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Bold Experiment

THE STORY OF EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION IN AMERICAN SAMOA

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THIS BOOK *is dedicated to the Samoans and the American mainlanders who worked so hard and so unselfishly to upgrade education in American Samoa with this Bold Experiment in the use of school television*

Preface

EVENTS in a far-off corner of the world sometimes turn out to have wide-ranging significance. Such was the case with the coming of television to a remote corner of the South Pacific on October 4, 1964. Introduced in American Samoa as the central feature of a crash program designed to modernize and rapidly upgrade an entire educational system, television soon took on a significance of its own, one that reached far beyond the classroom and also beyond the shores of this chain of tiny islands. For the action represented a historic first in the use of educational technology on such a broad scale.

Because of the significance to education everywhere of Samoa's Bold Experiment, it immediately became the center of worldwide attention, not just in education circles, but also in national planning offices and in "development" efforts in many countries. During the course of those early years, the project was visited by individuals and teams from dozens of countries. Their reports, based mostly on anecdotal evidence and personal observation, probably exceeded everything that had ever been written about Samoa up until then.

The authors of this book contributed their share to that volume of material. In so doing, however, they became convinced of the need for a thorough, carefully documented, longitudinal appraisal of the results of the Samoan experience. This book is the result. We hope that it will be read in the spirit in which it was written—not as an attempt to assess success or failure, but rather as an attempt to cast some light on the significance of developments and the lessons to be learned from them.

We owe much to many individuals and organizations. It is not possible to recognize all of them, but we would like to express our special thanks to the students, teachers, and staff of the schools of American Samoa who participated in the early stages of the project. Without their idealism, dedication, and hard work, often under the most difficult of circumstances, Samoan schools today might be little improved over those of 1964.

More generally, we owe a debt of gratitude to all members of the school system, past and present, who were honest and open about their experiences and willing to share with us freely and fully their observations and records. We could not have asked for more helpful or more responsible cooperation. In particular, we would like to thank Chief Nikolao Pula, for nearly 40 years a member of the Samoan school system and its first Samoan director of education; Roy and Milly Cobb, two of the early pioneers in bringing television to the classrooms of Samoa; and Milton deMello, the last U.S. director of education.

One of the most important contributions to this book was made by Richard Baldauf, whose early studies (for a Ph.D. degree at the University of Hawaii) provided important benchmarks for comparisons of changes in Samoan attitudes and values. We are also grateful to Dean Jamison of the World Bank, for reading the chapter on costs and for his comments thereon.

The cooperation and helpfulness of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, and its president, James Fellows, also deserves special mention. The NAEB gave us unrestricted access to all its files and records, and President Fellows was unusually helpful in tracking down former project participants who could provide information and answers to complex questions. Additionally, no book of this kind would be complete without mentioning the encouragement and unhesitating support given us by former Governor H. Rex Lee, a dedicated public servant whose desire to do something to redress years of American neglect in Samoa led to what was then—and remains today—a bold, innovative experiment in education.

We also acknowledge with gratitude the thorough and com-

prehensive review of the manuscript, and the many contributions, by our editor at the Stanford University Press, Barbara Mnookin. Stanford University and the East-West Center contributed much of the time of two of the authors. The contributions of UNESCO and the International Institute of Educational Planning, which commissioned some of the early studies that provided data for this book are also acknowledged.

Finally, this book would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of the Ford and Markle foundations and the Government of American Samoa, whose grants helped make possible much of the research.

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The Project and Its Setting

TELEVISION came to American Samoa on Sunday afternoon, October 4, 1964. It was the first time a developing region set out to use that medium in an all-out attempt to modernize an educational system. Consequently, it was a historic day not only for a group of small islands deep in the South Pacific, but also for many other countries looking to modern technology to speed economic and social development.

In 1964 educational television looked like an idea whose time had come. Economically advanced nations had already begun to make major use of it. As early as 1956 all the public schools of Washington County, Maryland, had been connected by closed-circuit, and some 21,000 students were receiving daily televised instruction from studios in Hagerstown. An airplane was flying lazy circles over the American midwest, broadcasting recorded television lessons to schools in six states that wanted to supplement their own teaching. The Chicago junior college was broadcasting many of its courses so that viewers could do most of the required work for a degree by studying at home. Italy was using television to teach illiterates how to read and write and to bring the classroom to parts of the country where schools were nonexistent or inadequate. Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, Japan, and other affluent countries were all using television in one way or another to supplement instruction.

Developing countries also were experimenting with television. Colombia was beginning to offer courses over its national net-

work. India was broadcasting supplementary courses to schools within reach of the country's only television transmitter in Delhi. And only a few weeks after Samoa's project got under way, the Republic of Niger, in Central Africa, launched a major ETV experiment of its own. The Niger experiment, conducted under French auspices, was intended to demonstrate—using relatively untrained monitors rather than certified teachers in the classroom and highly skilled educators and broadcasters in the studio—an alternative to the country's traditional system of education.

But in the midst of all this interest and activity, the Samoa project was unique. It was like Hagerstown in the sense that it was intended to carry the main load of instruction, rather than to supplement it. But unlike the Hagerstown operation, the Samoa project was not able to draw on the services of teachers who were well trained and could play a full part in designing the courses to be broadcast. Few of the Samoan teachers had gone beyond high school or teaching certificates, and they were accustomed to teaching in one-room native *fales*—huts with no interior or exterior walls—where the pupils sat on the ground and chanted back the words or statements their teacher gave them to learn. In this respect, Samoa was more like Niger, but in another, important respect it was quite different. The project in Niger moved very slowly and carefully. For several years it was restricted to a few classrooms and a few hundred students. Programs were carefully crafted and pretested; instruction began with the youngest students and progressed only one grade a year so that television did not reach the last level of primary school for five years. Not until the 1970's, by which time most of the French experts had been withdrawn, did Niger take steps to extend television beyond the few experimental classrooms to other schools in its national system.

No such slow and cautious beginnings in American Samoa! "There was no time for waiting, no time for armchair patience—there had been too much of that for sixty years," the governor of American Samoa said in 1965, looking back on the introduction

of television (Kaser 1965). In part his statement reflects the sense of guilt the U.S. government felt in the early 1960's over not having done more, in the period of its responsibility, to help Samoa move into the modern world. But the problem of conscience was two-edged: rather than doing more to help Samoa develop, perhaps the United States should not "disturb the peace and tranquility of the islands," as the governor put it, by introducing new customs, new goals, new problems, the turmoil of the modern world. Anthropologists and others who knew the Samoan culture well were inclined to argue that the culture should not be tampered with. Beyond that, many of the mainlanders who worked in the Samoa Department of Education for purely educational reasons opposed the introduction of television.

But by the time the Kennedy administration came to Washington in 1961, the balance had swung away from preserving the culture relatively unchanged. Island leaders themselves were asking for better education. There was prodding by the U.N. Trusteeship Council, which had apparently decided that development was good per se. A vigorous and public-spirited new governor, H. Rex Lee, was sent to Samoa in 1961. Thus in the early Kennedy years the pull of conscience over what had *not* been done in the past 60 years began to overbalance the pull of conscience over what the effect of doing it *might* be. And when the decision to use television was reached, then the sheer vigor and audacity of the actions taken drew the attention of the whole educational world to Samoa.

At the same time, education was made universal; previously it had been for a select few. New consolidated schools were built throughout the islands, handsome structures that retained much of the spirit of the native architecture but ended forever the day of the one-room school in Samoa. New classrooms were designed to receive television as soon as it was available. The best in television equipment was provided, including an air-conditioned studio building adjoining the central offices of the

Department of Education and a transmitter building and two television towers set spectacularly on a mountain top, where equipment could be delivered and employees could go to work only by means of a mile-long tramway over an arm of Pago Pago Bay. Teachers with television experience, ETV producers, engineers, and school principals intended to spark a program of in-service education for teachers—these and others were recruited in the States. Television teaching was made available to the six primary grades of most of the schools in the first year and to the full system (through grade 12) a year later. Thus, remarkably, within a matter of months the Samoans had an educational system organized around a medium that was unknown to them as late as July 1964. Two years later, four of every five school-age children were spending one-fourth to one-third of their class time looking at a television picture.

To some observers, this was seen as "typically American go-for-broke behavior," as indeed it was. But it was also a national response to a sense of obligation, for Samoa's destiny was at least partly dependent on the United States. Most of the hundreds of dedicated persons who participated in the project saw it that way, and made a sincere and deeply felt effort to remedy a long history of educational neglect by helping the islands move into the modern world of education. Such mistakes as were made must be seen in that light. And in any case there is nothing to be gained now by evaluating the performance of individuals or attempting to apportion blame for what may in hindsight seem to be errors of policy or practice. Rather, our intention is to try to identify some of the lessons that can be learned from this project concerning the use of television for instruction, and particularly its use on a grand scale for wholesale educational reform and development.

The ambitious goals of the Samoa project, the pace at which it was designed to move, the fact that it was intended for an entire school system separated from others by miles of ocean, and that it inevitably brought an old and relatively changeless culture into confrontation with a new and rapidly changing one—these

not only challenged educational television to do what few other projects had asked of it, but also threw a bright and pitiless light on the problems of using this technology as a tool of development. The architects of the Samoa plan said the project should not be evaluated until an entire academic generation—12 years—had passed through the school system. That time has now come. Several of the high school graduates in 1976 were first-graders, six- or seven-year-olds, in October 1964, when television tubes first lighted up in Samoan classrooms; and a still higher proportion of the subsequent graduates began their schooling in television classrooms. It seems an appropriate time, therefore, to look back over what has happened in the intervening years.

Like most such projects, this one had been neither a complete success nor a complete failure. It has fallen short of many of the hopes for it, and some of the recent developments relating to the use of television have been disappointing to observers who believed and still believe in the power of the medium as a teaching device. On the other hand, television has made important differences in Samoa, and the figures on student learning, so far as we can now resurrect them, though not spectacular are far from discouraging. But the important lessons to be learned from Samoa are more specific than general evaluations of the project. As we review the record, it seems to us that four stages in the history of the effort had most to do with its effectiveness or lack of it. These were, first, the decision to use television rather than something else to modernize the school system; second, the pace at which it was introduced; third, the kind of curriculum adopted in relation to the culture in which it had to operate; and fourth, the problem of coping with changes in teachers and students as the new program took hold. In the following pages we shall try first to fill in these chapters in the history of the project and then to see how this pattern of development relates to what we know about the effects of television in Samoa—on the school system itself, on student learning, on student attitudes and teacher attitudes, and on the cultural values of the young people.

But to understand what happened, one must begin with the