leaves off—with a description of Teacher Corp and the Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Project. Her article provides a detailed description of the new cohort program and shows how Samoan teachers have successfully adapted this collaborative approach to their own Samoan cultural practices. James Kneubuhl and Tupua Roy Fua describe recent developments at ASCC including efforts to encourage pre-service education majors from among its undergraduates, the creation of an early childhood education (ECE) program with a model ECE lab school, and future plans to establish a four-year program of teacher preparation at the community college. Steven Lin’s piece describes the contribution that the new Educational Resources Room at the ASCC library makes to the professional development of teachers. Donna Gurr offers an account of curricular and instructional reforms in the ASDOE.

In keeping with Educational Perspectives aim of providing a platform for teachers’ voices, three of the articles look at teaching and teacher education from the perspective of ASDOE teachers. Paul Tauiliili’s contribution, for example, describes the impact of the cohort program on classroom instruction, on the schools, and on the community from the vantage point of teachers. William Greene in collaboration with Siamaaua Ropeti, Lisa Vaivao Ino, Denise Ah-Sue, and Faleula Aoelu Sappa recount stories of their professional development journey from BEd students to graduate students in UH master’s program. Yuri Wellington, Denise Ah-Sue, Donna Vaitu’utu’u Achica-Talaeai, Liza Sauni, and Faleula Sappa discuss the implementation of critical literacy curricula and the impact that it had on teaching and learning.

While most of the articles in this issue adopt a descriptive posture, two of the contributors—Salusalumalo Hunkin-Finau and Kate Moran—take an advocacy stance and argue for changes to the present system. Hunkin-Finau counts the costs to American Sāmoa of linking educational policies and actions so closely to US thinking. She argues passionately that Samoans must take a more indigenous approach to education and educational reform. Kate Moran takes a close look at the efforts to place qualified teachers in special education classrooms. She recounts some of the formidable challenges facing schools and educators and points to some of the measures that will have to be taken to meet them. Dr. Moran also gets credit for the photographs in this issue, including the image on the front cover which so effectively symbolizes in one image the twin faces of American Sāmoa.

The portrait of Frank Brown is a tribute to a man who was devoted to Sāmoa and who devoted much of his career to working with Samoan students. I thank Michi Brown, Tony Picard, Salu Hunkin-Finau, and Peggy Haleck for their help in writing it. Thanks, too, to Byron Inouye for performing Photoshop artistry on a larger picture and extracting Frank’s image from it.

Editing this issue has been an interesting learning experience for me—one that has brought greater awareness of the immense challenges that face educators in American Sāmoa—particularly as it strives to maintain its unique culture identity and community values in the face of intense external pressure from the forces of globalization and Americanization. It has also been inspiring to learn that educators in Sāmoa are aware of the issues and that they are striving to address them in spite of the very great challenges. The articles in this issue, therefore, form an introduction to the work engaging educators in American Sāmoa and their efforts to bring about reforms that are both sensitive to its culture and responsive to the aspirations of its people.
REFERENCES

