

Pu‘uhonua o Pu‘uhuluhulu University

He Kīpuka Aloha ‘Āina no ka ‘Imi Na‘auao

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E ka mea heluhelu,

I have been requested to submit a paper on the radical emergence of Pu‘uhuluhulu University, Maunakea, Hawai‘i. In meeting this request, I have realized that the tenets supporting the radical conception and facilitation of Pu‘uhuluhulu University were and are really grounded in the tenets defining my formative years in an intergenerational home. In this essay I share with you how Pu‘uhuluhulu University transforms how we think of Indigenous education in a real-time Indigenous context, and how Pu‘uhuluhulu University has emerged as a metaphor for my personal journey of transformation as a *kanaka maoli*, an Indigenous Hawaiian.

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes “the practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Shaul)

When I was young, it was emphasized to me by almost everyone in my ‘ohana (family) that education is liberation. In my multigenerational home, however, the definition and understanding of what education entails varied from individual to individual. My Japanese mother focused on the importance of excelling in Western academia, while my Hawaiian father addressed the need to be cognizant of the space and place in which I reside—in his words, being “street-smart.” There was an added layer of my English grandmother pressing the need to be articulate in a world filled with Pidgin jargon, and my Hawaiian grandfather’s desire to transfer *mo‘olelo* (stories and histories), so I could have a strong sense of identity and connection to my past, which is indeed my present and future. Because of all that, coupled with my own need to not only substantiate myself, but to make others around me proud, I’ve always felt like I was chasing approval and shifting my focus to accommodate whoever was taking notice. To validate myself as *educated* I felt I needed to exist and excel in these various roles; always trying, yet sometimes falling a little short. What

I didn't comprehend then was how these multifaceted perspectives on education privileged me to view education through various lenses, strengthening my openness and willingness to learn from anyone and anything with a lesson to be shared.

Although I was indeed privileged with these various views on education, I have been in the Western academic setting since I was four. After completing my compulsory education, I immediately enrolled in higher education, attaining both bachelor's and master's degrees in Hawaiian Studies and Hawaiian Language from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. While enrolled as a graduate student, I began teaching at the university at the age of twenty-two and have been an educator by those standards for the past eight years. Because of this, my life and understanding of nuances has in large part been confined by and tailored to theory and idealizing what is referred to as a decolonial existence.

But theory without praxis does nothing more than reinforce the colonial agenda. On July 13, 2019, I began what has been to date one of my boldest attempts at putting theory into praxis. Following a *kāhea* (call out) from *aloha 'āina* (patriotic) colleagues, I packed a bag and left for Hawai'i Island to stand in protection of Maunakea against its proposed desecration by TMT (formally known as the Thirty Meter Telescope). Following the arrests of thirty-eight *kūpuna* (elders) on July 17, the *lāhui* (nation) arrived at the Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu en masse. We went from barely forty individuals to upwards of 7,000 in a matter of days. By the time the weekend approached, I had been holding space in the pu'uhonua for a week. I was exhausted, still fearing the arrival of law enforcement at any given time while trying to maintain my professionalism and conducting my online course for summer session. However, I felt a small sense of relief when I noticed how large our numbers had grown. So for a brief moment on that Saturday, I sat in my brother's 2004 Toyota Corolla and watched as hundreds upon hundreds of individuals made their way in and out of the pu'uhonua. After a few hours of sitting in solitude, I was approached with a request to schedule teach-ins, a common action in social movements. I realized then I had an opportunity to institute something I had only dreamed of. I was about to redefine education. It was then that I decided, with the help of some friends, to establish Pu'uhuluhulu University.

My intent was to educate the masses who showed up to practice *aloha 'āina*, and secondly, to prove that education is not confined within the walls of Western academia. We decided to claim this new institution as an actual place of Hawaiian learning, as opposed to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, which has publicly portrayed itself as an Indigenous space. It is my belief that an Indigenous education is fueled by community approval and acceptance. Unlike the current actions of the University of Hawai'i administration, Pu'uhuluhulu University therefore intentionally allowed and encouraged individuals of our *kaiāulu* (community) to take ownership of the *'ike* (knowledge) they possess, and transfer those knowledge systems to the *lāhui*. Individuals from all backgrounds were welcomed to teach courses, from *ōpio* (youth) to *kūpuna* (elders), on any subject (language, history, science, health, etc.). The methodological approach of Pu'uhuluhulu University

empowered all generations to learn from and transfer knowledge—a pedagogical approach similar to that of our kūpuna and the educational system they established in the mid-1800s.

After its inception, Pu'uhuluhulu University continued to offer free education to the community for eight months, until the demobilization of the *kia'i* (protectors) within the pu'uhonua due to COVID-19. Roughly one thousand different classes were offered by hundreds of educators of various backgrounds. These classes included, but were not limited to, History of the Hawaiian Language, Native Hawaiian Legal Rights, Mele Aloha 'Āina, Sea Level Rise, and Natural History. Following in the footsteps of Pu'uhuluhulu, other grassroots educational systems were created, including Hūnānāniho University, classes at Kahuku, and free online education and workshops provided by programs such as Kanaeokana.

To relate this back to my upbringing, Pu'uhuluhulu University mirrored what I have always innately wished education would look like, and helped me to realize why my formative years had *waiwai* (value). Through this endeavor, I began to understand that my desire to seek approval of others was actually an act of defining personal accountability to the collective. And indeed, that is exactly the reason why I decided to commit the amount of time and energy that I did to the movement. For the first time in my life, I felt an overwhelming sense of approval from my community, and I understood that Pu'uhuluhulu University gave others who have been seeking similar approval a space and place to find the same for themselves, either through teaching courses or absorbing the 'ike that was presented there.

Moving forward, it is my hope that Pu'uhuluhulu University can be used as a precedent for those who are equally eager to redefine education in this postcolonial era. Given the current situation regarding schooling during COVID-19, we have an opportunity to change drastically and quickly. Like the masses that showed up at Pu'uhuluhulu eager to join the aloha 'āina movement, there is a community of families who have an 'i'ini (desire) to help the 'ōpio of this generation receive the education they deserve without having to be afraid of the pandemic. Now is the time to dream and do. Now is the time to reclaim our *ea* (self-determination). Now is the time to *a'a i ka hula a waiho ho'i i ka hilahila ma ka hale* (step out and do without indifference). As it was expressed to me from a young age, the way of our future is through means of our past. *I ka wā ma mua, i ka wā ma hope.*

Work Cited

Shaull, Richard. Foreword. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, 1970, Bloomsbury, 2014.

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