

Learning from the Past to Grow the Future

Of 'Āina-Based Education



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Introduction

Since 2009, Hau'oli Mau Loa Foundation has been engaged in learning about and demonstrating the value of 'āina-based education as a way of teaching and learning by supporting community partners delivering 'āina-based education to keiki in their communities. As a result of this work, the Foundation adopted a goal which it is pursuing, together with partners, that all children in Hawai'i should have access to high quality 'āina-based education. They are pursuing this goal through an initiative called [Hope for Kids](#) which, to date, has included two cohorts of partners, 'Ekahi and 'Elua. This paper was commissioned by the Foundation and its partners to help define elements of 'āina-based education as documented in literature and through practice; and to lift up why and how 'āina-based education is essential to teaching and learning in Hawai'i.

Historical Context

Historically, Native Hawaiian people have had a strong connection to their culture and to the 'āina. Unfortunately, much of that changed after the arrival of Captain James Cook and the missionaries in Hawai'i. The status of Native Hawaiians swiftly declined; their population dwindled; they lost their land, language and culture.

The road to reclaiming what they lost has been long, complicated, and is ongoing. Resources and descriptions on the history and policies that influenced the relationship of Native Hawaiians to the 'āina over the years is provided in the attached appendix.

Throughout time, communities have sought ways to reconnect to culture, place, and people, as well as ways to integrate these aspects into education. The experiences of the loss of land and the language, to the reclaiming of both through policies and implementation, has influenced growth for Native Hawaiians and their culture. In Hawai'i, education across all levels, pre-school to post-secondary, continues to progress in moving beyond the Western pedagogy of teaching only within the four walls of a classroom, to incorporating more place-based and 'āina-based education.

Recent Educational Policy

In 2015, Policy 105-7, Hawaiian Education was approved by the Board of Education (Hawaii Board of Education, 2015), and is applicable to public and charter schools. Within this policy was the creation of the Office of Hawaiian Education (OHE). Through OHE, the goals of Hawaiian education shall be to:

1. Provide guidance in developing, securing, and utilizing materials that support the incorporation of Hawaiian knowledge, practices, and perspectives in all content areas.
2. Provide educators, staff and administrators with a fundamental knowledge of and appreciation for the indigenous culture, history, places and language of Hawai‘i.
3. Develop and implement an evaluation system that measures student outcomes, teacher effectiveness and administration support of Hawaiian Education. To ensure accountability, an annual assessment report to the Board of Education will be required.
4. Use community expertise as an essential means in the furtherance of Hawaiian education.
5. Ensure that all in Hawai‘i's public schools will graduate with proficiency in and appreciation for the indigenous culture, history, and language of Hawai‘i.

Through OHE, the Nā Hopena A‘o (HĀ) framework was created as a system-wide policy, BOE Policy E-3 (Hawaii Board of Education 2015, Quin’au 2016). “A framework for the Department of Education, to develop in its employees and students the skills, behaviors and dispositions that are reminiscent of Hawai‘i’s unique context and to honor the qualities and values of the indigenous language and culture of Hawai‘i.” It further supports “a holistic learning process with universal appeal and application to guide learners and leaders in the entire school community.”

The connection between ‘āina and education, as seen with the implementation of HĀ is holistic, and goes beyond educational outcomes to the overall well-being of a student. Hawai‘i educational programs are bringing students to the ‘āina to learn about the land, and to make connections and relationships (pilina) to place and people. It is these pilina that allow students to become more comfortable and confident and have increased student success since the students see themselves within the curriculum. Programs are specific to various regions across the pae ‘āina and allow students to learn about the specific ‘āina by utilizing Hawaiian cultural

practices, thus laying the foundation on the importance of culture. Vaughn (2018) defines ‘āina as three strands, (1) the source – the place itself, (2) people – those connected to that place, and (3) ongoing connection and care – strengthening of connections between people and place. These ‘āina-based education programs have been developed and implemented to do exactly this, to share the integration of cultural practices and values within schools, after-school programs, and across disciplines.

The Case for ‘Āina-based Education

‘Āina-based education in Hawai‘i has adapted and changed over time from its original concept of place-based learning. Maunakea (2020) discusses the inception of ‘āina-based education and how the definition has evolved from its beginnings as place-based learning. Additionally, Saffrey (2019, 35) further describes ‘āina education as “grounded in ‘Ōiwi perspectives”. At its core, ‘āina education focuses on building kanaka-‘āina relationships through all aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy. For place-based education, the importance of place should be defined and reflected upon, especially from the Indigenous perspective where place is entwined with an individual’s identity. As Saffrey (2019, 16) discusses, the current literature of place-based education runs counter to what is innately Hawaiian, “honoring and nurturing the development of kanaka-‘āina relationship which is key to the success and well-being of all our students in Hawai‘i”.

As cited in McInerney, Smyth & Down (2011), Sally Morgan notes, “to know one’s place” involves a heartfelt need on the part of many Indigenous Australians to reconnect with the earth, the spirit, and the culture of their forbearers – to once again walk in the land from which their families were evicted during a century of European colonization. Place is where generations learn who they are and form connections with themselves and their surroundings, while forming relationships, social network, and developing a sense of community.

Additionally, according to Smith (2002, 586), place-based learning is to “ground learning in local phenomena and students’ lived experiences”. In the United States, place-based education has been documented with outcomes such as promoting civic engagement while presenting an education program that is rigorous and meets national standards. Smith (2002) continues to share that traditional pedagogy shifts from understanding the student’s perspective and experience to, instead, teaching from textbooks based on other’s ways of knowing and

knowledge from elsewhere. Furthermore, as cited in Smith (2002, 586), John Dewey discussed the disconnection between school and the lived experience of students.

“From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school, it’s the isolation from life. When the child gets into the school room he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood.”

Due to the specificity of the place-based curriculum being related to the location or place, a generic curriculum is not appropriate to use. Instead, Smith discusses five criteria of place-based learning: (1) teachers and students turn to phenomena immediately around them as a foundation for curriculum development; (2) emphasis on learning experiences that allow students to become the creators of knowledge rather than the consumers of knowledge created by others; (3) students' questions and concerns play a central role in determining what is studied; (4) teachers in such settings act as experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities; and (5) the wall between school and community becomes more permeable and is crossed with frequency. The primary value of place-based learning/education is the way it serves to strengthen children's connection to others and to the regions in which they live.

The understanding of place-based learning is foundational to ‘āina-based education. However, ‘āina-based education goes beyond just being on the land, as noted in the discussion of place for Indigenous peoples. ‘Āina’s relationship to Native Hawaiians has breadth and depth as the ‘āina has the ability to teach and for people to learn from it. According to Ledward (2013, 37), ‘āina based education is defined as “the teaching and learning through ‘āina so that our people, our communities, and our lands thrive. ‘Āina refers to land, sea and air – all that feeds, heals and sustains us.” The pilina between ‘āina and kanaka is reciprocated; as we nurture the ‘āina, the ‘āina nurtures us. The ‘ōlelo no‘eau *Hānau ka ‘āina, hānau ke ali‘i, hānau ke kanaka* – the land, the chiefs, and the commoners belong together (Pukui 1983 #466) exemplifies the important relationship between the ‘āina and the people. Another ‘ōlelo no‘eau *He ali‘i ka ‘āina; he kauwā ke kanaka* – the land is chief, man is its servants (Pukui 1983 #531), further illustrates there is so much to learn from the ‘āina. “‘Āina is our kūpuna’s kūpuna” (Beamer 2014). The

influence that ‘āina has on the kanaka is generational, helping to shape the lens of individuals and how they see the world and make connections. Furthermore, according to Beamer (2014, 61),

"Our collective efforts move us closer to understanding the ways in which our kūpuna knew and were a part of our ‘āina: we explore ancestral memory to recall the models and systems of the past, fashioning the tools of the future and then fitting them to our purpose. As we reawaken to the collective mana of the honua, let's embrace the mehameha of the voyage."

Through funding sources, such as from Hau‘oli Mau Loa Foundation and work led by OHE, there is a continued perpetuation of communities and students of all ages being enriched by the ‘āina. The connection to the ‘āina, the place, and how the student is grounded in that ‘āina, allows for learning and growth opportunities to take place.

Hope for Kids Core Elements

Together with their Hope for Kids partners, Hau‘oli Mau Loa Foundation identified four core elements that these ‘āina-based organizations incorporate through their programs, and when working with youth participants, to further the goal of increasing hope among children by ensuring every child in Hawai‘i has access to quality ‘āina-based education. These core elements are *aloha, ho‘olako, kuleana, and mēheuheu*. And, while not a core element, the value of *mālama ‘āina* is woven throughout this work as well.

Aloha, as defined for Hope for Kids: “Provides opportunities for meaningful engagement with an adult who shares their ‘ike and aloha (knowledgeable, caring and affirming).”

According to Paglinawan, Paglinawan, Kauahi, & Kanuha (2020, 39), “Aloha flows from the great value Hawaiians place on the relationship we have with our ancestors and their ever-present spiritual guidance in our lives. It is through these relationships that we know who we are, what we value, and how we reflect the teaching of nā ‘aumākua. The basis for all of our relationships is our abiding sense of our ancestors and of aloha”. The idea of ‘ike, kupuna, and looking to the source, is resonant with the articles that focused on connectedness to an adult or mentoring, and community.

Having an adult that a student can connect to allows for greater success, and adults that students interact with outside of their familial relationships such as teachers, or other adults that become mentors, are important. These adults help the students develop their connectedness to who they are, build confidence and allow them to help find their sparks and passions (Scales, Benson, & Mannes 2006).

Aloha, as demonstrated through actions, is one way in which individuals interact with each other as a way of creating community. Furthermore, Vaughn (2018, 77) describes the reciprocity of aloha in her book *Kaiāulu* by stating “individuals share what they have in abundance, knowing that, if other community members do the same, everyone benefits without counting or keeping track of who gives what or when.”

As cited in Silva (2017), Kekuewa Kikilo then further discusses the pilina with the ‘āina: “Hawaiian well-being is tied first and foremost to a strong sense of cultural identity that links people to their homeland. At the core of this profound connection is the deep enduring sentiment of aloha ‘āina, or love for the land...The ‘āina sustains our identity, continuity, and well-being as a people...” With the experience of learning through a place-based education, students are given the opportunity to see and recognize their connections to their place, and their cultural roots. Therefore, demonstrating to students that there is not a need to leave their home (Hawai‘i). Educators in some schools are providing their students with the chance to think through the relationship between vocation and place in ways that supersede the common belief in industrial societies that young people need to leave home to find themselves and establish a place in the world. In doing so, these educators provide an additional model of place-based education, again reiterating the importance of place and home.

Beyond this are the pilina that the students build with one another as their class community. According to Koh (2012), during a time that classes came to a garden to do work, both homeroom teachers and students reflected on the collaborative nature. That the cooperation and everyone doing their part allows the class to grow a successful garden, and further allows the work to be more efficient. The building of the community within the class also resonates outward to how the students then interacted with other members in the community and finding ways to provide help when needed. Additionally, the products of the garden were also shared with the community. This resulted in students who were able to develop skills that could directly and positively influence their community and provide needed resources.

The knowledge gathered while working on the ‘āina allows for a greater connection to the past (“ike kupuna) and provides opportunities for learning. Additionally, other Indigenous peoples have found this to be true as well. Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019) found that when working with Cherokee adolescents, they learned (1) the responsibility of passing on the knowledge by being a lifelong learner and teacher; (2) the importance of family and community relationships as a site of learning and support thought “relationships of dependency;” and (3) access to and protection of healthy ecosystems that allow for sustainable water and land-based practices. In doing the research, adolescents were asked the following questions: “What values, practices, relationships and/or responsibilities need to be perpetuated to sustain our lifeways as Cherokee people for generations to come? What are the salient qualities of sustainable communities?” The outcome of the research indicated that the youth held a strong value and importance to land and water. The adolescents can build community and be connected when they are able to spend time in that space. When the use of the Native language is incorporated, deeper relationships are further formed with the land and water. That deep connection with language, cultural traditions, and land, shows how things resonate between each other. This connection is vital to life.

Ho’olako, as defined for Hope for Kids: “Assist children in the development of life skills.”

According to the Search Institute, there are 40 developmental assets (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth 2000) that children can obtain. These developmental assets help them to be able to succeed and to grow. These developmental assets cross over all of the Hope for Kids core elements. It is through the assistance of adults or mentors that these assets are developed over time. Having an adult that a student can connect to allows for greater success.

‘Āina-based education can provide 21st century life skills (Ledward 2013), including critical thinking, problem solving, communication and teamwork, observation and repetition, and learning by doing (Blaich 2003, Ledward 2013). Examples of how these skills are demonstrated include taking water samples and making observations of marine life or being immersed on the ‘āina and working together (Ledward 2013)). Blaich (2003) also found that these skills were learned by all students, those that identified as Native Hawaiian and non-Native Hawaiian students, therefore, demonstrating that ‘āina-based education can be beneficial beyond culturally specific groups.

Kuleana, as defined for Hope for Kids: “Believe in the potential of children and set high expectations for their performance.”

Our ancestors believe that kuleana was bestowed upon an individual, that each individual had potential for a skill or talent, and that this was expressed in the mana they had inherited. However, as Paglinawan, Paglinawan, Kauahi, & Kanuha (2020) discuss, not every individual is ready at the same time to express their mana to fulfill their kuleana. Yet, when they are ready, “they recognize the consequences of the kuleana and are prepared to face the challenges. The main ingredient necessary to this self-transformation is that you have self-knowledge and a sense of your future potential.” Through the experiences that the learners have in ‘āina-based education, they gain an understanding of the importance of kuleana.

When examining school gardens and garden-based learning, there were similar outcomes that were demonstrated by the students regarding the building of a sense of responsibility and how they see the environment (Koh 2012).

Additionally, in looking at the outcomes related to this core element, resiliency is an outcome that is discussed as one related to overcoming the historical trauma that Native Hawaiians have endured. Through the growth of cultural identity, the lāhui has focused on resiliency. Pukui, Haertig, and Lee (1972) discuss ‘oiā’io, defined as absolute truth, and Paglinawan, Paglinawan, Kauahi, & Kanuha (2020) further discuss how it is “the foundation for the resiliency of the Hawaiian people and our relationship to the ‘āina, our homeland. Our deeply spiritual and loving relationship with our ancestors, which extend to other humans – Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians alike – as well as to our ecosystem, has enabled us to survive.” The connection to ‘āina and the health of the ‘āina is parallel to the health and strength of the people.

Mēheuheu, as defined for Hope for Kids: “Provide opportunities to celebrate and find strength in one’s cultural identity. Culture is a foundation for learning.”

The resources that were reviewed that fall into this category discuss the importance of ‘āina-based education and the overall positive outcomes that connecting to one’s culture can have on a learner.

Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019) discuss that land-based education and land-centered literacies are ways to increase cultural identity while leading to self-determination. Ledward (2013) also discussed self-determination as related to these pedagogies. Cultural connection to one's identity can further influence the engagement of student learning – is the student seeing themselves within the curriculum, the environment in which they are learning in? (Saffrey 2019).

As Kukui Maunakea-Forth discusses, it is important to examine outcomes beyond the learning outcomes, the health of the 'āina represents the health of the people. The health of the people is physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. The connection to a specific 'āina is even more important as the example that Hi'ilei Kawelo from Paepae o He'eia has noted, that Huliāmahī is for all, but specifically for the students of Ko'olaupoko, so they understand their 'āina. Students and community should get to know their 'āina first and then understand other 'āina as the relevance allows for greater connection to the place.

Students from Kanu o Ka 'Āina Public Charter School have described engaging in cultural practices such as morning piko where traditional protocols took place, such as chanting in unison, as a way they connected to their school community. It was during this piko that the students asked permission to learn from their teachers, and the teachers welcomed their students (Matsu 2019). The connection for these students was not only to the cultural practices, but morning piko created a sense of community and belonging, the school was a community. As noted by Matsu (2019), alumni from the school would return and express how they missed the protocol and connection.

Cruz (2019), through the examination of teachers who engaged in the Aloha 'Āina curriculum, found that from the teachers' perspective, they see the benefits of the programming. They are able to provide a different way of learning by being with the 'āina and by doing, leading to greater student engagement in learning. This is more evident when the learning on the 'āina is paired with background information, allowing students and teachers to make additional connections between what they pre-learned, and the learning on the 'āina, resulting in greater relevance to the student. As one teacher is quoted in Cruz (2019, 82) "I know for a fact that when you take the kids out in the field if they are not well prepared with the knowledge, it just becomes another activity. But we see from giving them all of the background knowledge through the classroom activities that in the field they make connections that are relevant and show insight and some understanding of the culture and environment".

Looking Forward

Based on the literature review, we know that place-based and ‘āina-based education programs not only have a direct impact on learners and provide opportunities for learner growth but are essential to their growth. We also know that support for organizations providing ‘āina-based learning is essential. In particular, additional resources (both funding and expertise) to support evaluation efforts is needed for ‘āina-based practitioners, including developing an evaluation plan, gathering and analyzing data and being able to disseminate the information to a larger audience. If more organizations are able to disseminate results, the landscape of the literature can be expanded and can provide additional examples of how organizations are successfully utilizing ‘āina-based education (which includes culture) as a focus and positively impacting students. Organizations participating in an evaluation process can also use the data to inform programmatic needs and changes. Further, their findings can continue to help build and strengthen the case for support of ‘āina-based education.

Lifting up of all efforts that focus on the well-being of students, on a holistic approach, and the recognition that one solution may not fit all students or schools is essential to ensuring our educational programs meet students’ needs.

For Hau‘oli Mau Loa Foundation and Hope for Kids partners, the sharing of progress made in ‘āina-based education, as summarized in the final Hope for Kids evaluation report, is a step forward in moving from focusing on Western frameworks to prioritizing Indigenous perspectives and frameworks of how ‘āina-based education is related to long-term success for students at all levels. However, for this to be sustainable, long-term planning as to how to create the internal capacity, support, and infrastructure for the system of ‘āina-based education needs to be completed and then implemented.

By bringing ‘āina-based education to the forefront, we allow for greater social justice to occur, and provide keiki the opportunities to learn and to grow in ways that are meaningful to them. The resulting success, not necessarily defined by western standards, is knowing that these students are grounded and connected to their place and their culture, have strong ties to their community, and have an understanding of and capacity for fulfilling their kuleana.

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Appendix

The following description of policies are not all encompassing, but are some of the main policies that influenced the Kanaka's relationship to 'āina.

Mohala i ka wai, ka maka o ka pua

Flowers thrive where there is water, as thriving people are found where living conditions are good. ('Ōlelo No'eau #2178)

The Great Mahele

Issued by King Kamehameha III (Kauikeouli) it was the first time there would be private landownership in Hawaii. The goal was that there was to be three divisions, to the kings, the chiefs and the commoners through the Kuleana Lands Act of 1850. However, not being accustomed to this Western Idea of being landowners, Hawaiians struggled and instead of keeping Hawaiian lands in the hands of Hawaiians, foreigners were able to take lands through the Resident Alien Act of 1850. This further displaced Hawaiians from their lands, and they not only became the minority within the population but also those who had land. Resulting in the loss of connection to the 'āina. and to the cultural practices. Those who were able to receive lands through the Kuleana Lands Act no longer had the use of the sustainable model of the ahupua'a. Kanaka were losing their land, and their voice within their own country. Foreigners and business owners increased their political power and expansion of the sugar plantations with their accumulation of land.

Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920

Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalanianaole established the commission in 1920 with the goal to return the Hawaiian lands to Hawaiians. According to the Department of Hawaiian Homelands, the first homesteads were established on Molokai in 1921 in the homestead of Kalamaula, and then in 1925 the Ho'olehua homestead was established, with 42 families being awarded.

The purpose of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, which the Congress of the United States and the State of Hawaii declared in the policy of this Act was to enable Native Hawaiians to return to their lands in order to fully support self-sufficiency for Native Hawaiians and the self-determination of Native Hawaiians in the administration of this Act, and the preservation of

the values, traditions, and culture of Native Hawaiians. As Kalanianaole stated in his speech to U.S. Congress, “The Hawaiian race is passing...and if conditions continue to exist as they do today, this splendid race of people, my people will pass from the face of the Earth”

As Hawaiians were struggling with becoming the minority within their homelands, the education system was also changing. During the reign of Kamehameha III, he had to make difficult decisions, while supporting the population. To first ensure that his people were educated, he established the oldest education system west of the Mississippi as a Hawaiian language–medium system in 1841. Additionally, prior to the overthrow beyond the public school system private schools such as Punahoa were being established by missionaries, as well as schools being established by ali‘i, Kamehameha Schools and ‘Iolani. However, with the increase of foreigners, the shifting was not only of the economy in terms of business, but also shifting the education system. Within six decades of the public school system, in 1896, three years after the overthrow, the Hawaiian language ban, Act 57 was implemented, and all schools, both public and private, became English medium schools.

“The English language shall be the medium and basis of instruction at all public and private schools, provided that where it is desired that another language shall be taught in addition to the English language, such instruction may be authorized by the Department... Any schools that shall not conform to the provisions of this Section shall not be recognized by the Department.”
(Benham and Heck 1998) 1896, Act 57

It would then take another 80 years, during the 1978 Constitution Convention where the Hawaiian language was re-established as Hawaii’s official language. Further that Article X, Section 4 Article X, Section 4 stated: “The State shall promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history and language...in the public schools.” “The use of community expertise shall be encouraged as suitable and essential means in the furtherance of the Hawaiian educational program.”

In 1984, through the work of the Hawaiian language community, ‘Aha Pūnana Le‘o, Hawaiian immersion language preschools begin. Three years later, 1987, Kula Kaiaupuni, the Hawaiian immersion program in the Hawai‘i Department of Education begins.