Remaking, reweaving and indigenizing curriculum: Lessons from an American Samoa Head Start program

Allison Henward, Mene Tauaa, Ronald Turituri

Abstract: In this paper, we focus on how indigenous Head Start teachers in American Samoa, an unincorporated territory of the US located in the South Pacific negotiated imported policy and curricular models that were not always congruent with local, indigenous approaches to educating young children. Here we place our focus on the negotiation of curriculum within these spaces and in doing so, show that through the reweaving of curriculum, western discourses and influences from the US were altered. We conclude with implications for US territories and other contested spaces across the globe.

Key words: curriculum, preschool, Aoki, globalization.

Background

Through conscious development efforts by NGOs (World Bank, OECD) and by less deliberate educational borrowing and lending (Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009) the global expansion and movement of western early childhood education approaches has reached a frantic pace. Early childhood approaches include the commonly accepted beliefs and philosophies of how children learn, the content they learn, and the ways and materials teachers use to support children’s learning can now be found around the globe. Montessori methods, materials and a while originating in Italy over a century ago, can now found around the globe (Zhu & Zhang, 2008), often in minority world contexts, western “Child-centered” practices can be found
in Taiwan (Lee & Tsang, 2008) and local schools in Pakistan show evidence of Western influence (Hunzai, 2009). For teachers and local educators of indigenous and culturally diverse children, this movement has potential to present tremendous challenges, as these globally circulating curriculums bring with them cultural assumptions development and education that may be at odds with “indigenous (local) views of the child and how children develop and learn” (Cleghorn & Prochner, 2010 p. 4). The mismatch of western approaches can have significant education ramifications for children when policies fail to recognize the knowledge base, and when they are culturally and linguistically incongruent with the home and community environments of students (Zuricher et al., 2012).

In this paper, we use the metaphor of reweaving to capture how indigenous Head Start teachers in American Samoa, an unincorporated territory of the US located in the South Pacific negotiated imported policy and curricular models that were not always congruent with local, indigenous approaches to educating young children. In discussing curricular practice in terms of reweaving, we build upon the work of the Aotearoa early childhood education system, Te Whāriki. Te Whāriki means “the woven mat” in Te Reo Maori (Duhn, 2012) and is used to describe the creation of a bilingual and bicultural approach to ECE in New Zealand that draws on western and Maori knowledge. In this paper, drawing on our analysis, we find “reweaving” to be a more appropriate metaphor, for as we demonstrate, rather than being asked to construct a bilingual and bicultural curriculum, Samoan educators were handed „a mat.“ As we show, when this mat did not work, they began a process of carefully, artfully and tactfully reweaving, replacing threads of western curriculum with those from local practices, all the while hoping that their mat would not fall apart.

Study Focus

We draw upon fieldwork from a two-year ethnographic study, which examined how Head Start teachers in Samoa negotiated multiple, conflicting pressures and curricular models in their daily practice. Here we present our analysis of field notes and interviews. We use Aoki’s concept of curriculum as lived (Aoki, 1996) and postcolonial lenses (Bhaba, 2012) to understand how Samoan educators engage in a constant reweaving of curriculum, western discourses and influences as they attempt to make the commercialized curriculum relevant for four and five-year-old Samoan Children. We conclude with discussions of the contributions of this research to and curriculum theory to postcolonial, globally focused studies of early childhood education.
While this study analyzes US policy in areas of US influence, given the reach of western models on the global stage, it is far from an isolated concern.

**A Global/ Post-Colonial Ethnographic Study**

A key question in studies of globalization is how and to what degree globally circulating discourses take hold in local environments. In response, globalization researchers identify with two main theories or schools of thought. On one hand are theorists who suggest that socio-cultural and economic process of spreading various objects, experiences, and ideas result in a homogenous “universal” culture, a global convergence in the ideas about education, the notions and concept of schooling, as well as assumptions about and definitions of curriculum (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). These *world culture* scholars posit that all school systems will slowly integrate into more or less, a single global culture. A second contrasting approach draws on anthropological research, and a *cultural* theorist perspective globe looks to cultural variations and the borrowing and lending of educational ideas within a global context (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Benhabib, 2002; Hayhoe & Pan, 2001; Schriewer & Martinez, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). This interpretive framework recognizes how these importations are negotiated, resisted, and changed by local actors. While many of these studies have taken place in international contexts, research on early childhood programs in US territories has been sparse. As US territories are spaces which differ considerably culturally linguistically and geographically from the mainland, and yet also draw significant influence, federal support, and pressure from the US, how US territories respond to the importation of US models should not be overlooked.

Aligning with the second approach, in 2013, we launched *Negotiating Curriculum in the Pacific*. Our collaborative ethnographic project sought to understand the impact of US early childhood policy on Head Start programs located in American Samoa. Head Start is the premier US federal policy which provides grants to educators in all 50 states, Washington DC and indigenous lands in the US and within the five US territories. In co-conceptualizing this collaborative project, we employed a post-colonial lens, which, building on decades of indigenous scholarship, recognizes the historical erasure and de-valuing of indigenous voice and representation in scholarship (Bhaba, 1993; Fanon, 1967; Kaomea, 2003; Lal, 2018; Macedo, 2000; Pachini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Said, 1985; Smith, 2013; Viruru, 2005).

A postcolonial ethnographic approach acknowledges the ways that the perspectives, knowledge, and approaches of indigenous communities have
been disregarded and in some cases erased, only to be replaced with European/western descriptions of the world (Viruru, 2005). As McCarty (2005) so poignantly writes, “With some exceptions, Indigenous peoples worldwide have been minoritized and marginalized in their homelands; they share with other minoritized people a diasporic history characterized by invasion, colonization, displacement, enslavement, and genocide” (p. 2). Like traditional ethnographic methods, it acknowledges the social construction of reality and knowledge and the multiplicity of experiences and belief systems. However, unlike traditional ethnography, postcolonial ethnography is an explicitly political approach as it centers the stories and histories, in what Tuiwai-Smith (2005) calls a “reparative move.” For our purpose, it allows a decentering of eurocentric world views, educational practices, and beliefs, which undergird the majority of early childhood educational research. Our goal was to understand better how Samoan teachers’ interpreted national policy, in light of the global power relations that continue to devalue Samoan educational perspectives and favor U.S. policies (Hunkin-Finau, 2007; Tinitali, 2002). While post-colonial lenses are far from rare in research looking at American Samoa, research on Head Start in general, and in US territories in particular, has failed to embrace this perspective (Authors/s 2019a; Authors, 2019b).

Curriculum as Lived: A Theoretical and Pedagogical Approach

In comparison to the global focus of scholars working in comparative and international education, the field of curriculum theory is typically more focused on what is taught in schools within a single country. While curriculum theory has addressed issues of globalization in recent years, it often does not address global flows of curricula.

The contribution of curriculum theorists to education, particularly from scholars aligned with the reconceptualizing curriculum movement (e.g., Pinar, Eisner, Aoki) is the recognition of how curriculum models and practices transmit power. For these critical scholars, curricula are far from neutral and often reflect the linguistic repertoires, histories, knowledge systems, and practices of those in power; it advantages dominant groups at the expense of those with less power in society (Paris, 2015). They took particular umbrage with the conceptions of learning as a technical, linear process that could be uniformly applied to schools, children, and teachers and produce the desired outcome. Needless to say, this approach differs considerably (in both epistemological and ontological orientation) from that of curriculum implementation researchers, who primarily view the implementation
of intended curriculums and reforms as progress (Blignaught, 2007) and curricular theorists in favor of instrumental approaches, both of whom view curriculum as a product to be applied to children. ¹

Ted Aoki, a Japanese Canadian scholar, was critical of the application of instrumental curricular approaches in the classroom. His critique was not only that they fail to capture the complexity of classrooms, but moreover that they can dehumanize children and teachers, particularly for children whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds were not in alignment with those in power. Instead, he proposed that classrooms be considered places in which “curriculum lives.” Aoki’s concept of Lived Curriculum focuses on what emerges and what is enacted in the classroom, by focusing on multiplicity, including of social actors, educational policy, and local cultures. In accounting for social actors and material circumstances, he adequately captured the multiplicity and movement of an actual classroom. His theoretical and pedagogical concept of curriculum as lived (2005) considers curriculum not found merely in the child (as a child-centered approach might suggest), or teacher, or subject (as a teacher-directed approach), but as the active, fluid and changing interaction of children, teachers, and materials/environment. For Aoki, what people are taught emerges from “life in the classroom” “in the spaces between and among all three” (Aoki, 1999)

As a curriculum theorist, Aoki does not write explicitly from a post-colonial or decolonizing approach (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In many of his writings and underpinnings of curricula as lived, there is a substantial influence of postcolonial theory. In conceptualizing the classroom as a place in which discourses and ideas and people assemble to produce a curriculum, Aoki draws on Bhabha’s (2012) postcolonial concepts of hybridity, multiplicity, and interstices. As Bhabha’s points out, we should have little concern with considering western influences and ideologies (curriculum) and indigenous approaches in binary terms. Instead, one must focus on how these two opposing forces come together and specifically attend to what then becomes produced in the interstices. For Aoki, classrooms are interstices, spaces of constant negotiation, spaces of multiplicity, of doubling “where we slip into the language of ‘both this and that, but neither this nor that’... the space moves and is alive” (p. 181). Aoki (2005) notes that classrooms are “binary of two separate preexisting entities, which can be bridged or brought together

¹ For example, Blignaught, (2007) has noted that environment in which educational change takes place is increasingly complex and turbulent, and that individual quality of schools, a gap in knowledge and skills of the teachers, as well as a paucity of materials can account for the ways that curriculums are not taken up by teachers.
to conjoin in an ‘and’” (p. 315). His concepts invite us to consider classrooms in light of “ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty” (Aoki, 1999), but more so, they ask us to consider possibilities and what might emerge from this space (Pinar & Irwin, 2004). For teachers in post-colonial contexts that have constant influence on their practice, consideration of emergence, and change, and the multiplicity of meanings and linguistic repertoires allows for consideration of how intended, imported curriculum is taken up and changed in a South Pacific island context, and ultimately why it comes to matter in issues of globalization, education, culture and power.

**Methods**

We jointly collected written field notes through participant observation and conducted formal and informal interviews with teachers, directors, parents, and educational support personnel such as mentor teachers and program and curricular coaches. In classrooms, we took photographs of classroom environments and classroom materials. In a second phase, we added a third researcher and a video-cued multivocal (VCM) ethnographic approach (Hsueh & Tobin, 2012; Tobin, Wu & Davidson, 1991). We recognized VCM to be a useful methodological tool to better listen to these Sāmoan teacher’s implicit cultural logic (Authors, 2019). Following this method, we filmed a day in the Sāmoan preschool and then edited the video to 20 minutes. In focus groups, we showed the edited Sāmoan video to the two preschool teachers in the class. We used scenes as a cue to provoke and organize the discussion. We also showed them videos of mainland Head Start classrooms to illustrate ECE approaches more commonly found on the mainland. We then repeated this with other Sāmoan focus groups, which were comprised of teachers and directors. In viewing their video, the teachers can explain their approaches to education. When teachers comment on other teachers’ practices, they, in turn, reveal their own cultural beliefs to educating children (Hsueh & Tobin, 2012). In VCM, the video provides a shared prompt for discussion and is not considered data.

All interview data were recorded digitally and then transcribed. Field notes were collected (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). We used a two-tiered coding system to analyze transcripts and field notes (Saldana, 2015). We then revised the codes using a constant comparative method (Glazer & Strauss, 2017), the coded data were then clustered into conceptual categories including, respect for children, and respect for community, respect for cultural continuity and preservation. We later condensed respect for community, respect for cultural continuity and preservation into one theme: fa’a Samoa, or
respect for the Samoan Way. In light of these categories, we used curriculum theory models in analysis.

_Ethics and power in research_

In conducting research, there are always power differentials between researchers and informants. In keeping with the goals of the project and postcolonial approaches, we attempted to lessen this differential through multiple methods. Two members of the team are indigenous Samoan researchers who were born, raised, and continue to live on Tutuila, a small island of fewer than 55,000 people. (Authors) have decades-long, connected relationships with some of the informants. We used a community based ethnographic design (Lassiter, 2011), translated all consent forms into Samoan, and we were guided by relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). This approach propels researchers “to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences” (Ellis, 2007, p. 3). However, rather than privileging this approach as novel, we want to emphasize that this approach to research is simply fa’a Samoa (the Samoan way). Samoa is a profoundly interconnected culture which has long emphasized protocol, consensus, and respect for the community in all aspects of life (Tupuola, 1993). As community members and research partners, we would act accordingly and continually return to informants to verify interpretation (in Samoan and English). As our goal was to listen to teachers and not speak for them, this provided space for Samoan educators to shape and in one case, correct our interpretations of their practices.

_Context of Samoa_

American Sāmoa is a linguistic, ethnic, and cultural minority island community of approximately 65,000 people located in the South Pacific. According to the Berlin Treaty of 1899, the United States was guaranteed the harbor of Pago Pago, and Tutuila—as well as a group of small islands to the east—came under the rule of the US Navy (Droessler, 2013). Today, it is a territory of the US, and while autonomous in some regards, it is also highly influenced by an outsider nation-state. US territories have been noted as spaces of a dialectical juncture “in which colonial structures and local cultures of resistance are entangled” (Perez, 2001 p. 98). This intertwining of power and influence is reflected in the educational system, which has been tied to and substantially influenced by US philosophies of education for more than 100 years (Zuercher et al., 2012).
The public early childhood education program, which serves over half of all eligible preschoolers in American Samoa is funded almost entirely by a federal Head Start grant (NHSA, 2018). Head Start, for those unfamiliar, is a federal program which from its founding in 1968 has sought to improve social skills, education, health and overall economic security of children in the United States (Currie & Thomas, 1993; Domitrovich et al., 2008). In recent years, with the federal reauthorization of the Head Start program (in 2007) increased attention has been devoted to the expansion of standards, curriculums and assessment and quality assurances in the federal early childhood program (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). A condition of this grant is that the American Samoa Department of Education implements performance standards and aligned curriculum or, as the early childhood educators repeatedly reminded us in our interviews, lose funding for their 71 preschool classrooms. This requirement is a result of the 2007 Head Start reauthorization. A component of this reauthorization was the adoption of newly amended performance standards, which specified that must adopt “research-based curriculums” (Bierman et al., 2008; USDHHS, 2005). This changed the curricular and pedagogical approaches of American Sāmoa preschools which as a Village-based program, created with and administered by Sāmoan educators (Halverson, 2017; Johnson & Savali, 1971), a program which arguably felt less federal influence than K-12. As we soon learned through fieldwork, the Sāmoan early childhood education office, like the vast majority of Head Start grantees in the U.S. (Hulsey et al., 2011) adopted the Creative Curriculum. The creative curriculum is a commercialized curriculum with specific, detailed topics of study, daily schedules, and scripted, pre-planned lessons developed in the southern US, some 8,000 miles and culturally and linguistically worlds away from the island territory of American Samoa.

Results

Ms. Ella: “If I’m not doing the study starters, and it harms the program, what is that going to do to everyone?”

In early conversations with Sāmoan educators, it quickly became apparent that they felt considerable pressure to implement creative curriculum within their classrooms. They were bound by federal policy, and as they assured us, failure to oblige would have deleterious effects, the most notable was the loss of funding. As the director explained, the ECEC program was funded under one grant which provided the vast majority of funding for the program. While the teachers felt pressure to implement the curriculum, in actuality, they rarely endorsed the practices as intended. Below, we organize
findings around three key themes, respect for fanau (children), respect for community, and respect for fa’a Sāmoa. Within each theme, we show how the importance of this value allowed the teachers to enact a lived curriculum which changed the way that imported discourses are taken up in practice.

**Respect for fanau (children)**

It is a warm afternoon, and Ms. Alma, an experienced Head Start teacher, is sitting in a small child-sized chair in her brightly decorated classroom, leafing through a glossy white book. “See,” she says, “this is what they want, this is the way that the lessons should be taught.” As we look over her shoulder, we see the descriptions of lessons, the suggested materials, and even questions that teachers should pose to children.

Author: So, what do you think about the curriculum?

Ms. Alma: Well, it’s good. I mean it’s all there, you know exactly what to do. But here’s the thing...the curriculum now is kinda halfway there, and sometimes it doesn’t go real well with the students.”

Ms. Alma, like many Sāmoan teachers we interviewed, expressed considerable reservations about the curriculum because, as they explained, it did not fit the experiences and lived realities of the Sāmoan children in their class. Their concerns and occasional critiques of the curriculum revealed an extraordinarily thoughtful and caring approach to educating Sāmoan children. Their discussion made clear that their understanding of appropriate instruction was not included within the packaged curriculum,

To care for and adequately educate students, the teachers explained, linguistic repertoires of the children must be accessed and honored. This practice of honoring their language was considered respectful, but also essential for the children to learn and participate in class. As Ms. Alma and other teachers pointed out, the creative curriculum is written in English. While supplementary books are available in Spanish, they are not available in Sāmoan. Although these teachers are bilingual, many of the 3-5-year-olds in their class speak Sāmoan. As Natia explained, “without Sāmoan, the children wouldn’t know what we are talking about in a lesson. I mean, they could follow other children, but would they really understand”? Creative Curriculum materials are translated into Sāmoan, first at the ASECE office which oversees all 71 classrooms and later in classrooms through books made by teachers, and classroom materials. In fieldnotes and videos, all signs were in Sāmoan, with some in both Sāmoan and English. As
the teachers explained, the use of Sāmoan language was essential. They noted the necessity for communication, but also a continuity to the children’s lives outside of school. They believed that Sāmoan children should be taught using Sāmoan as it is the primary language on Tutuila, used in homes, churches, and businesses. As Sāmoan scholar Sauni (2011) notes that “Language is essential and fundamental for bridging understandings, translations of conversations and maintaining relationships within Sāmoan culture.

Importantly, these teachers made a distinction between merely translating Creative Curriculum into Sāmoan and making lessons relevant through local context. In the vast majority of the focus groups, the teachers extolled the importance of teaching lessons that relate to and build upon what the children experience in their lives in Sāmoa. This was revealed in their discussions of the packaged lessons being “boring.”

Ms. Salu: well...like the study starter (topic) “pipes” for instance?
Author: Pipes?
Ms. Sāmoa: Yes, it is one of our lessons, our topics, pipes. We have pipes in Sāmoa of course, but the ones (children) in my class, they don’t want to talk about that, they don’t find that interesting.” She explained she would spend time introducing topics through “presentations” rather than in the inquiry model that was recommended, as the children were often unfamiliar with the things they were to be teaching. Other teachers expressed similar concerns about the lessons, many of whom pointed directly to the “pipes and box studies” within the curriculum.

Their discussion made clear that their concern was not with pleasing the children, but that the ill fit of the content, as it held no interest for the children be effectively useless and considered a waste of time. This wasted time was for these teachers detrimental to the cognitive development of these children.

Ms. Lanuoa: Well, in the old curriculum, before this I was able to watch the kids, talk to them and create lessons based “on the interest of the kids, what was in the community.”
Ms. Samaria (nodding in agreement) Then, then they catch up (sic) real fast. But now, we are showing them these things that they’ve never; they’ve never seen and often don’t really know.
Ms. Natia observed that “while the kids would sit patiently through the lessons,” she didn’t feel they always “really would get it” as they often
did not engage in the same way that she remembered they did with the old curriculum. As Ms. Lori explained, “We have to provide our own kind of activity in order for the topic to be relevant to the students if you are teaching in Sāmoa.” As Ms. Ella explained, “If there is an activity in the book that day or a lesson that you know doesn’t work with the kids you can’t do it. And that’s not going to benefit them because sometimes activities are boring and useless. The lessons don’t work with the kids. So we try to change those activities and do our own activities to go through the lesson.”

As these teachers’ discussion indicates, they felt that they must significantly change activities to capture the interests and facilitate learning for these 3-5-year-old children. A lesson exemplified this that we observed one morning in May in Ms. Lisa’s classroom.

We (author and author) arrive at the I’a sa (turtle) early childhood center in American Sāmoa. In the center of the room, the lead preschool teacher, Lisa, is sitting at a table with twelve three and four-year-old children clustered around her. The children are in school uniform; the girls are dressed in brown jumpers and starched white shirts, the boys are dressed in brown shorts or brown lava lavas, wrapped fabric coverings. In Sāmoan, Lisa calls the children to attention and begins the lesson by telling the children that they are going to listen to a story about transportation. She raises the book and shows the children the cover, which has a young blonde haired Palagi (white) boy playing with cars, trucks, trains, etc. Lisa holds the book and reads the book, word for word. As she turns the pages, she reads about people traveling on foot, cars, subways, planes, trains, and boats, word for word. She interjects in Sāmoan to further explain. When she finishes, she places a large poster board on the table and shows it to the children. On the poster board, she has drawn and labeled the various types of Va’a (boats) that are commonly seen around Tutuila.

As we watch, Ms. Lisa points to, names and explains each of the eight boats, including longboats, commercial fishing boats that populate Tutuila, canoes, and other types of ships and vessels. In the lesson of the va’a, Ms. Lisa included the names, purposes, and history of each boat. Throughout her lesson, she focused exclusively on boats found in Sāmoa. This was done in a teacher-directed manner, and for 40 minutes, we watched the children pay rapt attention to Ms. Lisa. Following this, the children are then invited to join in a whole group song
that talked about boats and cars. It was led by the two teachers, one who played the ukulele and one who played the pate, an indigenous Sāmoan musical instrument. The pate is a hollowed log, which changed tone depending on where it is struck by the teacher, similar to a slit drum.

When discussing this scene, the Sāmoan teachers spoke with high praise for the lesson; they highlighted the fit of Ms. Lisa’s focus on boats to the children. As Ms. Lisa explained in her initial interview, she chose the boat lesson given what she knew about the children. In the lesson, we noted that she changed their language of instruction to Sāmoan, she created materials and most importantly changed the foci to relevant and exciting topics for the children.

As many of the teachers pointed out, Pago Pago is one of the largest natural harbors in the world, and boats are incredibly plentiful. Children in Sāmoa spend time fishing with families and much time outside of school and church is spent in the water, in canoes, and in “Longboats” enormous boats similar in form to crew boats that hold up to fifty men from each village. Furthermore, for many of the children, boats are integral to their household functioning (Moll, Gonzalez, Neff & Amanti, 1992). Some of the largest and most visible industries are fishing and canning. The Star-Kist tuna is one of the major employers on Tutuila and highly visible in the harbor.

Notably, their responses and justifications for their approach were much in line with those of asset scholars who, since the 1990’s, have unequivocally demonstrated the highly beneficial outcomes for culturally and linguistically marginalized children when schools acknowledge, value and build on their home and community experiences (Gay, 2010; McCarty & Zepeda, 1995)

*Respect for Fa’a Sāmoa*

Interviews with Sāmoan teachers also revealed that they sometimes felt incommensurable tensions between expectations from Head Start policy and their local environment. For these teachers, the responsibility of teaching children in ways consistent with fa’a Sāmoa or the Sāmoan way of life was onerous within a policy that mandated the use of commercialized curriculum and which offered standardized assessment tools to comply with mandates.

Ms. Corrine: “We have to adapt it (the curriculum) to our surroundings and our culture.

Ms. Harmony: “It would be better. Basically, if we could concentrate more
on our culture, we would bring up more things that we were raised up with, especially in our culture.”

For Sāmoan teachers, this was considered a moral and ethical imperative. In focus groups with more experienced Sāmoan teachers, they expressed concern about a loss of indigenous knowledge “as in some of the households...children are being taught other things, not Sāmoan things.” In Sāmoan Head Starts, we observed teachers who taught lessons in ways that more closely matched the directions in the Creative Curriculum. Often, these were less experienced teachers. In other classrooms, more experienced teachers taught lessons that differed significantly from what might be seen on the mainland. One example is a lesson we call Lava Lava Sāmoa, taught by Ms. Lora, a Head Start teacher with 25 years’ experience.

One morning we arrive Ms. Lora rushes to greet us “oh good, you are here... you will see the children. It is the clothing unit” As if on cue, Teuila, arrives with her father, waiting at the door. She is wearing a Siapo, made from a traditional u’a cloth. U’a cloth that is harvested from the paper mulberry trees on the island and scraped with the use of clamshells and then dyed using o’a lama, loa, ago and soa’a dyes, sourced from local plants. Teuila is also wearing an ornate crown headdress with seashells, which we later learn has been made by her family. She is greeted at the door and led by Teacher Tua to sit in a chair around the rug. She sits in front of a large bulletin board that has the words Lava lava Sāmoa (Sāmoan Clothes) prominently displayed.
The letters are cut from woven palm leaf mats, a typical floor covering in Sāmoa. Besides the title, there are pictures of Sāmoan families wearing traditional (Siapo) and more contemporary Sāmoan clothes (Pulatasi and Lava Lava). As we look around, on the wall are hung traditional dresses made from tapa, under photographs and drawings of men with traditional Matai tattoos, in traditional dress are models of fales, or open-air Sāmoan houses, which are made from coconut shells and sticks. One by one the other students arrive, many in Pulatasi and lava lavas. Once all the children arrive, the parents remain in the room as children are led outside and invited to reenter the classroom. As each child enters, in a voice similar to a pageant MC, Lora introduces the child, “Sua is wearing a... “ In her address, she acknowledges the type of clothing, the family members who have constructed this outfit, acknowledges the village they came from, and detail the materials used in the clothing.

In their viewing of this lesson, Sāmoan teachers explained that this lesson allowed children to understand traditions reinforces the importance of family, and allowed the children to learn how to carry on Sāmoan traditions.

Author: Tell me about this lesson. What are you doing here?
Ms. Mona: “Well, she.... we do this with parents.” “Sometimes we have to reach up to the parents for them to help us.”
Author: Help you with what? The lesson?
Ms. Lora: So the clothing units in Creative Curriculum don’t look like this (laughing) but these things, the children need to know how and why.
For as Ms. Lora explained, in Creative Curriculum, they were required to teach “the clothing unit.” Yet the teachers didn’t, per se. Instead, fieldnotes revealed that they altered the intended curriculum through the planning and implementation of a Sāmoan centered unit. In doing so, they called on parents, children and extended families from surrounding villages. As Ms. Lora revealed, these articles of clothing were constructed from the local environment. Far from arbitrary, the teachers recognized how this practice reinfused Sāmoan values.

Ms. Harmony: “We go into raiding our culture and making things with what we have. And showing the children how to make them. And we use it in our classroom. So we go and weave. We make the baskets, we weave. And we show them that they can use things. And there is a bond and interaction in learning how to make (Sāmoan) things.”

Within this lesson, parents were asked to escort their children so that the teachers could thank and honor the families. The children, they told us were to understand the history and significance. This pageant approach was a way in which they could pay reverence to and how their appreciation for the work of the parents and community. Within the lesson, they named and explained each type of clothing, identified the significance, and honored the families who provided them. As the teachers told us, Sāmoan values and principles undergirded this, practices such as “respect, love and service,” which are inseparable in Sāmoan culture (McDonald, 2004).
By integrating family and intergenerational knowledge, the teachers aimed to convey the importance of a collective approach to educating children. Surprisingly, this approach was very similar to the 1960’s Village ECEC approach in which family members were asked to accompany and join in during preschool activities in village *fales* (houses). In viewing this lesson, the teachers also pointed out the importance of the Sāmoan language. They explained that many of the clothes and associated values have no actual English translation. If this lesson were taught in English, it would fail to capture the interconnectedness and the significance. As Sāmoan writer Hunkin-Tuiletufuga (1996) notes, Gagana (or language) “is a blessing because it affirms your cultural identity. Language is a useful tool in contextualizing and consultation processes within Sāmoan contexts. communicates and gives meaning to all social and cultural relationships between groups or individuals, and this should not be ignored.”

**Discussion**

Considering Samoan teachers’ practices through the theoretical and pedagogical approach of lived curriculum (Aoki, 1979; 2004) and postcolonial theory affords multiple possibilities for understanding how global flows of curriculum come to matter in indigenous communities. While this study is focused on areas of US influence and analyzes how Sāmoan teachers, children, and parents transformed US educational ideas in their local context, it has application and influence in many other contexts.

One of the strengths of this analysis is that it contributes detailed understandings of how local practice and local actors can and do reformulate global policy and ideas from the US (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Vavrus and Bartlett, 2006, 2009). For as these teachers show, they in part rectified tensions in the global/ local nexus by their rejection of the *intended curriculum* (i.e. ‘curriculum-as-plan’) to a dynamic *lived curriculum*.

A central concern for Ted Aoki was that by approaching curricula as an instrument to be applied uniformly, and which is assumed to produce results, we ignore the educational experiences of learners in the classroom. As the Samoan teachers show, his concerns are alive and well in preschool classrooms in the Pacific. While Aoki never wrote about young children, as Samoan teachers demonstrate, the only option was to enact a lived curriculum. By recognizing students’ lived curricular experiences (Zheng & Heydon, 2014) Sāmoan teachers made clear they could better educate young children by attending to their linguistic repertoires and interweaving indigenous...
knowledge within their lived curriculum. As demonstrated in their practices and their rationale, enacting a lived curriculum can also be a process by which colonial practices are made and envisioned. By weaving indigenous knowledge, local examples and divergent linguistic repertoires, they are able to invite complexity, multiplicity and possibly find a way to attempt to rectify what were previously incommensurable tensions in practice.

Their approach to enacting a lived curriculum meant a constant analysis of the children’s interests and the relevance of this knowledge on Tutuila. As they demonstrated, a lesson on boats held more relevance than discussing a train or a subway on an island without a single stoplight. Similarly their choice to focus on traditional Sāmoan clothing within a clothing unit rather than talking about woodland creatures in a mitten set in a Scandinavian context (the focus of one of the supplemental books for use with the clothing unit) the teachers were able to engage in a creative weaving of seemingly disparate elements. In their literal linguistic translation interpretation, their making of materials, the inclusion of student experiences and approaches and the quest to connect the classroom to the broader context and the lived realities of students, Sāmoan teachers responded.

These findings align with globalization scholar Anderson-Levitt (2004), who writes that there are substantial differences between policy as dictated and how policy plays out on the ground. The reason, she writes, is that local actors often oppose reform. In the context of Sāmoa, the teachers did not openly disagree with the policy, and yet, through their everyday practice, they significantly changed the curriculum from intended, to curriculum as lived. This curriculum as lived produces “new and hybrid forms of culture that articulate the local with the global” (Stromquist, 2002, p. 2) through a ‘mixed dialogue’ between politics and culture, in both global and local contexts. As “school philosophies tend to mirror national cultures and borrow from cultural beliefs, and as local cultures evolve under global influences, school systems are transformed and begin to reflect those changes that are encountered in local realities. In other words, globally circulating discourses, “which take root through policy, are always filtered, negotiated and remade in local context” (Anderson-Levitt, 2012).

But our data also shows that this was far from a harmonious panacea, in keeping with critical postcolonial and indigenous work, this negotiation and enactment were tenuous, delicate, taxing and in some cases fraught for Sāmoan educators, as they attempted to live amongst and between competing discourses. Western reforms can create dilemmas for culturally diverse
teachers, who must choose between being considered professional through western standards and their local cultural knowledge. In these spaces, teachers can be “torn between the claims of western values and their indigenous culture” (Canagarajah, 1999, p.1). This study shows that these tensions were alive, well, and palatable. Focus group responses made clear that ECE teachers in American Samoa felt considerable pressure to implement western models and curriculum. For these teachers, the conflict created a dilemma that was not easily overcome, as their responsibility to the children and the community conflicted with the expectations of their profession.

In one way, a focus on the way that teachers enact a lived curriculum in light of intended curriculums is far from significant. While important and influential in curriculum studies, Aoki’s lived curriculum has been a central theoretical and pedagogical approach to understanding the complex interplay of teachers, discourses, children, curriculum and classroom materials for the past twenty years. Many theoretical and empirical pieces have noted the efficacy of considering practices through this model. Yet to date, the significance of this model in post-colonial contexts has not been emphasized, particularly in understanding the curricular practices of young indigenous children. As our data illuminates, consideration of this approach in a global, post-colonial context has significance beyond typical considerations of the curriculum as lived.

With the expansion and commercialization of early childhood curriculum and its increasing pace of movement across the globe, more tools are needed to understand what happens on the ground and what that means for children whose cultural knowledge and linguistic practices don’t match those of imported curriculum. As this study has demonstrated, by examining the pedagogical and curricular approaches of indigenous teachers through a lived curriculum in light of global pressures, can allow for a more thorough lens in which to understand how power is negotiated in the global and local nexus. In identifying the specific ways in which indigenous teachers altered and negotiated curriculum, we also show that understandings and strategies for indigenous teachers and curriculum studies.

Conclusion and Implications and Considering the Metaphor

The enactment of a lived curriculum has substantial and promising implications for culturally and linguistically diverse teachers and thus contributes crucial understandings of what this means for indigenous children.
and their teachers in individual early childhood programs around the world, too many of whom are facing increasing global pressures. But it also contributes valuable understandings of the bidirectional manner in which early childhood “educational borrowing and lending” occurs (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; 2014) on a global scale.

In highlighting how indigenous teachers were able to enact a lived curriculum to some degree, we do not wish to suggest this is simple or unproblematic. Our intent is not to excuse neo-colonial pressures that create dilemmas for indigenous women. Furthermore, while experienced teachers had confidence, capability, and understandings to enact a lived curriculum, we did not always see this with younger and less experienced teachers. In these spaces, colonial discourses have more authority and power. Furthermore, attending to the words and approaches of these teachers reveal that this intermingling is far from simple or without issue. It is arduous and laborious. The multistep process in which these curriculums were digested and changed must be seen for what it is, an undertaking that requires substantial work on the backs of Indigenous women. Moreover, within this process are different pressures, fears, and tensions that teachers of color must navigate in their teaching. These teachers, like many others, must live with the constant concern and in some cases fear that their process of indigenization and enactment of a lived curriculums will not be looked on favorably by policymakers, and government officials who control the purse strings to their programs.

**References**


Authors:

Allison Sterlin Henward, Ph.D.
The Pennsylvania State University
Core Faculty, Comparative & International Education Department
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
180 Chambers Building
University Park
PA 16802
USA
Email: ash55@psu.edu

Mene Tauaa, Instructor
University of Hawaii
Manoa-Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Program
Institute of Teacher Education (ITE) Department
College of Education-University of Hawaii, Manoa
1776 University Avenue
Everly Hall Room 126
Honolulu
Hawaii 96822

Ronald Turituri, Instructor
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Department-ITE
P.O. Box 3436
Pago Pago
American Samoa