

A culturally responsive, transnational middle grades teacher education program in American Samoa

Educators in American Samoa learn about teaching young adolescents through a transnational master's degree program.

Deborah K. Zuercher, Jon Yoshioka, Paul D. Deering, Katie Martin, Kezia Curry, Tara O'Neill, & Sheila W. Apisa

This article describes the development and implementation of a transnational middle level teacher education program, specifically based on the educative needs of young adolescent students and their teachers in American Samoa. For more than 30 years, the University of Hawai'i has partnered with the American Samoa Department of Education to provide undergraduate degrees in elementary education to a total of 647 graduates. While elementary education in American Samoa encompasses kindergarten through eighth grade, professional development needs specific to middle grades teachers have not been adequately addressed through these programs. In 2009, the University of Hawai'i at Manoa pioneered a graduate-level middle level teacher education program in American Samoa, the first program of its kind to focus on young adolescents' learning needs in this Pacific island territory. The 2011 Middle Level Master of Education degree (MLMED) cohort was the first group of inservice teachers ever to receive specialized middle grades teacher training in American Samoa.

Context

American Samoa is the center of Polynesia and is home to 65,000 people. Although modern ways have influenced the culture, the traditional Samoan way of life, centered on family and religion, is still predominant in the islands. On Flag Day, April 17, 2011, American Samoa celebrated

111 years of association with the United States. American Samoa has a unique political status as an "unorganized and unincorporated" United States Territory. As U.S. "nationals," American Samoans cannot vote in national elections in the United States and have no representation in the final approval of legislation by Congress (United States General Accounting Office, 1997, p. 9). American Samoan nationals enjoy the privilege of non-restrictive travel to and from the United States and receive the following protections under the law:

It shall be the policy of the Government of American Samoa to protect persons of Samoan ancestry against alienation of their lands and the destruction of the Samoans' way of life and language, contrary to their best interests. Such legislation as may be necessary may be enacted to protect the lands, customs, culture, and traditional Samoan family organization of persons of Samoan ancestry. (Government of American Samoa, 1966, Article 1, Sec. 3)

The American Samoan education system has been influenced by the United States and tied to an American philosophy of education for more than 100 years. While missionaries began working in American Samoa in 1830, the first public school was established there in 1904, with U.S. Naval wives and officers serving as teachers (Sutherland, 1941). The first students to attend the American public schools were children of the Navy officers and "part-Samoan children" (Allen, 1962, p. 176).

This article reflects the following *This We Believe* characteristics: Value Young Adolescents, Committed Leaders, Professional Development

The school system in American Samoa evolved through the 20th century and was influenced over the years by the U.S. Navy, the Barstow Foundation for American Samoa, and the U.S. Department of the Interior (see, e.g., Allen, 1962; Pirie, 1976; Reid, 1986; Schramm, Nelson, & Betham, 1981; Sutherland, 1941).

American Samoa's young adolescents at risk

Young adolescents in American Samoa can be labeled “at risk” in terms of academic performance in school and risk behaviors. On the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 87% of American Samoan eighth graders in public schools scored at or below a “basic” level in reading (Jerry & Lutkus, 2003), and assessments of American Samoan eighth graders in mathematics and science indicated that 93% and 95% of these students, respectively, lacked basic skills in these subjects (Hunkin-Finau, 2006). To put these results in perspective, 26% of 8th graders nationwide scored at or below “basic” level in reading. Moreover, American Samoa had the largest percentage of eighth graders at or below a basic level in reading, followed by the District of Columbia (52%), the U.S. Virgin Islands (51%), and Guam (50%) (Jerry & Lutkus, 2003).

American Samoan youth are at equal or greater risk than their mainland U.S. peers for engaging in 19 of 22 dangerous sexual, violent, and substance abuse behaviors tracked by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For example, American Samoan youth are more likely to use cigarettes (24.2% vs. 20.0%), to have ridden with a drunk driver (37.6% vs. 29.1%), or to have been in a physical fight (54.4% vs. 35.5%), and they are nearly three times as likely to have attempted suicide (19.6% vs. 6.9%) or to have had forced sexual intercourse (22.8% vs. 7.8%) (CDC, 2007).

The combination of low academic performance and high youth risk behavior statistics confirms the urgency for specialized middle grades teacher training in American Samoa. As we describe the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa MLMED program in the next section, it should be noted that many courses—particularly courses in adolescent development and health—were specifically tailored to empower American Samoan teachers to confront these alarming youth risk behaviors in their classrooms.



Dr. Chris Sorensen (center), Dean of College of Education at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, participates in a traditional Samoa farewell dance.
photo provided by Deborah K. Zuercher

The Middle Level Master’s in Education (MLMED) program in American Samoa

Background of the MLMED in American Samoa

In 1979, the American Samoa Department of Education (ASDOE) awarded the University of Hawai‘i the first contract to offer a four-year bachelor of education degree in partnership with American Samoa Community College. The award was funded through a Teacher Corps program grant that has enabled the ASDOE to select, on a year-to-year basis, the university teacher education program that will receive this contract. Beginning in 1981, this teacher education program has been designed to enable American Samoan teachers to continue teaching in American Samoan classrooms and complete university coursework in the evenings after school, as all of the teacher candidates are inservice, not preservice, teachers. This inservice teacher education program design is very time intensive for the teacher candidates, but it is necessary for American Samoan teachers to teach while pursuing their degrees because of the certified teacher shortage throughout the Pacific region. Consequently, the ASDOE has “found this teacher

training program model highly appropriate for their teachers' needs and work schedule" (Reid, 1986, p. 36).

From its early years, the program has been well received in American Samoa. In its 1983 annual report, the ASDOE praised the partnership with University of Hawai'i:

The teacher, together with the school, represents to the community the most visible symbols of the Department of Education. It is recognized that the success of any educational program, no matter how well intentioned or researched, ultimately depends on how well that program is received and utilized by the classroom teacher. It is primarily for this reason that the Department embarked on its most ambitious and extensive staff development program to date. With the assistance of the American Samoa Community College, and the University of Hawai'i ... the teachers, and administrators of American Samoa are afforded the opportunity to obtain quality higher education training, enabling them to address with more confidence the specific educational needs and concerns of our public school children. The program is proving to be highly successful, with many teachers earning undergraduate or post-graduate degrees. (ASDOE, 1983, p. 7)

From its beginnings in 1979, the grant-funded teacher education partnership involving the University of Hawai'i, American Samoa Community College, and the ASDOE has had a profound influence on teachers and teaching in American Samoa.

The MLMED program of study

The MLMED program is aligned with the University of Hawai'i at Manoa *Professional Standards for Teachers of Early Adolescents* (see Figure 1) that call for candidates to have knowledge of, competence with, and inquiry into (a) the nature of early adolescence and principles of middle level education; (b) subject area content and pedagogy; (c) developmentally appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment for diverse learners; (d) communication, counseling, and group dynamics strategies; and (e) professionalism and leadership (Deering & Port, 1995). These standards were developed from the Association for Middle Level Education Standards on Middle Level Teacher Preparation (see <http://www.amle.org/ProfessionalPreparation/AMLEStandards/tabid/374/Default.aspx>) as well as other key middle grades texts.

The program spans two years and three summers, thus the American Samoa cohort began the program in the summer of 2009 and completed it at the end of the summer of 2011. The courses and course sequence (see Figure 2) mirror the program for candidates who complete the degree at University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Courses are aligned with the University of Hawai'i MLMED standards (see Figure 1) and address the following thematic questions:

- Who are young adolescents? What do they need at school, at home, in the community?
- How do I address the needs of culturally diverse learners?
- What is educational research? What does it tell us about early adolescents and education?
- What else do I need to further my professional development?
- What is going on with young adolescents in our school and community? How can we find out?
- How can we help adolescents use technology effectively and ethically for learning and sharing?
- What are current trends in adolescent education? How can we exercise leadership in the profession?

Candidates complete a total of 31 graduate level course credits and meet the same standards for degree completion as candidates in Hawai'i, though courses are conducted online to make them easily accessible to full-time educators in American Samoa.

Distance delivery

The University of Hawai'i MLMED faculty resisted distance learning until technology advanced to the point at which they could practice in the university classroom what they were teaching their students to do in middle grades classrooms. The faculty embraces the adage: "If you don't model what you teach, you end up teaching something else." Elluminate! and Blackboard technologies now enable teacher educators to model interactive, constructivist teaching strategies. For instance, instructors can vary small- and whole-group discussions in breakout rooms, engage candidates in WebQuests, poll class participants, facilitate collaborative group PowerPoint presentations, use educational gaming, and provide audio-video demonstrations. The transnational courses are delivered synchronously via Elluminate!, so learning strategies and content

Figure 1 University of Hawai'i at Manoa Professional Standards for Teachers of Early Adolescents

| Professional Standards for Educators of Early Adolescents* | |
|--|---|
| The following knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and actions characterize exemplary leaders in the education of early adolescents, and are the standards upon which the MLMED is based. | |
| 1. | <p>Thorough knowledge and acceptance of, and inquiry into, the nature and needs of early adolescents in the a) biological, b) social/emotional, and c) cognitive/ psychological realms.</p> <p><i>Subsumed here is an understanding of the physical, emotional, intellectual and moral development (including health and sexuality) of young adolescents, and awareness of small and large scale processes by which this development can be nurtured. These processes would involve school, home and community contexts, and informal and institutional settings.</i></p> |
| 2. | <p>Sufficient content preparation to a) lead in-depth study in major subject area(s) and b) make well-founded linkages to other academic and exploratory areas.</p> <p><i>Implicit is a well-rounded education in the liberal arts with some of the breadth of an elementary generalist, some of the depth of a secondary specialist, and a sound intellectual capacity to understand and convey the interrelatedness of varied subject disciplines.</i></p> |
| 3. | <p>Ability to a) design, implement, and assess developmentally-appropriate curriculum and pedagogy that emphasizes holistic learning, exploration, interdisciplinary organization, and active, successful learning for b) students with diverse interests, abilities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.</p> <p><i>Appropriate curriculum and pedagogy would include, but not be limited to, teaching of reading, writing, speaking and listening in authentic contexts; team planning and teaching; individualized instruction; cooperative/collaborative learning; basic skills and enrichment learning; effective use of educational technology; teaching of skills and attitudes for lifelong learning; cross-age grouping; flexible scheduling; service and apprenticeship learning. Assessment should include a broad range of formative and summative, teacher-designed and standardized, authentic and decontextualized, and student and parent measures. Emphasis must be placed on recognizing and addressing the diversity within and across various subgroups of students and families.</i></p> |
| 4. | <p>Able to effectively apply sound a) communication, b) management, and c) counseling skills to address the highly demanding and diverse needs of early adolescents in instructional and guidance capacities, to develop communities of learning, and to d) collaborate effectively with students, parents, community members and colleagues.</p> <p><i>Teachers should be committed to and capable of serving as close, positive role models for students; facilitators of personal growth and development of self-esteem; leaders of student activities; and able to develop and maintain positive intellectual, social and emotional environments in the classroom and school. They should be able to apply effective human relations skills in a variety of contexts including with individuals, small groups and large groups; school and community settings; and faculty teams.</i></p> |
| 5. | <p>A commitment to being outstanding professional middle level educators, including: a) exercising leadership in instruction and schooling; b) constantly examining and improving upon one's work; c) able to interpret and critique a variety of research methodologies, and capable of utilizing at least one.</p> <p><i>Implicit in middle level philosophy and in current trends toward shared school governance is a spirit of collaboration and inclusiveness. Educators should be prepared and committed to collaborate with all other stake-holders in promoting positive development for early adolescents. They should also be prepared and committed to serving as leaders, spokespersons and advocates in the rapidly developing field of middle level education in order to steer the field on a course of continued development and reflection.</i></p> |

*1995/Revised 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005; 2007 – Developed by the Hawai'i School-University Partnership Implementation Task Force for Middle Level Teacher Education; Paul D. Deering & Antonette Port, Co-Chairs. Drawn from: Alexander & McEwin, 1988; Burnkrant, 1991; Butler, Davies & Dickinson, 1991; Center for Early Adolescence, 1994; Irvin, 1992; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Johnston & Markle, 1986; Lawton, 1993; Mergandoller, 1993; Middle Grades Teacher Education Task Force, 1991; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1993; NMSA, 1982, 1991a, 1991b; Scales, 1993, Stevenson, 1998.

knowledge are taught by example. The university also uses a collaborative document sharing system called Laulima for candidates to access online text materials as well as Web sites, Elluminate! class recordings, blogs, and forum postings.

Building community

While much of the course content is delivered online, the success of the program depends heavily on personal relationships and community. Communal structures such as the village and family are strong Samoan cultural

Figure 2 MLMED¹ schedule and course sequence

| Semester | Theme/Course(s) | Targeted Standards (see Figure 1) |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Summer-1 | Who are early adolescents? What do they need at school, home, in the community? EDCS-640M: Seminar in Interdisciplinary Curriculum—Focus on Early Adolescent Development (3 credits) | 1 |
| | EDCS-622D: School Curriculum—Middle Level (3 credits) | 2,3 |
| Fall-1 Exploratory Semester | How do I address the needs of culturally diverse learners? EDCS-630: Cultural Diversity and Education (3 credits) | 3 |
| | EDCS-642: Seminar (1 credit) ² | All, especially diversity |
| Spring-1 | What is educational research? What does it tell us about early adolescents and education? EDCS-606: Introduction to Research in Curriculum (3 credits) | 1,5 |
| | EDCS-642: Seminar (1 credit) | All, especially diversity |
| Summer-2 Exploratory Semester | What else do I (participant) need to further my professional development? <i>Variety of courses focused on content and pedagogy in language arts/ social studies, science/math, and health/writing.</i> | Primarily 2, plus others |
| Fall-2 | What is going on with early adolescents around our school and community? How can we find out? EDCS-632: Qualitative Research Methods (3 credits) | 1,3,4,5 |
| | EDCS-642: Seminar (1 credit) | All, especially diversity |
| Spring-2 Exploratory Semester | How can we help adolescents use technology effectively and ethically for learning and sharing? EDCS-480: Issues in Computer Education (3 credits) | 1,3,4 |
| | EDCS-642: Seminar (1 credit) | All, especially diversity |
| Spring 2 / Summer-3 | Portfolio Presentation | All |
| Summer-3 | What are current trends in adolescent education? How can we exercise leadership in the profession? EDCS-667D: Seminar in Curriculum—Middle Level (3 credits) | 5 |
| August | GRADUATE! | 6 ³ |
| 2 Years + 3 Summers | ←———— Total —————→ (31 credits) | |

Notes
 1) MLMED = Master of Education Degree in Curriculum Studies with a Middle Level Emphasis Program
 2) Seminar = Seminar in Interdisciplinary, Multicultural, Middle Level Education – meets once monthly.
 3) Standard 6 = Student-created “standard” calling for celebration!

values. Samoan author Sia Figiel (1999) captured the communal essence of Samoan society in the novel *Where We Once Belonged*:

“I” does not exist.

I am not.

My self belongs not to me because “I” does not exist.

“I” is always “we.”

Is a part of the ‘aiga,

A part of the Au a teine,

A part of the Aufaipese,

A part of the Autalavou,

A part of the Aoga a le Faifeau,

A part of the Aoga Aso Sa,

A part of the Church. A part of the nu’u.

A part of Samoa. (p. 235)

University of Hawai‘i program administrators learned over the years that grouping undergraduate candidates into a cohort greatly enhanced candidate retention rates and course attendance in American Samoa. Consequently, since 1994, undergraduate candidates have been admitted into the teacher education program as a cohort. The graduate MLMED program has always organized candidates in Hawai‘i into cohorts for the same reasons, and the practice was employed with the program in American Samoa.

Ongoing team-building activities start with a face-to-face meet and greet and continue throughout the year through celebrations of birthdays, births, and other events at monthly seminars. These experiences help to establish a trusting, collegial, family-like community, or *aiga*. The cohort model of the MLMED program provides a meaningful communal structure that complements Samoan culture. American Samoan teacher cohorts each design a customized uniform unique to that group, as is the custom in a Samoan village, business, *aiga* (family), or church community. Uniforms often bear the cohort theme or logo, such as “On a Journey” or “Success is our Quest.” “Believe and Achieve” was the theme chosen by the first MLMED cohort in American Samoa.

Home bases, which are smaller groupings of students from the cohort assigned to a single faculty advisor, help to build the community and support networks needed for students to guide one another through the MLMED program and inevitable family and life events. In part because of the strong support network, 24 of 25 candidates (96%) completed the MLMED program as a cohort during the fall of 2011 semester, with one candidate requiring an extra semester to complete the program due to family obligations.

The American Samoa teachers place a high value on the sociocultural-constructivist philosophy of the program, which can be understood, in part, through the concept “talk story.” Throughout the Pacific islands, talk story is the expression used to describe how knowledge is constructed and shared among people as they exchange stories, folktales, legends, tattoo, dance, and song. The MLMED program maintained this tradition to the extent that the American Samoa cohort was intentionally designed to be a place where members could “bring their own unique cultural perspectives and past educative experiences to the learning process” (Dias, Eick, & Brantley-Dias, 2010, p. 57).



Graduate candidates support each other in the Lupelele homebase group. Pictured are: (back row, left to right) William Thompson, Fanapovi Tanielu, and Taotasi Pati Sala; and (front row, left to right) Vinnie Siofago Afoa and Makerita Lam Yuen. photo provided by Deborah K. Zuercher

Assessment and evaluation

The culminating assessment for the MLMED program is a candidate portfolio that is aligned with the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa *Professional Standards for Teachers of Early Adolescents* (see Figure 1). In the portfolio, candidates merge educational theory with their classroom practice by selecting examples from their classroom teaching to document their proficiency with each of the standards and by citing current educational research that supports the standards in their written narratives.

The program is continuously monitored through a combination of online and on-site meetings. Indigenous, local, home-base advisors meet online with University of Hawai‘i staff monthly to share in all aspects of decision-making regarding program operations and help gather participants’ perspectives on the cohort program (Tauiliili, 2006). Tri-annual visits to American Samoa from University of Hawai‘i at Manoa representatives occur for additional face-to-face meetings with ASDOE administrators.



Lita Marie Timoteo (red flower) and Josephine Paulo (white flower) were graduate candidates in the Samoa MLMED Cohort. Lita was named Territorial Teacher of the Year, the highest teaching award in American Samoa. photo provided by Deborah K. Zuercher.

Celebrating success

The American Samoa Department of Education recognizes teaching excellence by identifying school, district, and territory teachers of the year. The 2011 Territorial Teacher of the Year, the highest teaching recognition in American Samoa, was given to MLMED graduate Lita Timoteo. During the MLMED graduation ceremony, local school leaders from the MLMED cohort were also recognized for (a) receiving school/district teacher of the year titles, (b) administrative promotions, (c) outstanding community service, (d) passing Praxis I and II tests, (e) department and grade level committee headship, (f) extra-curricular academic and athletic

coaching, and (g) acts of heroism during the tsunami. It was apparent that participation in the MLMED program empowered local teacher leaders. Following the graduation, the governor of American Samoa sent a letter to University of Hawai‘i to express his support of the MLMED professional development program.

Issues, adaptations, and lessons learned

In the poem “Regulators,” John Enright (n.d.) wrote about importing regulations from the mainland to American Samoa.

When you’ve lived awhile within the sound
Of surf and mosquitoes and swirls of children
Between blindingly green ridges of jungle
Emitting birds and bird sounds and moving
Through the spectrums of saffron and shadow
And squall-closing grays, when the
News become who is pregnant by whom
And why who is leaving the island
Then come to me and talk about your
Air-conditioned plans for the regulation of
Whatever it is you’ve been brought here
To set straight by mainland standards
We’ll set up a timeline that will most
Closely resemble a slowly drifting cloud.

Life on American Samoa is characterized by an island culture that seems to operate like a slowly drifting cloud. The University of Hawai‘i, on the other hand, follows a more Western path that involves a system of checks and balances for processing all paperwork to ensure ethical guidelines and correct procedures are followed in a timely and efficient manner. In addition, teacher candidates from Hawai‘i generally have greater access to technology, higher levels of proficiency in using technology, and more reliable Internet access than their counterparts in American Samoa. Consequently, challenges and issues sometimes arise that require exceptions to university procedures, modifications to the MLMED program, or changes in instructional practices. In this section, we describe some of these challenges and issues as well as lessons we have learned from addressing them.

Readiness gaps

American Samoan candidates start the MLMED program at a different academic and technological level than Hawai‘ian or mainland candidates. To the

extent possible, the university makes adjustments in the delivery of the program when participants voice concerns such as cultural time management pressures and technological limitations. For the 2009 American Samoa cohort, courses were held weekly on Monday evenings throughout the program, and seminars occurred once per month on Wednesdays to help busy graduate

Life on American Samoa is characterized by an island culture that seems to operate like a slowly drifting cloud.

candidates organize their demanding schedules. To help American Samoan candidates learn and adapt to the distant technology platforms, the University of Hawai‘i Instructional Technology Department created online modules, and faculty provided monthly demonstrations and tutorial sessions.

Maintaining accountability and communication in an online environment

Online course attendance is much greater when candidates in American Samoa meet together in a classroom and the online Elluminate! class is projected for the group. When the University of Hawai‘i began offering online courses, graduate candidates were simply given the Elluminate! link and told to independently log into the classes from their home, school, or business site. Class attendance rates dropped. This may have been due to unreliable Internet access, or it may have been because candidates face real pressures to perform family and community duties and may choose to miss class to fulfill these duties when they are not held accountable to log into class with a group of their colleagues.

The use of both synchronous communication (when everyone is online together at the same time) and asynchronous communication (when individuals get online at their own convenience) allows all parties to remain in close contact with one another and helps to foster the relationships between the students and instructor, despite the physical distance that separates them. This is not to say, however, that one can

immediately switch from face-to-face to totally online classes. As previously mentioned, if students are put in an online class and left to their own devices, they may choose to miss class due to pressures from family and community. Having the ability to videoconference through Elluminate! lessens the likelihood of this possibility occurring because it makes each person accountable for being in class on time. Face-to-face meetings, however, are also essential because they help build a sense of community between the teacher and the students. The authors wholeheartedly agree with Ho and Burniske (2005), who recommend a “gentle transition” from a face-to-face community before building an online community, because “without honoring the local community, and making time for its renewal on a regular basis, the online community would be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain” (p. 29).

Certification and exam issues

Due to the shortage of highly qualified teachers in American Samoa, all teacher candidates are teaching full time as emergency-hire teachers, whereas all teachers at the Hawai‘i campus are preservice teachers. This requires significant changes in the way field placements, mentor teacher partnerships, and instructor field supervision are structured in American Samoa. Instructors in American Samoa increase the number and frequency of field observations, since candidates are teaching full time without mentor teachers.

Another difference involves certification requirements—while candidates in Hawai‘i complete the State of Hawai‘i licensure requirements, candidates in American Samoa work toward fulfilling ASDOE certification requirements. To become a certified teacher in American Samoa, candidates must pass the Praxis I Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) and hold a B.Ed. degree. However, because all teacher candidates in American Samoa are English language learners (ELLs) and are schooled in an isolated Pacific island milieu, many struggle to pass the standardized PPST.

The Praxis I PPST is an entrance requirement at the University of Hawai‘i College of Education, but it is waived as an entrance requirement in American Samoa so that University of Hawai‘i instructors can help prepare teacher candidates for the exam during the program. To prepare ELL candidates for the Praxis exams, faculty members offer a one-credit Praxis prep course each semester in American Samoa.

Administrative challenges and issues

Communicating administrative procedures (e.g., enrollment, registration) in a traditional university setting can be difficult, but these difficulties may be magnified in a transnational university degree program. Registration has been especially problematic for the MLMED program in American Samoa, largely due to the physical distance—approximately 2,500 miles—between the teacher candidates and the university’s registration offices. One solution has been to provide candidates with access to Web sites with clear directions and flowcharts of what they need to do to register, along with contact information for people who can answer questions that arise. Offering such resources is a good start, however we have experienced problems even when the instructions and procedures have been clearly explained several times. To improve the process, instructors have used Elluminate! to take an entire cohort of students through the procedure at the same time, step by step. This option allows instructors to present visual examples of what needs to be done, and the students can ask questions about pressing issues in real time. Using the on-island home-base advisor to answer questions after the Elluminate! session has been another way to provide the students with an additional level of support.

Communication issues also exist at the administrative level. While miscommunication can occur whether parties are online or face-to-face, it is both quicker and easier to communicate clearly if parties are face-to-face and in person. The tri-annual visits by University of Hawai‘i at Manoa representatives are a critical link that helps to keep clear lines of communication open. However, problems and issues do occur as, for example, in the development of the budgets and contracts for the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa and ASDOE partnership. Budget and contract drafts could be drafted and revised jointly using a tool such as Google Docs, but due to the sensitive nature of the material, the medium would need to be secure. Gathering signatures in digital form, or even scanned as PDFs would decrease the time spent routing documents from one office to another and alleviate the need for repetitive face-to-face contact. Hogan and Kedrayate (2010) support this view, stating, “multi-signed pieces of paper need to give way to online services to serve new educational markets” (p. 3). When voice communication or video is necessary, a program like Skype can facilitate communication between sites.

Language and culture issues

English is the language of instruction in American Samoa public schools and university courses, and there is growing concern that the Samoan language and cultural arts will be lost if Samoan language and culture is not a part of teacher education. Feleti (2009) has documented that Samoan writing and grammar skills have declined among American Samoa Community College students. Hunkin-Finau (2010) argued, “For teaching to be meaningful to students who do not speak English as a native language, local education systems must take into consideration the patterns of learning and teaching, which are harmonious with indigenous ways” (p. 27). A way to achieve this aim is to implement dual-language instruction policies and contextualized learning strategies for American Samoa (Hunkin-Finau, 2010). Generally, Samoans perceive the transnational university as supplying 21st century knowledge—including teaching the dominant business language (English), technology, and team problem-solving skills—to remote regions. This is true, yet the University of Hawai‘i is also looking for opportunities to integrate Samoan language and culture in course requirements, as it has done with both dominant U.S. culture and indigenous Hawai‘ian culture.

Conclusion

Distance learning technology has allowed middle level faculty at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa to bridge the geographical gap between Hawai‘i and American Samoa to bring high-quality middle grades teacher education and professional development to the islands. Yet, there is still much to do. The transnational MLMED program involves a stream of ever-emergent issues that need to be addressed to sustain an effective program in American Samoa. Some of the main challenges to be overcome include improving the technology infrastructure in American Samoa and gradually building the candidates’ levels of expertise in using technology. As with anything new, making the switch to online learning will take time, but the program has been very well received by the teacher candidates and education officials in American Samoa. It is important to note that, while the MLMED program is meeting a specific, immediate need for middle grades teacher education and professional development in American Samoa, it is also supporting more general efforts by the

ASDOE to increase collaborative decision-making and broaden stakeholder involvement (Gurr, 2005). Perhaps the most significant outcome of the program has been the empowerment of American Samoan middle grades teachers. As the first cohort completed the program in 2011, a petition bearing more than 70 names of American Samoan teacher candidates requesting another MLMED online program in Samoa was submitted to the ASDOE. Perhaps teacher empowerment is contagious.

References

- Allen, R. R. (1962). *Developing a teacher education program at the Church College of Hawaii for students from American Samoa, Western Samoa and Tonga*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). University of Utah, Salt Lake City.
- Government of American Samoa. (1966). *Revised constitution of American Samoa*. Retrieved from: <http://www.asbar.org/Newcode/rcas.htm>
- American Samoa Department of Education. (1983). *Annual report*. Pago Pago, American Samoa: Author.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance [Data file]. Available from <ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/data/yrbs/2007/yrbs07.sav>
- Deering, P. D., & Port, A. (1995). *Master of education degree in secondary education with a middle level education emphasis, University of Hawai'i-Manoa*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i-Manoa and the Hawai'i School University Partnership.
- Dias, M., Eick, C., & Brantley-Dias, L. (2010). Practicing what we teach: A self-study in implementing an inquiry-based curriculum in a middle grades classroom. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, 22, 53–78.
- Enright, J. (n.d.) John Enright's poetry and prose. Retrieved from http://members.tripod.com/~Siu_Leo_o_Samoa/index-2.html
- Feleti, E. F. (2009). *Strengths and weaknesses of Samoan grammar*. (Unpublished Master's Plan B paper). University of Hawai'i, Manoa.
- Figiel, S. (1999). *Where we once belonged*. New York, NY: Kaya Press.
- Gurr, D. (2005). Meeting the challenges of public education in American Samoa: A collaborative approach. *Educational Perspectives*, 39(1), 24–28.
- Ho, C. P., & Burniske, R. W. (2005). The evolution of a hybrid classroom: Introducing online learning to educators in American Samoa. *TechTrends*, 49(1), 24–29.
- Hogan, R., & Kedrayate, A. (2010, March). *E-learning: A survival strategy for developing countries*. Paper presented at the Eleventh Annual Conference of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Retrieved from <http://sta.uwi.edu/conferences/2009/salises/documents/r.Hogan.pdf>
- Hunkin-Finau, S. (2006). An indigenous approach to teacher preparation for American Samoa. *Educational Perspective*, 39(1), 47–52.
- Hunkin-Finau, S. (2010). NCLB and education in the Pacific: A dire need for a balanced perspective ... What do we do now? *Pacific Resources for Education and Learning Research into Practice*, 25–32.
- Jerry, L., & Lutkus, A. (2003). *The nation's report card: State reading 2002, Report for American Samoa*, (Report No. NCES 2003–526 AS. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2002/2003526AS.pdf>
- Pirie, P. (1976). The demographic effects of local socio-economic change on small populations: A Samoan example. In L. Kisinki & J. Webb (Eds.), *Populations at microscale* (pp. 79–92). Hamilton, NZ: New Zealand Geographical Society.
- Reid, S. H. (1986). *Educator's perceptions of the teacher education program goals and the educational needs of the territory of American Samoa*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Hawai'i, Manoa.
- Schramm, W., Nelson, L., & Betham, M. (1981). *Bold experiment: The story of educational television in American Samoa*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sutherland, M. N. (1941). *A study of teacher training in American Samoa*. (Unpublished master thesis). University of Hawai'i, Manoa.
- Tauiliili, P. (2006). The cohort program in American Samoa: A teacher's perspective. *Educational Perspectives: Journal of the College of Education/University of Hawai'i at Manoa*, 39(1), 14–17.
- United States General Accounting Office. (1997). General accounting report to the Chairman Committee on Resources, House of Representatives. *United States insular areas: Applications of the U.S. constitution*. Washington, DC: Author.

Deborah K. Zuercher is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. E-mail: zuercher@hawaii.edu

Jon Yoshioka is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. E-mail: joyoshi@hawaii.edu

Paul D. Deering is a professor in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. E-mail: deering@hawaii.edu

Katie Martin is a curriculum director with the Hawai'i Department of Education. E-mail: ktmartin06@yahoo.com

Kezia Curry is a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. E-mail: currykm@hawaii.edu

Tara O'Neill is an assistant professor at the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. E-mail: toneill@hawaii.edu

Sheila W. Apisa is a faculty member in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. E-mail: swapisa@aol.com

Copyright of Middle School Journal is the property of Association for Middle Level Education and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.