

Trying Minds: Disability, Activism, and Inclusion in Samoa

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Introduction

- Loto Taumafai School or “the school of Trying Minds” is located in Apia, Samoa
- Established in 1980 for students with disabilities; first institution for students who were excluded from mainstream schools
- Community organizing led to the school’s opening as a non-government organization (NGO)

Photos

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TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

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Research Questions

- How do we negotiate and understand notions of *ma'i*, activism, and disability and their influence on Indigenous rights and educational policy?
- How do we create spaces to give “voice” to the competing definitions of disability and illness?
- When does *ma'i* or sickness become a disability, and for what purpose?

Map

QuickTime™ and a
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Glossary

- *Aitu*: spirits
- *Atua*: God
- *Fa'a Samoa*: Samoan way of life
- *Fofu*: massage
- *Ma'i*: sickness/illness
- *Ma'i agasala*: sin
- *Ma'i aitu*: spiritual sickness
- *Ma'i valea*: mental illness
- *Taulasea*: indigenous healer
- *Tiute*: obligation
- *Toa'ala*: chest area of a person
- *Ma'i papalagi*: European illness or foreign sickness
- *Ma'i Samoa*: Samoa illness
- *Fulu*: flu
- *Mamapapala*: tuberculosis
- *Misela*: measles
- *Pala*: stomatitis
- *Ma'i sua*: boils
- *Mana tina*: stomach ache

Part II

- In what ways do Samoan students with disabilities inform understandings of disability and difference in educational and other institutional settings?
- How can we deconstruct competing views of disability in our critique of ableism, inclusion, and normalcy?

LBJ Tropical Medical Center

“The most disturbing and preventable problem has been the use in children of local Samoan bush medicine. By this I mean the plant and herbal medicines given by taulesea or fofo. In the past year, we saw at least six children die after being given “Samoan medicine” by mouth from a fofo. The picture was not a pretty one. The children initially had mild cases of the “flu.” They were then given “Samoan medicine” and soon developed seizures, kidney failure and increased acid in the blood. Despite intensive care at the hospital, these children died within three days... Many of the medicines given by a fofo are probably safe for children, but some are poisons and will quickly kill a child. In the first half of 1988, more children died in American Samoa from being given “Samoan medicine” than...from any other use”

(Anonymous name of the author/staff at LBJ Medical Ctr., the *Samoa News*, November 17, 1988).

Conclusion

- Foster cross-discipline dialogues
- Critical of inclusive rhetoric, but exclusive practices
- What does disability mean?
- Organize alliances with others to challenge social injustices and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities worldwide

Thank you

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