

## ALL ABOUT 'AHA KUKA

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"Aha Kuka" are Hawaiian-language words meaning "the gathering of councils" or "the studying to discuss." It is the name suggested by Eleanor Williamson of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Honolulu for a statewide conference of "councils" first convened in November 1983, and which has since become an annual event. These councils are advisory to or in a working relationship with the State of Hawaii Department of Education, DOE. The logo, designed by Dave Thorne of the DOE, consists of four people with hands joined talking together. It symbolizes a networking of councils, each with the other.

### 'Aha Kuka: Its Beginning

'Aha Kuka was begun in May 1983, when Ralph Stueber, Director of the Center for Adult and Community Education Development at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, announced that there were funds available for a community education project.

The Center is located in the College of Education and receives funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation for community education development. The Center has funded or provided personnel for a number of community education projects. For example, the Center has funded (1) district and state conferences to promote community education, (2) a demonstration project, in cooperation with the Hawaii Neighborhood Justice Center and the DOE, for conflict mediation in high schools, (3) a training workshop for literacy volunteers, (4) personnel for the State Superintendent of School's Wai'anae Task Force on Quality Education, and (5) personnel for a cooperative effort with the University of Hawaii at Manoa's College of Education and the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum to produce forums and a public exhibit as part of the College of Education's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 1982.

Meanwhile, at an executive council meeting of the Hawaii State Advisory Council for Adult and Community Education, its chairman, Al Temple, expressed the desire of the Council to form a network

with other community groups. Vivian Ing, one of the Council members, responded to both these developments by writing a proposal for a conference that would be a gathering together of all councils. She submitted it to the Hawaii Community Education Association for support. All three organizations approved the proposal and, immediately, community networking began for the planning of 'Aha Kuka 1983.

### 'Aha Kuka: Its Members and Networking

Members of the State Advisory Council for Adult and Community Education are appointed by the Hawaii State Board of Education. They advise the Board on such matters as (1) adult education needs and the needs of the adult community schools, (2) early childhood needs, and (3) community education needs. The Council works closely with the Adult and Early Childhood Section of the DOE and with the principals of the Adult Community Schools. In order to identify and meet community education needs, the Council has continued its networking function with other councils advisory to the DOE and to build relationships with other community agencies and the K-12 schools. Because of its linkage to the Board and the entire DOE, the Council played a key role in the planning and implementation of 'Aha Kuka 1983. The members' networking efforts resulted in participation by persons representing:

1. Adult and Community Education Section, DOE
2. The Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Schools
3. The Hawaii Adult Education Association
4. The Kamehameha Schools
5. The School Advisory Councils
6. The Adult Community Schools
7. The State Commission on Manpower and Full Employment

The members of the Hawaii Community Education Association also engaged in networking activities. This non-profit organization was established to facilitate or conduct activities that promote a better understanding of the dynamics of the community education process and its



relationship to an improved community. The efforts of the members resulted in participation by persons representing:

1. State Volunteers Service
2. Hawaii State Teachers Association
3. District Government Employees Association
4. DOE District Superintendents
5. School Principals
6. Community Councils
7. Students Councils
8. The Hawaii State Parent-Teacher-Student Association
9. Phi Lambda Theta

The networking process didn't end with only these official co-sponsors. By word of mouth, the network grew to include others as well. In addition, a survey was sent out to council and board members of parent/school groups to invite both their participation as planners and their ideas and suggestions concerning which topics and skills, for enhancing community participation, should be presented at the conference. As a result, other planners joined the network. In 1984, the following groups were added to the growing list of sponsors:

1. Hawaii Literacy, Inc.
2. Office of Hawaiian Affairs
3. Youth Development and Research Center
4. State Advisory Council for Gifted and Talented
5. Hawaii State Student Councils
6. Hawaii Council on Legal Education for Youth

Invited to participate in the conference itself were all the members of the various councils at the school level, the district level, and the state level. At the school level they were (1) school community councils, (2) executive boards of the parent/teacher/student group of each public school, and (3) student councils of public high schools. Represented at the district level were members of the school advisory councils. Finally, from the state level, there were representatives from (1) the State Advisory Council for Adult and Community Education, (2) the State Board of Education, and (3) the State Vocational Education Coordinating Advisory Council.

#### **'Aha Kuka: It Becomes a Reality**

Three-hundred and fifty people registered for 'Aha Kuka 1983. Approximately 50 more persons "walked in" on the day of the conference. Twenty-six percent of the total number of persons who registered were DOE personnel and, of these, 93 percent were principals, vice-principals, parent involvers, and educational specialists; seven percent were teachers. Of the 74 percent who were not DOE personnel, 76 percent were members of councils advisory to the DOE or board members of parent groups. Twenty-four percent were members of a variety of community agencies.

Four-hundred and forty people registered for 'Aha Kuka 1984. This time 36 percent were professional educators and 64 percent were participants who identified themselves as parents, volunteers, council members, and members of a variety of community agencies and institutions.

Features of 'Aha Kuka 1983 and 1984 that are likely to be retained in order to provide continuity for future 'Aha Kuka conferences are:

1. The opportunity for the State Superintendent of Schools to personally address the councils and to receive feedback from the councils each year.
2. Linkage meetings of at least two different kinds of councils and corresponding DOE staff. For example, School Advisory Council, District Office, and School Community Councils; Board of Education and the School Advisory Councils, etc.
3. Involvement of the Neighbor Islands through funding allocated for council members to attend 'Aha Kuka and possibly for a "mini conference" for each neighbor island school district
4. Workshops for both equipping council members and for the debate and discussion of current issues in education.
5. Dissemination of a resource booklet as an aid to networking.
6. A newsletter, *'Aha Kuka Update*.
7. Various slide/tape presentations.
8. Followup sessions held between conferences: The 1985 ones to be focused on an upcoming Governor's Conference on Education.
9. Grassroots citizen leadership development in the process of planning 'Aha Kuka. Many people who have never given workshops or taken leadership in planning will continue to be given the opportunity to express themselves outside of their usual roles.
10. On-going conceptualization / documentation / dissemination of 'Aha Kuka concepts, philosophy, processes, rationalizations, etc.

In addition to these conference outcomes, certain emerging characteristics of the planning process itself have come to reflect the 'Aha Kuka philosophy and will be refined and emphasized in the planning of future conferences. Some of these are:

1. The organization of the different groups and individuals, cooperating in the planning and implementation of 'Aha Kuka, into a coalition, rather than into an incorporated group with bylaws, etc., with the result that each year new coalition members are sought and invited.
2. An agreement with the objectives of the conference being the only prerequisite for participating in the planning sessions. To be a planner, one need not "represent" a group. Any individual, expressing only sheer interest, may participate as a planner in any meeting.
3. General Planning Sessions are held once-a-month with their purposes mainly for communication, socializing, and new network possibilities. Activities during planning sessions usually include "warmups," some business, lots of sharing and socializing, and may include a lunch, breakfast, or dinner.



Promoting an environment conducive to community building and maintenance, where the many "hands" of 'Aha Kuka promote networking by informing each other about what is being done, is always a purpose of these sessions. Individuals from the group are asked to lead different parts of a meeting. Styles of leadership are varied but lean toward the informal. Decisionmaking proceeds through consensus. The number attending a given meeting range from 25-60 people (1983 average). It is highly recommended that agencies who do send representatives send two persons. If one cannot make a meeting, the other usually can.

4. Small Committee Meetings are held whenever the chairs call them. Such meetings are task-oriented.

5. It is a fact that people begin work at different times, get off work at different times, leave the island frequently for conferences and business on the mainland, live at far ends of the island, etc. The composition of a group may vary from meeting to meeting. However, meetings are held at a centralized location and are characterized by a general agreement on objectives by the members.

6. Committees, as much as possible, include a cross-section of organizations and individuals, thereby enhancing community and networking. No one agency or person takes on a responsibility alone or works in isolation.

### **'Aha Kuka: Benefits the Nation**

'Aha Kuka has implications beyond the State of Hawaii. The Center for Adult and Community Education Development has an obligation to document the 'Aha Kuka concept as it develops here and to share it with the other community education centers throughout the nation. 'Aha Kuka literature was distributed at the 1984 annual conference of the National Community Education Association. Nationally, there is a great deal of interest in how grassroots participation can make an impact on education. 'Aha Kuka is one of many attempts to form partnerships in education. Its very nature requires a process of planning and implementation that is different from the planning and implementation of other kinds of conferences. It demands a different set of skills, a different framework, and different concepts. It is the first of its kind in the nation and exists as a model to be tested, modified, and tried in other places.

As a working model, 'Aha Kuka challenges participants to:

1. Maintain a sense of community among groups whose membership changes from year to year.
2. Plan for a diverse spectrum of persons differing in such ways as type of employment, socio-economic level, amount of schooling, ethnic background, and personal philosophies, but whose common interest is in supporting education throughout the community.
3. Form a coalition of organizations and individuals willing to share expertise and resources, become learners, and exert cooperative leadership.

4. Understand, in depth, the community education process.

5. Describe contemporary society and its needs in a way that facilitates new ways of looking at society and meeting its educational needs.

6. Look objectively at the potential of Hawaii's centralized schooling system, with all its uniqueness and advantages, for providing the means by which students and teachers in local, family, and small groups can generate creative ways to overcome the disadvantages of that same system.

Inquiries regarding the 'Aha Kuka model should be addressed to The Center for Adult and Community Education Development, University of Hawaii at Manoa, College of Education, Wist Hall 204, 1776 University Avenue, Honolulu, HI 96822.

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