DEMARGINALIZING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH PLACE-BASED LEARNING:

EXPLORING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AT THE LO‘I

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By
Pearl Z. Wu

Thesis Committee:
Hannah Tavares, Chairperson
Eileen Tamura
Julie Kaomea
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To Uncle Nana, who taught me how to watch things grow.
Abstract

Papa lo‘i kalo, a system of integrated wetland taro patches, are serving as sites of place-based learning for schools and the community. The taro plant and the lo‘i inform students about the traditional knowledge of taro farming and create a space in which the power of learning and teaching is most influenced by the community and the place itself. The educational experience at the lo‘i raises questions about the normative content of curriculum, control of education, and approaches to pedagogy. Using student reflections and an oral history with a taro farmer, this thesis will explore the lo‘i as a critical place that has the potential to reshape students’ understanding of Hawai‘i, its history, and the Native Hawaiian community.
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Introduction

Papa lo‘i kalo, a system of integrated wetland taro patches, are finding a place in the educational system in Hawai‘i on school campuses and/or as sites of place-based learning for schools and the community. They are now educational spaces, where taro farmers are teaching students about the plant, the lo‘i, and land management within an ahupua‘a, a traditional land division typically running like a wedge from the mountain to the sea.

The taro plant and the lo‘i inform students about the traditional knowledge of taro farming and create a space in which the power of learning and teaching is most influenced by the community and the place itself. Mahi‘ai kalo, taro planters, most, if not all without teaching credentials, are now serving as teachers; shaping a new image of an educator. With this image, we are invited to broaden and hopefully reconceptualize what constitutes an “educator,” “curriculum” and “education.” The educational experience at the lo‘i moreover raises questions about the normative content of curriculum, control of education, and approaches to pedagogy.

As policies and worldviews shift, the walls of the classroom have changed. Both public and private institutions are looking towards places outside of the classroom such as the lo‘i to teach the complicated history of Hawai‘i, and the struggles and successes of the Hawaiian community. Because of this, the lo‘i serves as a critical place that has reshaped many students’ understanding of Hawai‘i, its history, and the Native Hawaiian community. By looking at the experience at the lo‘i from the student and farmers’
perspective, this thesis will show how experiences outside of the classroom are helping students foster a critical perspective of knowledge, culture, and history among students. Additionally I hope this thesis will encourage more discussion within education about the power dynamics of knowledge and how it influences what is and is not taught in schools.

**Understanding Knowledge and its Role in the Curriculum in Hawai‘i**

This section will focus on pivotal events such as the introduction of formal schooling by American missionaries, the English-only law, the Hawaiian renaissance, and the development of Hawaiian-focused charter schools that have helped to create the socio-cultural and political conditions for the educational paradigm shift towards place-based learning (PBL) in the present. Place-based learning is not a new phenomenon. Education prior to the introduction of formal schooling was predominately place-based; the teaching, learning process, and the transference of knowledge took place within the environment. The educational experience was not isolated from its context. Education was seen as a life long process where the students’ learning was motivated not only by a desire to survive but to also harmoniously integrate into a bigger environment (Pukui, Haertig & Lee, 1972). Kelly describes education during this time as “practical, skill-oriented, socially useful, in tune with reality, environmentally-aware, conserver-cognizant.” and heavily influenced by “learning-by-doing” or what some might say as “on the job” learning (1982, p. 13).

Formal education in Hawai‘i, as practiced in the United States, came with the arrival of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). Before
the 1820s, education was seen as an exchange of skills that occurred within the environment passed down orally from one generation to another. With the introduction of formal education by the missionaries, the exchange of knowledge shifted from occurring in an environment from various elders to an exchange that occurred within the walls of the classroom (Chun, 2006). Education became a separate experience from the day to day lives of the students.

In order to introduce formal education, the missionaries had to convince Hawaiians that they were in need of Christianity and civilization. Christianity and civilization, defined the cultural transformation and the influence that the ABCFM and their sponsors hoped to have on Hawaiians’ worldview (Menton, 1992). It was not the Christianizing of Hawaiians that dismembered the Hawaiian people from their culture, language, and customs and drove the cultural transformation, but rather the missionaries’ narrow view of a civilized society. Although society in Hawai‘i before foreigners had arrived in 1778 was characterized by a “highly developed social system, a complicated land use organization, and a sophisticated division of labor that allowed them to live in communal self sufficiency,” Hawaiians were still referred to as “savages” and in need of the missionaries’ notion of civilization (Menton, 1992, p. 216). Most detrimental in the missionaries’ perception of civilization was the idea that Western notions of civilization was more advanced than Hawaiian society and that their Western understanding of education was also far more effective. With this outlook, the missionaries were able to create a system of formal education in Hawai‘i that was detached from both Hawaiian
culture and designed without the consent or input from Hawaiians.

Hawaiian culture was also separated from students’ school experience through the elimination of the use of Hawaiian language in the classroom. By the middle of the 19th century, English emerged as a language of business, government, and diplomacy and with this came the pressure and policies that encouraged English as the basis of instruction in schools. Fifty years later, the School law of 1896 banned the use of Hawaiian language which was a strong factor in the placement of Hawaiian culture outside of the school walls. The School Law of 1896, commonly known as the “English-only law” stated:

The English language shall be the medium and basis of instruction in 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, either by its rules, the curriculum of the school, or by direct order in any particular instance. Any schools that shall not conform to the provisions of this Section shall not be recognized by the Department (Hawaii Republic, 1896).

Although the law does not directly state that English would be the only language of instruction in the public schools, the law effectively eliminated the use of Hawaiian in the public school system. This law continued to affect the use of Hawaiian language and inevitably the omission of the Hawaiian culture from schools until the 1970s. This intervention over the curriculum demonstrates that curriculum is “never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of nations. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, and some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts,
tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people” (Apple, 1993, 1). In the case of Hawai‘i, the English-only law significantly deligitimated Hawaiian knowledge in the classroom ultimately fostering an alien worldview for Hawaiians in school and it was in the 1960s that significant efforts were made to integrate Hawaiian epistemology and traditional knowledge into the curriculum.

The socio-cultural environment during the 1960s was influential in setting the stage for monumental policies in education that would reinsert Hawaiian knowledge back into the classroom. The 1960s marked a time of land struggles where rural Hawaiian communities and agricultural areas, such as Hana, East Moloka‘i, Waimānalo, Kahalu‘u, faced rapid development. In these areas, ways of living dependent on traditional practices of taro farming and fishing were being threatened by urbanization. These urban encroachments were attempts, as Trask puts it, to rid “their ancestral homeland of all things Native” (1999, p. 66). According to Trask, it was predictable that in these rural areas where the “call for a land base would be loudest” the Native rights movement was born and through this movement the community became more cognizant of Hawaiian identity and self-determination (1999, p. 66). It is this focus on the importance of a strong land-base that would also nurture the Hawaiian educational movement towards place-based learning.

At this time, Hawaiian communities throughout the state also began demanding power over the schooling of their children. The socio-cultural environment of the Native rights movement and the Hawaiian renaissance led to many changes in education that
would occur in the 1980s and 1990s. It was a time, as George Kanahele (1979) describes, when Hawaiians were responding to decades of cultural decline and acculturation. During this period of renewed cultural and political activism in the 1970s, many Hawaiians reconnected with their heritage by learning the Hawaiian language and culture. It was within this socio-cultural environment that the following articles of the Constitutional Convention of 1978, commonly known as the “Hawaiian package” were passed.

<table>
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<th>Constitutional Convention 1978, the Hawaiian Package</th>
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<tr>
<td>Article X, Section 4</td>
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<td>Article XII, Section 5</td>
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<td>Article XV, Section 4</td>
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(Constitutional Convention, 1980)
Of the three articles, Article X, Section 4 (Hawaiian education program) has had the greatest significance on the teaching of the Hawaiian language and the incorporation of Hawaiian culture in the public school classroom. The article mandates that a “Hawaiian education program consisting of language, culture and history” should be provided in public schools (Constitutional Convention, 1980). Although Article X, Section 4, mandated a “Hawaiian Education program” little was said about what “Hawaiian education” should look like or how public schools would find the resources to satisfy this mandate. With the passing of this article came more discussion about Hawaiian education models and many Hawaiian studies programs began to emerge in public schools. Two of the most significant educational outcomes of the Hawaiian Package were the establishment of Ka Papahana Kaiapuni and the kūpuna program in public schools.

In a compelling and groundbreaking analysis of the Hawaiian education program in public schools, Kaomea (2003) found that the textbooks being used to promote the study of Hawaiian history and culture were similar to guide books designed for tourists visiting Hawai‘i. Specifically, Kaomea argued that the textbooks portrayed stereotypical images of Hawai‘i and Hawaiians; images that were very similar to the “exoticized perceptions” projected on Hawaiians by early colonizers (Kaomea, 2005, p.30). In another study, Kaomea found similar problems when she looked at the kūpuna program. Created in 1980, the kūpuna program was designed to offer assistance to teachers, unfamiliar with Hawaiian language, culture, and history.
Kaomea’s critical analysis of the kūpuna program brought to light the influence institutions, such as schooling, can have on our perceptions of ourselves and own culture. In the case of these kūpuna, many were raised during the time before the Hawaiian Renaissance or the passing of the Constitutional Convention of 1978. They were heavily influenced by the missionary legacy and their notions of schooling, many of the kupuna’s perceptions of their own identity and culture were grounded in stereotypes that had been placed on Hawaiian people historically and through tourism. These concerns with the curriculum and kūpuna program were the impetus in which educators became more aware of the misrepresentation of Hawaiian people and culture and questions arose regarding the nature of culture, how it changes, and how the power of a few can skew one’s own understanding of identity.

Ka Papahana Kaiapuni, the Hawaiian language immersion program, was another outcome of the Constitutional Convention of 1978. The program is an example of Hawaiian communities responding to decades of commercial representations of their culture. In an effort of self-determination in 1986, parents of a Hawaiian language preschool program, Pūnana Leo, lobbied for elementary programs for their children. They petitioned for the Board of Education and the Department of Education to set up two Hawaiian immersion kindergartens (Kame‘elehiwa, 1992). This led to the passing of Act 47 in 1986, which rescinded the School Law of 1896 and led to the formation of the first Hawaiian language immersion schools, in 1987. In that year, the State Board of Education agreed to open two kindergarten-first grade combined classes at Waiau
elementary in Pearl City and Keaukaha Elementary in Hilo to serve Hawaiian speaking children from the Pūnana Leo schools. The passing of Act 47 would not have been possible without the lobbying efforts of Pūnana Leo parents and Hawaiian language educators. With the passing of Act 47 in 1986, Hawaiian language was allowed back into the classroom for special projects. Act 47 states:

The department shall regulate the courses of study to be pursued in all grades of public schools and classify them by such methods as [it shall deem] the department deems proper; provided[,] that the course of study and instruction in the first eight grades shall be so regulated that not less than fifty per cent of the study and instruction in each school day shall be devoted to the oral expression, the written composition, and the spelling of the English language[,], except for special projects using the Hawaiian language as approved by the board of education.

(Hawaii State, Session Laws, 1986)

Although Hawaiian Language courses were already taught in both public and private schools as well as at the University of Hawai‘i, Act 47 was a “landmark decision” that finally acknowledged the “fundamental magnitude of language to an indigenous people” and marked the beginning of a concerted effort towards Hawaiian language revitalization (Kahumoku, 2000, p. 178). According to Trask, Hawaii’s initiative to revitalize Native language instruction in schools was both a cultural and political assertion: cultural because it sought “to preserve the core of a way of thinking and being that is uniquely Native, and political because this attempt at preservation takes place in a system where the dominant group has employed legal and social means to deny the use and inheritance of the Native language by Native themselves” (1999, p. 42). Due to the interconnectedness between language and culture, by rescinding the English-only law, it
not only allowed Hawaiian language instruction into public schools but also inspired the development of culture-based curriculums.

Within a decade after the opening of the first Kula Kaiapuni, Hawaiian educators began critically looking at Hawaiian education and the difficulties of promoting a Hawaiian immersion school while still meeting the standards of the Department of Education. The Hawaiian language immersion program was facing limitations and barriers in providing a truly Hawaiian immersion program, consisting of both culture and language. They had limited freedom over the structure and curriculum of their school and had to exist within a western model of education and epistemology (Kahakalau, 2003).

The pivotal events shaping the curricular shift towards PBL reveal that historically the construction of Hawaiian culture and history in schools has been predominantly from a Western perspective and rooted in the commercial representation of Hawai‘i as a place of leisure. Tavares (2003) further elaborates on this misrepresentation of Hawai‘i in her discussion of the Polynesian Barbie. She points out that images such as the Polynesian Barbie in her grass skirt, lei, and long black hair prevail as a prominent image of Hawai‘i, and moreover, these images code Polynesian cultures in “infantile and idyllic ways and in allochronic time-space” presenting Polynesians as “happy in their simplicity” (Tavares, 2003, p. 58, 80). By educating students about different epistemologies, the hope is that commercial Tahitian dancers, grass skirts, and mai-tai cocktails with umbrellas will no longer misrepresent people’s understanding of Hawaiian culture.
The context in which we attempt to foster Hawaiian culture, identity, and epistemology within curriculum design and pedagogy becomes important. Being at the lo‘i, students are exposed to a different epistemology. In Kahana for example, they learn about the genealogical relationship between Hawaiians and the taro plant. Students begin to see this worldview by observing the farmers and how they interact with the plants. This relationship reflects a Native Hawaiian epistemology. In her research to codify Hawaiian epistemology, Manu Meyer found that the following relationships reflected a Native Hawaiian way of knowing:

- **Moana (ocean)**: Spirituality and Knowledge - cultural contexts of knowledge
- **ʻĀina hānua (land)**: That which Feeds - physical place and knowing
- **Lani ulu (sky)**: Cultural Nature of the Senses – expanding empiricism
- **Pōhaku lana (stone)**: Relationship and Knowledge – notion of self through others
- **Pūnawai (water)**: Utility and Knowledge – ideas of wealth and usefulness
- **Malanai (wind)**: Words and Knowledge – causality in language
- **Wao akua (forest)**: The Body/Mind Question – the illusion of separation

One example of how the lo‘i perpetuates a Native Hawaiian epistemology is seen in Meyer’s discussion of the epistemological theme of ʻāina hanua. ʻĀina hanua represents land and the theme draws the connection between physical place and knowing. Recognizing the role that land plays in perpetuating this epistemology reveals the importance of utilizing place-based learning. The case of Hawai‘i and the cultural significance of the land opens up many possibilities of integrating place-based learning as a way to give “fair” balance of a Native Hawaiian epistemology in schools.

Meyer’s research further argues that the current “non- Hawaiian educational milieu” does not nurture Native Hawaiian epistemology. Meyer recognizes that one
system of understanding should not be used over another and that educators should offer “fair and equal time” of a Hawaiian epistemology, since it has become problematic to “fight for a Hawaiian identity in a structure that is set up to assimilate students into a larger hegemonic context” that is predominantly non-Hawaiian (Meyer, 1998, p. 147).

Although Meyer’s research is helpful, it is problematic to assume that her coding of Native Hawaiian epistemology is “the” definition. Due to the profound nature of her work, there is a tendency to assume that Meyer’s work is the only representation of Hawaiian epistemology and many utilize her work as the quintessential definition of epistemology and disregard the possibility that multiple Hawaiian epistemologies can and do exist. Meyer describes this as the “homogenizing impulse” (2003, p. 85). “All Hawaiians are not alike, nor is there one static way of interpreting our fluid modes of knowledge production . . . . Although it is tempting to offer universalisms that would portray Kānaka ʻŌiwi as one people and one mind, to do would ignore the multiple realities within this group” (Meyer, 2003, p. 85).

Charter School Movement

By the 1960s, the romantic ideals of public schooling was eclipsed by the realization of both school’s impersonal organization and the fact that not all families were joining the middle class. In the early 1990s, the charter school movement in the continental United States pushed to localize education and move away from large impersonal institutions. Charter schools, with very diverse missions and distinct cultural foundations, began to appear in many poor and working class communities with very
diverse missions, many founded on distinct cultural foundations. In Hawai‘i, one of the main driving forces of the Hawaiian-focused charter school movement was the push for Native Hawaiians themselves to determine their own education.

The charter school movement, driven by cultural forces, challenged how the state organized public schools. The charter school agenda sought to strengthen diverse groups through smaller community-based forms of schooling rather than the “cafeteria like offerings” public schools had used to address cultural differences (Fuller, 2003, p. 20). Like the charter school movement in the continental United States, the movement in Hawai‘i was driven by the idea that schools should be smaller and community-based. In the early 1990s, Charles Toguchi, Hawaii’s State Superintendent of Education made an effort to “deregulate” more authority to the school level through a process called School Community-Based Management (SCBM). SCBM process attempted to give local schools more control over curriculum, personnel, and the budget process. Although it failed to fulfill its goal, the SCBM inspired the charter school movement in Hawai‘i. Frustrated with the need to seek waivers from administrative and BOE policies, two schools, Waialae Elementary and Lanikai Elementary, became the first “student-centered” schools during the 1995-1996 year. Once Hawaii’s charter school law was enacted in 1999, these two student-centered schools were designated conversion charter schools (PREL, 2005).

In the 1990s, culture-based charter schools emerged as examples of Hawaiian education programs that incorporated not only Hawaiian language, but also Hawaiian epistemology. Although Hawaiian-focused charter schools admission was not race-based,
meaning that the schools were solely for students of Hawaiian ancestry, the visioning of this type of model of schooling was heavily influenced by how Hawaiian students were performing in public schools and the lack of representation of Native Hawaiians in the two conversion charter schools. According to a study written in 2003 by Kana‘iapuni and Ishibashi, *Left Behind? The Status of Hawaiian Students in Hawai‘i Public Schools*:

- Schools in areas with high concentrations of Hawaiians were typically corrective action schools with less experienced teachers.
- Hawaiian students were overrepresented in the special education system.
- Absenteeism was more prevalent among Hawaiian students.
- Standardized reading and math test scores for Hawaiian students were the lowest among all major ethnic groups in the DOE.
- Graduation rates of Hawaiian students were among the lowest in the DOE and grade retention rates are among the highest.

(p.3-4)

This movement towards culture-based charter schools was heavily influenced by Kahakalau who saw that curricular freedom, a characteristic of all charter schools, was necessary in order to truly develop a Hawaiian education program. When the Department of Education began to offer funding for start up community-based charter schools, communities saw this as an opportunity to initiate models of education, distinctly different from the status quo (Kahakalau, 2003). Modeled after Freire’s notion of education as “transformative of conscientization,” these charter schools looked towards culture as a means to transform the educational experience of students (Kahakalau, 2003). One way in which many of the Hawaiian-focused chartered schools incorporated culture was through place-based learning (PBL).

PBL is essentially a Hawaiian/Indigenous way of learning, since our ancestors learned primarily by participating and assisting in the completion of authentic tasks and projects. Another aspect that makes PBL attractive to Indigenous
peoples is the fact that the process can be undertaken with a variety of groups, communities, associations, and multiple communities since it requires collaboration, constructing and synthesizing information, and performance of the gained knowledge, skills and wisdom. 

(Kahakalau, 2003)

Place-based learning exists beyond the realm of charter schools and can now be found in public schools, private schools, and in the university setting. Furthermore, as the socio-cultural environment of Hawai‘i continues to change and people realize the historical and educational context in which Hawaiians and the culture have become marginalized, educators are looking towards place-based learning as a means to decolonize and demarginalize knowledge systems, people, culture, and ways of knowing. This curricular shift towards PBL was part of a greater movement in Hawai‘i known as ‘Ike Āina, the land movement, which pushed to bring back lands for spiritual, educational, justice, health and economic reasons (Meyer, 2003, p.59).

Much like the Native rights movement that was based in rural areas which had a strong land base, described by Trask earlier, the Hawaiian education movement also found its momentum by looking towards the land. Education before the arrival of missionaries was essentially place-based and the numerous struggles and encounters that would serve as the impetus for a Hawaiian self-determined education were all heavily connected to land and place.
Literature Review

Place-based Education

Current actions taken by Indigenous peoples throughout the world demonstrate that a “paradigm shift is under way in which Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing are recognized as constituting complex knowledge systems with an adaptive integrity of their own” (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 9). By utilizing place and community-based learning, traditional knowledge is becoming recognized as a valid, complex knowledge system important to students’ learning in some communities.

PBL has become a means to decolonize and demarginalize knowledge because it adapts the curriculum to unique characteristics of particular places (Smith, 2002). In Hawai‘i because of its adaptability to place, PBL is frequently used to teach the traditional knowledge unique to certain areas of the island. Place-based learning has also been effective for the following reasons:

- Reduction of alienation and isolation by providing a culturally familiar setting for learning.
- Increased engagement, motivation, and mastery of skills.
- Enhancement of self-concept.
- Acquisition of strategies to effect social change.

(Senechal, 2008, p. 103)

Since the Hawaiian Renaissance and the 1978 Constitutional Convention, Hawai‘i has experienced a proliferation of Hawaiian place-based education programs throughout the state. Many mālama ‘āina programs based on traditional practices of fishing and taro farming have emerged. Mālama ‘āina based programs are a form of place-based learning that focuses on caring for the land. These concepts such as aloha ‘āina, love of the land,
and mālama ʻāina, caring for the land, stem from the traditional model established at the time of Wākea. Since the kalo plant is the elder sibling of Hāloa, the first Hawaiian aliʻi nui, a relationship was established that the younger siblings, the Hawaiian people, must care and protect their older brother, the kalo plant. Thus, loʻi based programs embody this concept of mālama ʻāina and help nurture the notion that the kalo plant is the elder sibling of the Hawaiian race.

Using place-based education also allows teachers to contextualize cultural practices and minimizes the tendency to have translated cultural programs that do not consider epistemology. Educating students about Hawaiian cultural traditions through place-based learning is a cultural and political assertion on the status of traditional knowledge and the important relationship Hawaiians have had and continue to have to land. At the same time, however, essentializing cultural traditions such as taro farming, as monoliths for understanding Hawaiian culture and identity should be avoided. In other words, just because a student does not identify with the loʻi does not make them any less Hawaiian. Regardless, providing students’ access to these experiences is important because it may help some students look more complexly at self-identity and Hawaiian epistemology.

**Traditional Knowledge**

Traditional knowledge, often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in scholarly works, is defined as having a "knowledge base acquired by indigenous and local peoples over thousands of years through direct contact with the environment,” including an “intimate and detailed knowledge of plants, animals, and
natural phenomena, the development and use of appropriate technologies for hunting, fishing trapping, agriculture, and forestry, and a holistic knowledge, or ‘world view’ which parallels the scientific discipline of ecology” (Bourque & Inglis, 1993, p. vi).

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is commonly placed in opposition, if not subordinate, to science. TEK and science, based on different principles, should not be opposition, but rather as two different ways of looking at things, each appropriate in different contexts.

Van Eijck and Roth argue that the science and TEK are not in opposition, but “incommensurable forms of knowledge each useful in specific local contexts” (2007, p. 926). By criticizing the hierarchy between TEK and science and discussing notions of truth, Van Eijck and Roth suggest that power has played a role in the marginalization of TEK. Van Eijck and Roth point out that the recalibration of TEK and science is necessary since a knowledge system is based on a truth, which is dictated by those in power.

The concept of “truth,” rooted in the supposed opposition between TEK and science, affects what bodies of knowledge are favored in schools. Knowledge, in other words is based on a “truth” that is influenced primarily by those in power and this power has lied in the hands of the majority who from their perspectives visualize their truth as the only truth. PBL in Hawai‘i shifts the truth to one based on traditional knowledge and by doing so raises questions regarding notions of truth embedded within the educational system of Hawai‘i and school curriculums.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term “traditional knowledge” to
describe the knowledge of taro farming that the farmers share with students that come to visit. Although the term refers to a knowledge system of indigenous people, I am not suggesting that “traditional” knowledge is ancient and never changing. Green’s explanation of tradition depicts well this complexity. She states that tradition has come to represent a “pre-colonial time when Indigenous peoples exercised self-determination.”

According to Green, “tradition is neither a monolith, or is it axiomatically good, and the notions of what practices were and are essential, how they should be practised, who may be involved and who is an authority are all open to interpretation” (Green, 2007, p.26-27).

Traditional knowledge has struggled to find its place in the academic world. The knowledge and the value of knowledge and truth have been guided, in recent decades, by what schools and universities have chosen to omit out of their curriculum. If we look back to the historical educational context, it becomes evident how traditional knowledge was slowly eliminated with the introduction of formal schooling and the banning of the Hawaiian language.

Lo‘i-based programs emerged as part of greater movement connecting Hawaiians back to the land and to the culture. These lo‘i-based programs are being used as classrooms to teach traditional practices and are also providing a context to understand Hawaii’s history. Lo‘i have become part of the educational experience in two different ways. On the one hand, schools are using community-based lo‘i for subsistence or commercial farming, and on the other hand they are also building lo‘i on school
campuses. Many of these lo‘i are located on Hawaiian-focused charter school campuses. Some schools with lo‘i include UH Mānoa, Ānuenue, and Hakipu‘u Learning Center. Some examples of lo‘i in the community are Ka‘ala farms, Papahana Kualoa, Waiāhole, and Kahana Valley lo‘i. This study will focus on a lo‘i-based education program, located in the Kahana community, whose main focus is subsistence farming.
Methodology

I tried to ignore the pressure to write and research a certain way; at some point, I began to realize the importance that I, as a researcher, needed to be a part of the dialogue and that not only my topic, but that how I was choosing to write and research the topic would be a cultural and political assertion against the ideologies that my schooling had suggested was more rigorous and scholarly. Pondering more deeply about this dilemma and my perceptions of knowledge and what makes one type of knowledge more valid than another, I looked back towards my schooling, my upbringing, and all said information based on statistics and defined by numbers as the best way to tell the story and understanding science is far more complex than understanding something like the way taro grows. I questioned this view that statistical data and the utilization of quantitative methods would be a more rigorous approach and more valid. It was much like the dilemma between science and traditional ecological knowledge. With this in mind, I consciously chose to utilize qualitative methods such as interviewing and student reflections. I recognized that like the argument between science and traditional knowledge existed the same dilemma between quantitative and qualitative research. One is not more valid than the other, but rather each reveal different stories.

Having impacted my own life, I wanted to learn more, find out more, and explore the educational impact that the lo‘i was having on students. Concerned with the marginalization of traditional knowledge from formal schools, I recognized that the curriculum shift towards mālama ʻāina programs is necessary for the demarginalization
of Hawaiian ontology and epistemology from our notions of education and schooling.

I explored the phenomena at the lo‘i through different perspectives. By utilizing these different perspectives and strategies of inquiries I was attempting to reduce the risk of conclusions that reflected systematic biases of a specific source or method and by doing so hoped to depict the multi-dimensional nature of the educational phenomena that was occurring at the lo‘i (Maxwell, 2005). The study consisted of written student reflections of Hawaiian Studies 107 students that visited the Kahana lo‘i and oral history interviews with Uncle Nana, a taro farmer in Kahana.

**Student Reflections**

I explored the students’ perspective by collecting written reflections from postsecondary students taking a Hawaiian Studies 107 course at UH Mānoa during summer sessions 2008. The Hawaiian Studies 107 course is an introduction to the “unique aspects of the native point of view in Hawai‘i and in the larger Pacific with regards to origins, language, religion, land, art, history, and modern issues” (Hawaii State, 2010, p. 424). Many students take the class to learn more about Hawai‘i and to fulfill a general education requirement at UH Mānoa; thus the student demographic is quite diverse in these classes. Some students, having moved recently to Hawai‘i, had very little background of Hawaii’s history and exposure to the “native point of view;” others in the class, growing up in Hawai‘i and/or of Hawaiian ancestry, had more exposure. I included non-Hawaiian students, not to disregard the importance for Hawaiian students to connect with Hawaiian ways of knowing, but to suggest that for non-Hawaiians
recognizing other epistemologies fosters a greater capacity for them to understand people from different places and it also helps students find a deeper understanding of diversity.

Many Hawaiian Studies 107 classes, Hawaiian language classes, and many other student groups have visited the Kahana lo‘i. For teachers of these classes, the lo‘i provides a context for students to learn about the land, history, and modern issues facing Hawai‘i. Most kumu, teachers, as a part of the student’s experience going to the lo‘i, request that students complete a written reflection regarding their huaka‘i or excursion. Knowing that this was in place already, I collected these reflections to find a better understanding of the students’ learning. In all, 33 reflections were collected during 2008 summer sessions one and two.

The analysis of the reflection, and making sense of the students’ diverse experiences, was challenging. At first I could not recognize how my own observations and expectations were influencing my analysis of the student reflections. I continued rereading the reflections, hoping I could find some way to present the reflections in a logical way. After discussing this challenge with one of my committee members, she suggested to use a method of analysis in which I cut the student’s reflections and then organized them into similar topics. I was a bit skeptical of the process at first because I did not think it would really help me to see things differently; however, to my surprise, the themes appeared much clearer, making it much easier to see the students’ learning themes. This process allowed the reflections themselves to reveal the story.

Recognizing learning themes was the first step. Although the learning themes were
quickly apparent in the analysis of the reflections, the reshaping of students’ understanding and the claim that the lo‘i was a critical place was hard to see at first in the reflections. How was I going to explain this through the reflections? Would I have to change my argument that the lo‘i was critically shifting the perspective of the students? I kept looking for words such as “critical.” In hindsight, it was pretty ridiculous for me to look so literally for the shift in the students’ worldview. Eventually I was able to notice specific words students used that suggested that the experience at the lo‘i shifted their perspective and helped them to look more critically at history, culture, and communities. I then chose to highlight these words and interpret the students’ word choices.

**Oral History Interviews**

For the taro farmers perspective I realized that their story and the context of their story was important in understanding the farmer’s motivations for sharing their lo‘i for educational purposes. For this reason, I utilized interviewing from a life history perspective. According to Yow, at the core of life history research is the relationship between the researcher and narrator. The researcher is interested in understanding as fully as possible the experiences of others and the meanings the narrator makes out of their life experiences (2005). Oral history methodology allows the relationship between the interviewer and narrator to be a part of the research. Having a previous relationship with Uncle Nana, I felt that oral history interviewing would be an appropriate method to learn Uncle Nana’s story. Oral history interviewing allowed me to be a part of my own research and unlike survey interviewing; it allowed me to ask questions more thoroughly
regarding his life experiences.

Recognizing the power of story telling, I wanted to share Uncle’s story. Uncle Nana’s story contributed to the larger story about taro farmers and Hawaiians who grew up during his time. I will convey Uncle’s Nana’s story and his “place” by stories collected through our interviews. I interviewed Uncle Nana on October 28, 2008 at his lo‘i in Kahana. The surroundings of the interview, his lo‘i, provided meaning for Uncle Nana’s life history. The interviews were tape recorded and focused on his life experiences and his motivations for sharing the lo‘i.
Exploring the Educational Experience at the Lo‘i: Student Reflections

Kahana went through the “classical stages after Western contact of taro to rice to ranching to sugar, and traditional paths to roads, bridges, and a railroad” (Stauffer, 2004, p.7). Kahana was also a favorite of the well-known scholarly team of E.S. Craighill Handy and Elizabeth Green Handy. Their work with Kawena Pukui, Native Planters of Old Hawai‘i (1972), features a great amount of information about Kahana (Stauffer, 2004, p.7). In 1965, the ahupua‘a of Kahana on the island of ‘Oahu, condemned as state lands, became a state park and uniquely a cultural living park in which residents in order to be a part of this community were expected to volunteer and create cultural interpretive programs. In 1997 Ron Johnson, a Kahana resident, inspired the restoration of approximately 4000 feet of the Wailua ‘Auwai situated in the mauka area of Kahana valley. The restoration has been an ongoing process and has succeeded with the support of numerous student groups, community members, volunteers, and Onipa‘a Na Hui Kalo.

I focused this study on the experience of students at lo‘i located in Kahana Valley. These lo‘i are part of the Wailua ‘Auwai Project. Although this thesis focuses on the educational experience at the Wailua ‘Auwai project, it is not claiming that these lo‘i are the best or the only example of place-based learning. The Kahana lo‘i consists of two lo‘i, one run by Uncle Ron and the other by Uncle Nana. Although the primary focus of both of these lo‘i is for subsistence farming, these lo‘i have provided educational experiences for programs and schools such as Kamehameha Schools Ho‘olauna program, East West Center, UH Manoa’s Hawaiian Studies and Hawaiian Language classes, and
Pūnana Leo. A couple years ago, I began helping with the maintenance of the lo‘i and the facilitation of huaka‘i to Kahana valley.

Place-based learning critics often argue that what is taught outside can be taught in the classroom. In the case of the lo‘i and the students experience in their Hawaiian Studies class, the lo‘i was essential in helping students look more profoundly at concepts such as mālama ʻāina and gain awareness about Hawaiian culture. For the HWST 107 students this was a one-day field trip as part of their summer class. Students recognized that the experience outside of the classroom allowed them to understand concepts at a different level; they could feel and learn what had been taught to them in the classroom.

Helping as a group facilitator at the lo‘i, I often heard students mention how they now had a better understanding of what their kumu was talking about in class and how they enjoyed engaging in the course material in a hands-on way. Even with these remarks, I was not sure if students themselves could see or would express the learning that was taking place at the lo‘i; however, after reading over the reflections, the theme of learning outside of the classroom and its value to the students was apparent. It became clear to me that many students felt that their PBL experience at the lo‘i was necessary for them to truly understand the classroom content about Hawaiian culture. On a different level, the students’ reflections also revealed and gave a sense of the experience being one that shifted perspective. I highlighted words that suggested that the lens in which students understood Hawaiian culture, history, and the Native Hawaiian community was changed because of their experience in Kahana.

It offered a great chance to physically work with the ancestral plant of Hawaii
and to further educate and reinforce the terms we learned in class . . . . This tangible review of both the taro plant and the loi system really reinforced the terms in my head. Reviewing with the kumus really has made me remember the process, terms, and areas of the lo‘i. Not to mention the **significance** behind the land and the kalo also.

(student reflection, June 21, 2008)

In this reflection we see the student first discuss how the activities during the day helped reinforce what they were learning in the class. Two words stand out in this reflection, “ancestral” and “significance.” The use of the word ancestral by the student suggests that the student recognizes the connection between the taro plant and the historical genesis of Hawaiian man that traces back to Hāloa. In order to make this connection it also implies that the student recognized that people see and understand the world differently. Although the student would not describe it as such, by understanding the ancestral ties to the taro plant the student is fostering a Hawaiian epistemology. In the last sentence, the student indicates how the experience helped with them understanding the “significance” behind the land and kalo, which suggests that the student found a deeper meaning of the terms taught in class.

Although many students did not directly discuss how the lo‘i experience reshaped their understanding, many did speak about how they found that hands-on activities enhanced their understanding of classroom content. Much of the connection that helps students better understand their ha’awina or lesson is found when students actively engage with the environment, feeling and smelling what they are learning.

*Some of the things you can’t really learn from just reading text or looking at pictures you have to experience for yourself to learn.*

(student reflection, June 21, 2008)
The opportunity to go to Kahana Valley last weekend was an amazing experience that I am grateful for. It was great to finally see how everything in the Hawaiian language and culture is connected to the aina. I think that it is great that the Hawaiian studies department gives the students an opportunity like this, to get hands on learning experience. I’ve always thought that outdoor learning, being in the environment in which you are studying, is the best way to understand and appreciate it.

(student reflection, July 19, 2008)

For some, the hands-on experience helps them to “finally see how everything in Hawaiian language and culture is connected to the aina.” The keyword in the students reflection is “finally,” suggesting that before their visit, the student really did not see the connection between language, culture, and land; furthermore suggesting that the PBL experience itself helped them to see these things.

Role of the Teacher

PBL is also characterized by its ability to shift the role of the teacher. Senechal points out that “the classroom is no longer an entity within itself, totally under the control or guidance of the teacher . . . . The teacher is a part of a cast of different individuals working with students toward a common cause or goal” (2008, p. 101). The source of knowledge is no longer text but rather a place, a plant. At the lo‘i, the teacher’s role changes because they have to physically work with taro farmers and community members. With this “cast of different individuals,” the student-teacher relationship changes and adapts to the context (Senechal, 2008, p. 101).

Another thing I really liked about our visit to Kahana Valley was the ability to learn directly from the kumu. It just felt more enlightening and easier to understand when you were learning side by side with the kumu rather than having chairs and desks and papers in between you and the source of information . . . . The relationship between kumu and student seems a lot closer than the
western style of teaching.

With the changing role of the teacher, the power relationship between teacher and student can also shift. The student not only looked towards the teacher for the answers, but also towards community members and to the outdoor environment for answers. This student specifically discussed how the changing role of the teacher made what they were learning “more enlightening,” suggesting that the students now have a different understanding than they did before their excursion to Kahana. This student also brings up an interesting point about notions of student-teacher relationships in Western and non-Western contexts by suggesting that “learning side by side” is a more Hawaiian style of teaching and to this student an easier way for them to learn about Hawaiian culture.

Mālama ʻĀina

Many students discussed how their visit to Kahana provided clarity on the concept of mālama ʻāina and its relevance to Hawaiian culture. The reflections revealed how potentially effective, with the proper background information, the experience at the lo‘i can be for teaching Hawaiian concepts. It also helped students to recognize the complexity of the concept of mālama ʻāina.

I had never done anything like that before. I have never seen a taro patch in person, even though I was born and raised on the island . . . . After just a day in Kahana Bay, I truly began to understand the meaning behind malama ʻaina. I always used to see that phrase on bumper stickers and on tv commercials, but I did not give it much thought. Saturday was the first time, I experienced any sort of farming, and I discovered that malama ʻāina means if you take care of the land, the land will take care of you. The Hawaiians knew this. They cultivated the land respectfully and never took more than what was necessary from the earth.

This student recognized how powerful the experience at the lo‘i could be that
“after just a day” the student began to “understand the meaning” behind a concept learned in class. By seeing the lo’i and how it functioned, the student could better understand how the traditional practice of taro farming was environmentally-conscious and perpetuated mālama ʻāina. Moreover, with the current trend of sustainability, many students drew connections between sustainability and taro farming. Through elaborate irrigation systems and farming methods, Native Hawaiians perpetuated a sustainable lifestyle in which everything was connected within the ahupua’a.

Everything was structured around the long-term growth of kalo, from utilizing crop rotation, to planting the stem into the ground over and over again . . . The idea of long term sustainable growth was what struck me the most in Kahana Valley. As one of the last undeveloped areas in Hawai‘i, Kahana has demonstrated an ability to live through subsistence farming and community organization . . . . Their community participation and the ability and knowledge of the farmers in Kahana Valley to keep their resources in check for as long as possible is really something that should be taken into account for the rest of the world.

(student reflection from June 21, 2008)

I believe that more people should go on these kind of trips so that they can learn what they can do to sustain themselves . . . If people learned to sustain themselves we wouldn’t have to rely on so many imports.

(student reflection, July 19, 2008).

Sustainability is not a new concept. If we look back to the practices of farmers and the function of an ahupua’a, we see that traditionally Hawaiians used their resources conservatively for survival purposes (Handy & Handy, 1972). Through their huakaʻi many students began to see that Hawaiians in their practice of taro farming and the management of the ahupua’a lived sustainably.
Responsibility as a Hawai‘i resident

Another apparent theme in the students’ learning was their heightened awareness of Native Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture. Many students suggested that after their PBL experience at the lo‘i they better understood their responsibility as residents to learn about Native Hawaiian and Hawaiian culture. In the first reflection the student recognizes that before their visit to their lo‘i, they were “ignorant to the history” of Native Hawaiians. By reshaping their understanding of Native Hawaiians, the student recognizes that they are now a better resident because of it. Some students also recognized the privilege that they have access to experiences such as those at the lo‘i.

I have lived in Hawaii for almost 4 years and I have been quite ignorant to the history, not learning about the native Hawaiians. Not only with Kahana Valley, but Kanewai loi, and this class in general has made me aware of the histories and traditions of Old Hawaii, and I am a better resident now because of it. Even though I signed up for this class solely because of credit satisfaction, I have enjoyed the material and learned a lot.

(student reflection, June 21, 2008)

A lot of people who come to Hawai‘i don’t get to learn the cultural part and experience what it is like to live in Hawai‘i. I feel very fortunate for this opportunity.

(student reflection, June 21, 2008)

Also knowing more of the culture and begin able to respect that makes me feel less of an outsider and more empowered to stop the desecration of the Hawaiian land and culture.

(student reflection, July 19, 2008)

The last reflection portrays an interesting student perspective. The student’s reflection reveals a political lens in which the student is viewing their experience at the lo‘i. This reflection depicts well how the experience can engage students at many
different angles and levels.

Although the lo‘i does help students experience culture, it can become problematic in its construction when students begin to see the lo‘i as the only and most authentic expression of Hawaiian identity and culture. Culture is dynamic and changing, and although the lo‘i can teach a lot about Hawaiian culture it is also important to see that the lo‘i is not the only way to define or understand Hawaiian culture. Not all Hawaiians traditionally farmed taro and not all Hawaiians identify with taro farming.

In summary student reflections revealed that the students saw their place-based learning experience at the lo‘i as an opportunity to better understand the concept of mālama ʻāina and learn more about Hawai‘i. The students found their experience unique because of the hands-on activities, the different role of the teacher in the outdoor environment, and the introduction of the taro farmer and the place itself as a teacher. Although the students only visited the lo‘i once, many found the experience useful in understanding the classroom content. The reflections themselves also provided a view of the different types of students and learners that were in these classes.

In order to see how the experience at the lo‘i was not only helping students better understand classroom context, but also “reshaping” or providing a more critical lens to look at Hawai‘i, history, and Native Hawaiians; I had to look at students’ word choice and look into how they were choosing to describe their experience. By interpreting the student’s choice of these words, I was able to see how the lo‘i is a critical place that transforms students’ understanding of Hawaiian consciousness.
Uncle Nana: the Farmer as Teacher

The backdrop to these students’ experiences is a story of taro farmers perpetuating their own ancestral traditions and willingly sharing their lo‘i to many youth in Hawai‘i. They are crucial to the educational experience that is happening at the lo‘i. Their own stories and how they have lived their life provide a context for students to understand the important changes in Hawai‘i that have happened. For me personally the individual I chose to interview has impacted my own understanding of the lo‘i, what it is like to grow up in Hawai‘i, and the complexities and nuances of understanding Native Hawaiian identity.

I interviewed Clinton Kanahele Gorai, who I fondly call Uncle Nana, a taro farmer in Kahana. I knew that his personal story would help people understand the many lessons taro farmers have to contribute to the educational experience of students who visit the lo‘i. Kahana has changed vastly since the days Uncle spent his childhood there playing in the Kahana stream, mauka or in the mountains, and in the bay. There have been numerous land ownership changes and societal changes in Hawai‘i; however, the Wailua ‘Auwai Project has become a way for the Kahana residents to restore some of the tradition and ways of their ancestors.

Although Uncle Nana now lives in Kahalu‘u, he goes to Kahana almost every day to take care of his lo‘i. Even in his seventies, Uncle Nana still has his restless nature. Almost everyday, rain or shine, he walks down a steep bluff to the well-manicured area where he keeps kalo, red ginger, pink ginger, five finger, gardenias and anything else that...
grows. The only thing that distracts him from going mauka is the ocean, if it’s a good fishing day. Although his life experiences have taken him all over the world, it has also led him back to Kahana, where day-by-day, he restores the area to the place he remembers growing up.

**Learning how Uncle Nana’s World Turned**

There have been many days that Uncle Nana and I have spent working at the lo‘i, sitting and talking. One thing Uncle always talks about is how he is not the type of guy to sit around and watch the world turn. He told me of his simple lifestyle growing up in Kahana, all the kolohe, mischevious, things he used to do, adjusting to the lifestyle in the Army, and then returning back to Kahana after he retired to farm taro. Regardless of the difficulties he faced in life, he never just sat around and watched the world turn. In listening to his past, I learned how Uncle Nana’s life turned.

In 1932, Uncle Nana was born in Kahana Valley on the island of O’ahu. His mother, Maggie Lia Aleka, was fluent in Hawaiian and originally from the Big Island. She spent much of her life on Oahu where she grew up in Kahana as a young girl and later lived with her hānai family in Kahaluu (Minford & Stauffer, 1983). When his mother married Tsuneji Gorai, she settled down in Kahana (Minford & Stauffer, 1983). Tsuneji Gorai immigrated from Japan at the age of 14 to work in the sugar plantation and when it folded up he worked for Mr. Iguchi, “but half the time he just lived off the land and did fishing” (Minford & Stauffer, 1983)

Uncle Nana will be the first to talk about how he never enjoyed school very much.
He attended Ka’a‘awa Elementary School, then Hauula Intermediate School and then a year or two at Kahuku High School. Of all the schools, he most fondly speaks of his experiences at Ka’a‘awa Elementary School. One of the things Uncle Nana looked forward to the most at Ka‘a‘awa School was going to the garden. “We make a victory garden they called it. During the war years, everybody go out there and make garden, we get one period one hour we go out there and make garden” (C. Gorai, personal communication, October 28, 2008).

At a young age, Uncle Nana developed a love for “watching things grow.” I like to farm, I “no like learn in school.” “Some days I just sit in school, in the classroom, because we’re close, Ka‘a‘awa School was close to the beach, I don’t listen to the teacher I lookin out in the ocean, I ready to go fishing” (C. Gorai, personal communication, October 28, 2008). This story about Ka’a‘awa School depicts the dilemma some students have in engaging with learning in the classroom. The story also shows how although Uncle Nana did not like learning in the classroom he valued what he was able to learn in the environment in regards to fishing and farming. Although his immediate life choices did not lead him to farming; he would eventually return to the area he grew up to farm kalo.

After 20 years of active duty in the United States Army, Uncle Nana decided to return to Kahana, the place he grew up, to grow kalo. In the 1990s, Uncle Ron, a Kahana resident, decided to restore the Wailua ‘Auwai to how it used to be. When Uncle Ron first decided to restore the Wailua ‘Auwai, Uncle Nana also decided to restore lo‘i in the
area his parents once lived.

And then I decide, eh this is where, I still remember this is where my dad used to farm, but it was all bushes, you can not even walk like this, you got to crawl through here, come down here, so I went through all the hau bush, walk inside here and then I found, right over there by the corner of the house, yeah. . . . And then right below the hau tree, was all bottles, the kind, liquor bottles yeah, whiskey bottles, sake bottles or whatever, it was all piled up over there, so I knew right away this is where the house was, so then I thought, ahhh, I’m gonna open up, I gonna open up one lo‘i over here. This was all flat over here. This was the first lo‘i, I made, it was all flat over here, after I clean all the bushes, I burn everything, nobody say anything about me burning; I just burn all the, every trees that I cut, I burn um, and then this came nice I said this gonna be my first lo‘i over here, so I start digging yeah after I clean up, the other place, all inside was still all bushy yet, but I like put one lo‘i in, so I can watch the taro grow while I work [chuckles].

(C. Gorai, personal communication, October 28, 2008)

When I heard this story, I began to better understand Uncle Nana’s connection to that ‘āina and what motivates him every morning to take care of his plants and the area. I was also curious as to what he thought motivated students to visit the lo‘i:

Mainly they want to come out and look see how the taro is growing; how the Hawaiians use to plant taro before, but even that goes in one ear come out the other; they rather go in the ho‘i and catch the kind, small little mosquito fish, or look for the crayfish; they’re more excited about that, than learning about how the taro grow . . .What the people use to do before, the old Hawaiians, what they use to do, but you know, young kids inside here they no like, only certain, certain ones, they go in help and help the parents with the lo‘i.

(C.Gorai, personal communication, October 28, 2008).

He also recognized that taro farming is not for everyone and that some students will not connect with the experience. Uncle Nana and I spoke more deeply about this situation when discussing what he expected of his own children and my own parents’ attitude towards education and farming.

Pearl: Sometimes I start thinking, they never like me get into anything like this
Uncle Nana: But you have to, it’s part of survival this.
Pearl: Yeah, but I think, they immigrated yeah.
Uncle Nana: Yeah.
Pearl: So they want me, go school, make straight A’s.
Uncle Nana: Yeah, better job in the future.
Pearl: Yeah.
Uncle Nana: Because this is low paying kind of job or no more education kind job, but then you use what you get in your head to get ahead on things like this.
Pearl: Yeah.
Uncle Nana: Sure, even me too, I wouldn’t like my kids doing this kind of work, you know, full-time. I’d rather them go get better education, go get a better job, maybe later on.
Pearl: But would you like them to go through life, never knowing anything about this.
Uncle Nana: No, they can come down here and learn about this kind of work. Most of my kids, know about this kind, yeah.
Pearl: Like, they could know how for huki.
Uncle Nana: Yeah, they don’t have to come up here, be here everyday, they know more or less what to do, or how to plant, or which kind uh huli for plant, there’s a certain kind of huli you get plant, in order to get good results from the fruit itself. Just like me, I particular what kind huli I put in the ground.

(C. Gorai, personal communication, October 28, 2008)

I grew up with expectations and the understanding that success is marked by high educational attainment and prestigious careers such as becoming a doctor or lawyer. In my conversation with Uncle Nana I hint at my parents’ expectations of myself and he quickly agrees saying he has similar expectations for his own children. I think that a lot of these expectations are rooted in the idea that the knowledge one can learn at the lo‘i has little value and cannot be more important than anything that one could learn in school. Much like this view on traditional knowledge is also the view people have of taro farmers.

The taro farmer’s perspective is often overlooked in academia. People’s
perception of traditional knowledge is heavily influenced by people’s perceptions of farmers and taro farming. PBL experiences are challenging the negative attitude towards taro farmers and farming. Communities and schools are now seeing the lo‘i as an educational space and value what it teaches students. With this curriculum shift, people’s attitudes towards taro farmers are changing.

**The Things Uncle Nana has Taught Me**

In Uncle Nana’s words and actions, I learned several valuable lessons. I realized the importance of context. The context in which one grows up strongly shapes one’s understanding of their culture and history. Defining culture, in this case Hawaiian culture, is complex and often differs between generations. For Uncle Nana the importance of sharing his lo‘i was not about explaining the genesis of Hawaiian man or about teaching Hawaiian values, but about sharing a way of life that Hawaiians use to live, a way of life he grew up with. This to him is Hawaiian culture.

Observing Uncle Nana, during my visits, I noticed his knowledge of different types of plants, how to care for them, and most importantly how to make them happy. How did he learn these things? His knowledge of taro farming was not taught in a formal schooling environment, but he learned by watching others farm. Still today Uncle Nana judges his own intelligence by his poor performance in formal school and disregards the wealth of knowledge that he has learned from the community and the land of Kahana. In his oral history, I found that he learned many things from his elders, the community, and from the land, not directly but by observing.
This oral history forced me to find meaning in the intersection of our lives. Uncle reminded me of the happiness real friendships bring. He taught me to slow down but not too much so, where you are just sitting and watching the world turn by. Through our interviews, I saw the richness of his life, his generous heart, and his love for Kahana. Uncle not only shared with me his knowledge of taro farming and farming in general, but he showed me how to love the land and its plants. Most importantly, he taught me how to watch things grow.
Summary and Conclusion

Recognizing the possibilities of lo‘i-based programs, I wanted to make sense of it and share this phenomena with people that had not recognized the possibilities of incorporating place-based education as part of the educational experience here in Hawai‘i. Attempting to consider this audience and their understanding of Hawaiian culture and history, proved challenging as I felt the need to validate my research and the experiences at the lo‘i with papers and books, while disregarding the stories of the taro farmers. Gaining my knowledge, not only from the university, but also from the lo‘i, I began to value more the knowledge and stories that kūpuna such as Uncle Nana have shared with me and the lessons I learned by working at the Kahana lo‘i.

In the first section of the thesis, I chose to discuss pivotal events that shaped the shift towards place-based learning in Hawai‘i. These pivotal events help the reader to understand what has led to the use of lo‘i-based programs to supplement the classroom experience. I also wanted the reader to see the cultural and political assertion lo‘i based programs are making about the current educational system and furthermore how these programs are a response to what has happened in education historically here in Hawai‘i.

Determining how I would describe the educational exchange that was occurring at the lo‘i was challenging, since it incorporated many concepts such as traditional knowledge, place-based education, and mālama ‘āina programming. I discussed these terms to depict the type of knowledge that was being demarginalized at the lo‘i and to help the reader better understand what was happening educationally at the lo‘i.
My methodology was not as clean as I had first envisioned, but as it began to evolve I recognized that different perspectives were necessary because the Kahana lo‘i experience should not be defined by one perspective. By juxtaposing the stories of the students and the farmer, I could appropriately present the experience. Organizing excerpts from student reflections and stories from the interview coherently so that they could tell the larger story was more laborious than expected.

The analysis of the student reflections revealed more than I had expected. I knew that the concept of mālama ʻāina, the role of the teacher, and Hawaiian culture would be themes; however, I did not expect the experience to have such an impact on the identity of non-Hawaiian students. Several non-Hawaiian students discussed how their experience at the lo‘i helped them better understand their role and identity in Hawai‘i. Also as part of this understanding, students also recognized their responsibility as residents of Hawai‘i and saw learning about Hawaiian culture and history as a basic responsibility. Through the class and the lo‘i experience the students gained a heightened sensitivity towards issues facing Native Hawaiians. The words students chose to use in their reflections revealed that the lo‘i experience was indeed reshaping their understanding of the traditional knowledge of taro farming.

Although the analysis revealed different themes, the reflections did not provide the depth that I had hoped for. While most of the students spoke positively about their experience at the lo‘i, I questioned realistically how much the experience impacted students. I wondered if they saw it as another part of making the grade and whether or not
it was really changing the general mindset of students about traditional knowledge, since
the experience is still outside of the classroom and unfortunately still seen as a
supplemental experience rather than an essential part of the curriculum.

My greatest questions arose regarding identity and culture. How do you promote
traditional practices yet still recognize the dynamic nature of culture? What role does the
experience at the lo‘i have for Native Hawaiian students in forming their identity? The
use of lo‘i as a PBL site has become prominent in student programming for Native
Hawaiian students, requirements for Native Hawaiian scholarships, Kamehameha
Schools programming, and Hawaiian-focused charter schools. What are the motivations
of these educational institutions in exposing the students to lo‘i? What are they hoping to
teach them about Hawaiian culture and identity?

Although PBL can be seen as a liberating and transforming experience for
students, is it really liberating a Hawaiian consciousness in education or is it narrowing
people’s understanding of Hawaiian culture and identity? Now seeing the problematic
nature of PBL experiences that focus on traditional practices, I recognize the necessity for
also a curriculum and a more critical discussion regarding Hawaiian identity and culture.
Regardless, the shift towards PBL experiences is necessary because it provides students
access to different epistemologies and perspectives such as the traditional view of
Hawaiian culture. Hopefully by looking back to practices of their kūpuna, the experiences
help students look forward and do not limit their possibilities. Hawaiian educators are
also urging students to feel free to exist outside of these stereotypical images of
Hawaiians, yet still look back towards their kūpuna and traditional practices for guidance and answers.
References


