

FIGHTING AGAINST THE COLONIZATION OF OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

O ko‘u aupuni, he aupuni palapala ko‘u. Kaulikeaouli, 1825

My Kingdom shall be one of literacy.

Ilima-Lei Macfarlane
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Introduction:

It is no secret that throughout history, Western and European powers have colonized countless indigenous populations across the globe. Politically, economically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally, these indigenous populations have been controlled and forced to adopt foreign practices in nearly all facets of life. Cultural ideals have been imposed on typically self-efficient and self-sustaining populations that have resulted in their loss of land, sovereignty, and culture. Although colonial occupation is not as glaringly obvious as in the past, the effects of the past are still felt and manifested through current day institutions of power. It is not surprising, therefore, that recent attempts have been made by these indigenous populations, including Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians, to reclaim their identities and self-determination once more. While some have been more or less successful than others, it has been noted that the path towards self-determination for indigenous people is successful through the course of education. Although positions on education reformation vary within and among different indigenous populations, many understand that you don't have a kingdom without educated citizens. At its core, sovereignty and self-determination rely upon land and knowledge. In the words of Hawaiian author and scholarly activist Dr. Trisha Kehaulani Watson, “A nation in name only is a castle made of sand; one that will quickly crumble beneath even the weakest of waves. Yet a nation built by educated, determined people, each proud citizen a hardened brick upon hardened brick, that nation is one that will never fall” (Watson 2014).

While ancient Hawaiians valued knowledge and learning, there are political and cultural issues that keep contemporary Native Hawaiians and other indigenous people

within the margins of the education system. In many minority groups that have a history of being colonized, school is characterized more as a place of assimilation rather than place of opportunity. Not only do Native Hawaiian children in general have the lowest rates of academic success of all minority groups that populate the Hawaiian Islands (Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate, 1993), but they also are underrepresented in the state's institutions of higher education, either as students, faculty, or administrators (University of Hawai'i Institutional Research Office, 1996). This translates to other areas of life as Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders continuously lead the State of Hawai'i in poverty, unemployment, incarceration, substance abuse, and violence rates. From the start of the 1970's movement to revitalize Hawaiian language and culture, the people recognize the importance of not only educating Hawaiian children, but also educating in a manner that reflects the Hawaiian culture and values.

In this paper I will elaborate on two of the main problems that contribute to the peripheral placement of native people within the system; the failure of current curricula to accommodate genuine and accurate indigenous perspectives and epistemologies, and the underrepresentation of indigenous people in educator and administrative positions. I will present three case studies from Hawai'i that highlights the educational issues mentioned above, followed by a cross-cultural comparison with other indigenous groups from around the world. The first case study I will present describes the effects of a culturally compatible lesson on reading comprehension scores of Native Hawaiian children. The second case study highlights not only the underrepresentation of indigenous educators, but also the subsequent repercussions of nonindigenous teachers trying to teach indigenous perspectives. The final case study describes an initiative that was

formed to help ameliorate both the lack of Native Hawaiian perspectives in school curricula, as well as the underrepresentation of Native Hawaiian in the education system. In using these examples, I will also demonstrate the ways in which anthropological theories, and methods were and could be utilized in addressing these issues.

The degree to which these separate sites saw meaningful change varies by case, but collectively they contributed to the common goal of self-determination of indigenous people throughout the world. As an aspiring educator, it is my aim to advocate for a change in the mainstream education system, and the rights of indigenous people to self-education.

Case Study #1:

Hawaiian children as a group, experience some of the lowest levels of academic achievement statewide. In order to address this underachievement, Kamehameha Schools developed a research-for-action educational program, known as KEEP, that not only attempted to discover ways in which to improve the academic achievement of Native Hawaiian children, but also to influence the public schools system of Hawai'i on their behalf. The first part of the study was to develop reading and literacy programs that would improve the levels of school achievement, as measured by standardized tests, to match national scores. The second part of the study was to disseminate the program, if found to be effective, to the rest of Hawai'i's public schools where the majority of students were of Native Hawaiian background.

As part of the first phase of the study, Educational Specialist, Kathryn Au began to develop new lesson plans based off of ethnographic accounts of the classrooms and

communities in which the children were from. Previous studies reported that the children were unresponsive to particular techniques they employed the teachers to use, such as constant praise and positive reinforcement. Their standardized tests scores also did not improve when reading lessons focused on the phonetics of the words. Although the children's dictations and pronunciations had improved, their reading comprehension had not. Using these reports and current observations, researchers developed a reading lesson that was structured around a "talk-story" hypothesis, a speech event that is found in Native Hawaiian speech economies.

"Talk-story" is a speech event specific to Hawaiian and local culture, that involves the use of Pigeon-English (Hawaiian Creole), overlapping speech, joint construction, voluntary turn-taking, and interactive conversation. In reading groups, children were encouraged by teachers to share their own experiences that related to what they had just read. They were allowed to employ all of the speech patterns typically seen within a "talk-story" event, with the relaxed guidance of the teacher. Rather than focusing on the phonetics and sound identification as they previously had done through decontextualized skill drills, they were focusing on the *meaning* of the readings, in the context of their own experiences.

Critical to the success of the new lesson plan was also the new seating arrangement of the classroom. Researchers theorized that because of the common Hawaiian practice of having multiple caregivers and lots of interaction with siblings and peers, this translated to the children working better together in groups rather than individually at their desks. Children were allowed to assist each other, just as they would at home with their siblings and younger relatives.

Reading comprehension and literacy scores ultimately improved, according to national standards, because Western teaching styles and classroom configurations were adjusted to fit the minority children's inclinations and styles. Culturally appropriate lessons were successfully created that deviated from the monolithic system that was originally in place.

Case Study #2:

Indigenous perspectives were all but absent in curricula across the State of Hawai'i, until the civil rights movements of the 60's and 70's inspired Hawaiian activist groups to push for state legislature to mandate for the inclusion of Native Hawaiian experiences and stories. Although few studies have been done that show the actual level of inclusion (if any) of these Native Hawaiian perspectives, Native Hawaiian scholar and assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i, Julie Kaomea began studying elementary classrooms that were supposed to incorporate Native Hawaiian studies into the curriculum. What she observed was unsettling, as the brief units on Hawaiian culture were inauthentic and false. Verbal presentations by the students depicted ancient Hawaiians as uncivilized, violent and sacrificial individuals with a strict law system (Kaomea 2005:27).

The origin of the children's sadistic research findings were from the textbook itself, which was written in 1980 by non-Hawaiian authors, and mass distributed to the public school system immediately following the mandate to include Native Hawaiian perspectives in curricula (Kaomea 2005:28). Kaomea was astounded at the graphic and violent depictions of ancient Hawaiians, and the utter lack of inclusion of other aspects of

their lives. The ancient Hawaiians were great navigators, cultivators, and craftsmen with a spiritual connection to the land, living within a complex society. Instead, a savage-like portrayal of the indigenous people was all that could be found. Not surprisingly, this textbook did not include the violence that Captain Cook committed on Native Hawaiians, and instead focused immensely on the violent “savage” nature of the ancient Hawaiians (Kaomea 2005:29). Colonial discourse also claimed that Hawaiians, through their own deprivation and self-destruction, was ultimately responsible for their own demise. They attributed the massive decline of the Native Hawaiian population post-contact to internal factors such as infanticide, warfare, cannibalism and sacrificial killings with no mention of the diseases that the European explorers brought over, or violent warfare that took place between them (Kaomea 2005:28). This, Kaomea suggests, is a deliberate measure taken by Western authors to justify colonization and the suppression of Hawaiian culture, language, government, religion, and civilization. Kaomea challenges colonial discourse and questions why we don’t teach about contemporary Western punishment systems with the same graphic detail that textbooks use to describe Hawaiian practices, such as how the internal organs implode with lethal injection, or police brutality, and prison rape. While this seems extremely too graphic for fourth graders, her point is that while it is taboo to learn about Western penal systems, “primitive” systems are considered fair game in colonial discourse.

Although Kaomea pointed out this egregious error in the transmission of cultural knowledge, because of the rising costs of material, and tight budgets of public schools, updated textbooks and other resources have not been readily available for educators and students. This is where Kaomea brings up her second argument in that it is not just the

textbooks, but also the educators who decide whether or not to teach from them.

Although children of Native Hawaiian ancestry comprise the majority of public school students at 24.7 percent, educators are largely from the dominant political and economical class, majority being American-Japanese at 46.4 percent and Caucasian at 27.9 percent (Hawaii Department of Education 1999:27). The fact that the American-Japanese teacher did not intervene troubled Kaomea even more so than the children's recitations of textbook information. Upon interviewing those educators, many admitted that they had not taken any courses on Hawaiian studies, and obtained their information from the textbooks alone. This lead Kaomea to question the qualifications of nonnative teachers who were teaching Hawaiian studies. Many indigenous experts echo the same sentiment that one must be cautious of teaching a culture outside of their own at the risk of perpetuating a false identity. Until true experts of the Hawaiian culture, and more Native Hawaiian educators are hired, steps must be taken to ensure the cultural competence of non-Hawaiian educators.

Case Study #3:

As I mentioned in my introduction, Native Hawaiian children in general have the lowest rates of academic success of all minority groups that populate the Hawaiian Islands (Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate, 1993). They also are underrepresented in the state's institutions of higher education, either as students, faculty, or administrators (University of Hawai'i Institutional Research Office, 1996). To help address these dismal statistics, an initiative, called Ka Lama o ke Kaia'ulu (The Light of the Community), was designed by University of Hawai'i's College of Education professors, Margaret Maaka

and Kathryn Au to improve education for the Wai‘anae Coast community on the island of O‘ahu. Wai‘anae was chosen as the site of the initiative for its high rate of Native Hawaiian students, yet low rate of Native Hawaiian teachers.

Ma‘aka and Au believed that one thing that the coast was lacking, like so many other underserved and impoverished communities, was a stable support system in the schools, both for the students and for the teachers. Like other schools with a lack of resources, the teacher turn over rate was exceptionally high and teachers typically left after three years once they received tenure and could transfer to other locations (Mantle-Bromley et al 2010:259). Ma‘aka and Au, along with others who created the initiative proposed the idea of actively recruiting members of the community to participate in a program that would train prospective teachers, in the hopes of them remaining in Wai‘anae after they completed the certification program. Community members were asked to help with the recruiting phase and recommend students that they felt would excel in teaching, *kupuna* (elders) were asked to share their cultural knowledge and expertise in creating lesson plans, and current teachers were asked to help mentor the selected teachers in training. The purpose of recruiting from within the community was that not only do these individuals already possess a cultural understanding of the coast, but their personal connection to the land and the community would encourage them to stay despite the short comings of the public school system. They would also serve as role models to students who come from the coast, and who have low expectations of school. If they could do it, so can the students.

This long-term solution was put into action in three phases. The first phase was the active recruitment phase where the help from members in the community was enlisted

to recruit and retain promising individuals. It was during this phase that they sought out students from nearby community colleges, and helped them apply to the Hawaii's Preservice Teacher Education Program at the University of Manoa. The most difficult part of this phase was in convincing individuals that they had the capacity to teach, and become leaders in their community. The second phase of the Ka Lama initiative involved the creation of a teacher cohort that was designed to help support the teachers in training, and guide them through school together. This included academic and financial aid counselors from post-secondary institutions, transportation to and from town for evening classes, real time experience in Wai'anae classrooms, and assistance with the teacher certification program. The final phase of the initiative involved a Ka Lama Graduate Studies in Education program that was available to students who received their teacher certifications through the Ka Lama program. The graduate program included classes offered at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, where students would receive Master's degrees at the culmination of a two- to three-year period. This final phase of the initiative was constructed to help address the underrepresentation of Native Hawaiians not only among educators, but also among post-graduate students (Mantle Bromley et al. 2003, 260).

Not only was the initiative successful in its mission to recruit and retain teachers from the Wai'anae community, but also many students were able to successfully complete the program, and build a stable core of dedicated teachers committed to the educational wellbeing of the children. Community involvement was a driving factor in the success, as parents, *kupuna*, current teachers, and others all contributed to meeting the expectations of the initiative. In evaluating the initiative, Mantle-Bromley et al.,

concluded that the context and local environment of the communities in which teachers are prepared, matters. Community support for pre-service teachers, active recruitment from the community for future teachers, understanding of the community and its culture, and understanding Native Hawaiian perspectives are all critical to insinuating meaningful change in the education system.

Discussion:

There have been numerous reports on the deleterious affects that mainstream education has on minority students, most especially those from indigenous populations. A common theme from several studies highlighted the ineffective transmission of knowledge to minority students when done within a purely Western framework. In first case study I presented on Native Hawaiian speech in classrooms, Kathryn Au suggested that academic verbal productivity is only possible in classrooms that have appropriate contexts for it (1980:92). She advocates for more awareness amongst educators that often time minority children come from different speech cultures that have different rules, and customs from the dominating Anglo-speech found in most classrooms. It is not just an obvious language barrier that these students face, but also a socio-cultural speech barrier (Au 1980:93). Her findings are critical when creating culturally appropriate instructional lessons, both within and outside the confines of Western systems.

A second study done on culturally appropriate instructional lessons, which was largely inspired by Au's work and the KEEP mission, involved the transmission of the very same reading exercise designed for Native Hawaiian children, to a group of Navajo children in Rough Rock, Arizona. Ultimately it proved to be ineffective as researchers

found that they could not apply the same techniques to this group of Navajo children because of the difference in cultural thinking (Vogt 1987:280). Researchers found that did not collaborate in groups well, or peer assist one another as Hawaiian children had. When misbehaving or displaying disruptive behavior, in contrast to Hawaiian children, Navajo children responded better to indirect warnings from the teacher, rather than direct verbal warnings. Finally, and perhaps the most beneficial to their reading comprehension, Navajo students benefited more from reading lessons that discussed the material holistically, and in cyclical time. Although researchers had at first tried to employ the technique of discussing segments of the story, in a linear fashion, at the suggestion of a Navajo teacher they changed the instructional event to fit the students' cultural styles. In taking into account these cultural differences, they were able to successfully create a new lesson program that improved the literacy of Navajo students, while employing the same anthropological and ethnographic methods that were used in the KEEP study (Lipka & Mccarty 1994:270). As Vogt et al. suggests when comparing the two reading programs above, cultural compatibility is a credible reason for school success, and conversely cultural incompatibility is a credible reason for school failure (1987, 281).

Of those schools that were successful in negotiating culturally compatible lessons included those studied in Ray Barnhardt and Oscar Angayuqaq's article, "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alaska Native Ways of Knowing"(2005). A critique of mainstream education that was spearheaded by native teachers and elders included the compartmentalization of knowledge, and the detached setting in which knowledge, especially scientific, is taught. In revealing the limitations of mainstream education, they suggested alternative ways of thinking and learning science, such as learning in a real-

world context versus a detached classroom setting, or thinking within a holistic, connected framework rather than a compartmentalized one (2005:19). By collaborating with other native teachers, community leaders, and elders, they were able to create a culturally appropriate curriculum that incorporated both Western and indigenous ways of thinking. They were also pioneers in creating special programs such as ethno-mathematics, place-based learning, and native camps (Barnhardt & Angayuqaq 2005:18).

While there is a large push to reform current education systems, there were several works that cautioned against the collaboration of indigenous knowledge and mainstream education including Masturah and Cazden's, "Struggles for Indigenous Education and Self-Determination: Culture, Context, and Collaboration"(2005). While Masturah and Cazden, like many indigenous thinkers, are too critics of compartmentalizing knowledge, it is the actual compartmentalization of *indigenous knowledge* that they warn against. The "institutionalizing" of culture, and failure to capture many of its holistic and deeper meanings is a possible consequence when collaborating between the different frameworks (2005:89). In other words, compartmentalizing indigenous knowledge, and only including it in curricula if it overlaps with Western knowledge is dangerous, and something that was explicitly seen in the second case study that I presented on inaccurate textbooks and teacher knowledge.

Julie Kaomea's study done on the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into mainstream curricula, and the transmission of indigenous knowledge by non-indigenous teachers proved to be a cautionary example for those fighting for self-determination. In her study she found that it was not only colonial discourse found in textbooks that perpetuated a false identity and history of the ancient Hawaiians, but it was also the lack

of authentic cultural knowledge that the teachers' possessed, which contributed to a total perversion of indigenous knowledge (Kaomea 2005:30). Kaomea brings up a very valid point, and one that many educators and anthropologists alike should heed, that one must be cautious of teaching a culture outside of their own at the risk of transmitting false knowledge.

Perhaps a remedy the situation above, Kaomea advocates that although indigenous perspectives and other historically oppressed groups' must be reflected in curricula, it must be equally represented in educator positions and administrative positions. Minorities are constantly underrepresented in positions of power, including those within the education system, yet the current Western system makes it difficult for equal representation. For example, standardized tests and graduate entry-program requirements based on the dominant culture's ideals serve as gate-keeping mechanisms to indigenous and other minority students (Warner 1999:85). Kaomea insists that until true experts of the Hawaiian culture, and more Native Hawaiian educators are hired, non-Hawaiian educators will have to take a supportive role. These sentiments are echoed in the final case study that I presented on the Ka Lama initiative in the coastal community of Wai'anae. Founders noted that a large part of the academic underachievement of Native Hawaiian children in Wai'anae was in large due to lack of motivation and seeing school as a place of opportunity. Motivation to do well in school is difficult when there are no stable support system, a high turn over rate of teachers, and no good role models for Native Hawaiian children. The purpose of the initiative was to create a solid core of Native Hawaiian teachers with roots in Wai'anae that the children could look up to, and become inspired to pursue education as they had. The more teachers and educators that

represented the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds as the students, the more it seemed possible that students could achieve the same.

While it is critical to create more representation of indigenous and minority cultures in the educational system, until then nonindigenous members will have to take a supportive role. In concluding her research, Kaomea strongly suggests for the cultural education of nonnative teachers. She included a number of options such as required college courses on Hawaiian studies, cultural workshops, collaborative efforts with Hawaiian experts, *kupuna* class visits, and more. Part of the reason for the success of the Alaskan Native, Rough Rock, Ka Lama and KEEP schools was the collaborative efforts between teachers, researchers, community members, elders, natives, nonnatives, and experts in other fields and disciplines. Included in this collaborative effort and supportive role were anthropologists, both native and nonnative alike. Although there are mixed reviews on the involvement of anthropologists in the pursuit of sovereignty and self-determination, this demonstrates the extra precaution that we must take as a field when working with indigenous issues. Native Hawaiian scholar and activist, Haunani Trask, vehemently denies the involvement of anthropologists in Hawaiian affairs, as they contribute to the colonial plight of the dominant culture. The fact that indigenous people must rely on foreign anthropologists and lawyers to represent them and strengthen their case shows the true lack of voice that indigenous people hold. Rather than being able to define their own culture, they must enlist the help of those from the dominant culture who are sympathetic to their cause (Tobin 1994:123). Although collaboration is both encouraged and inevitable, as anthropologists working in education and indigenous issues, we must tread lightly and allow the indigenous community to define all

parameters.

Conclusion:

In order to continue down the path of self-determination, indigenous perspectives and other historically oppressed groups' must not only be reflected in curricula, but also equally represented in educator and administrative positions. In the case of the Native Hawaiian and Navajo students striving to improve their reading comprehension, academic verbal productivity was possible in classrooms that had appropriate contexts for it. In taking from these examples, lessons should strive to be culturally appropriate for minority students and indigenous students, such as constructing a learning activity in which their turn taking is culturally specific.

Globally, indigenous populations fighting for self-determination will sometimes have to depend on the assistance and support of non-indigenous people until they are able to gain more political, social, and economical power within the education system and government. However, some suggest that non-indigenous assistance only works affectively when they play the role that is assigned to them by the indigenous (Tobin 1994:123). Others echo this sentiment such as Warner and Kaomea, in that natives should determine the help by nonnatives. Until then, effective teacher preparedness programs in diverse cultural settings must accept that often times the teachers they are training are not of indigenous background. To help remedy this, collaborative efforts are encouraged between natives and nonnatives to navigate the system and create culturally authentic curricula. This brings up the issue of whether or not it is possible to include different perspectives without comparing it to Western ideals (Masturah & Cazden 2005:92). That

is not to say that a complete break from Western thought is needed on the path to self-determination, because in reality Western practices will continue to exist within institutions. It should be that indigenous and native people should be able to understand Western practices, but not at the expense of their own cultural knowledge and views (Barnhardt & Angayuqaq 2005:18).

As anthropologists in education, we have no other option but to participate in research-for-action and align ourselves with the *applied* aspect of anthropology. Questions such as “what makes a school fail?” are only useful if those who ask it wish to remedy it (Vogt et al 1987, 281). In her 2004 Council on Anthropology of Education (CAE) Presidential address, Catherine Emihovich urged educational anthropologist and ethnographers to embrace our activist roots (McCarty & McKinley 2009:14). As researchers we are trained to think holistically, taking into account the historical, social, political, and economic processes that continue to marginalize groups today. Our background not only allows us to become involved in the research phases of studies, but also to become engaged in policy, interpretation, and implementation. While on paper it makes perfect sense for applied anthropologists to become engaged in indigenous affairs, we know all too well the resounding voice that natives possess. Although we may be working towards the same goal of self-determination, we must always be sensitive to the needs and wants of indigenous people. They should be able to forge their path to self-determination, with us as their supporters.

In conclusion, we must remind ourselves of King Kamehameha III mission to establish *he aupuni ho'ona'auao*, or a kingdom of learning (Kauikeaouli 1825). Without education, knowledge, and learning, we are but a kingdom of sand.

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