

# Nā Pou Kihi: Reestablishing the Corner Post of Our Educational Hale

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The kūpuna kahiko (ancient ancestors) of contemporary Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians) have a long history of valuing learning and ‘imi na‘auao (the pursuit of knowledge). These values are celebrated in our mo‘olelo (history) and exemplified in the phenomenal achievements of our kūpuna kahiko. In the 1800s, the maka‘āinana (general Hawaiian citizenry) were among the most literate in the world with the desire to study the Baibala Hemolele (the Holy Bible) and with the circulation of over 20 Hawaiian language newspapers that fed their love for knowledge and the transmission of our mo‘olelo. Our Ali‘i (Royalty) were among the most educated, often speaking several languages, and were prolific poets, composers of music and song, and writers among all Heads-of-States of their time. Our kūpuna kahiko developed a sophisticated system of resource management ensuring equitable access to the riches of the ‘āina (land), wai (fresh water), and kai (ocean) for all. All members of society had a clear and well-defined role that contributed to the welfare of the community and were well educated for those roles. However, much has changed since Western intrusion that altered the political and thus the cultural, educational, and economic circumstances for Native Hawaiians the years leading up to and following the illegal overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1893.

Contemporary Kānaka ‘Ōiwi face educational and economic challenges. Those with poorer educational qualifications and opportunities are more likely to suffer from behavioral health issues (e.g., substance abuse) and be at risk for chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes and heart disease; Kaholokula, Spencer, Nacapoy, and Dang 2009). A majority of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi are educated by our public school system, which is under-resourced and whose curriculum is often incongruent with the values and learning preferences of many ‘Ōiwi students. Compared to students of other ethnic groups, ‘Ōiwi students are more likely to attend low-quality schools with less experienced teachers, to be overrepresented in special education, to repeat grade levels more frequently, and to have among the lowest graduation rates

(Kana‘iaupuni and Ishibashi 2003). These early educational experiences means less ‘Ōiwi students transitioning to college. Disturbing news given that a higher educational achievement contributes to better quality of life (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality 2015) and a longer life expectancy across all populations (Hayward, Hummer, and Sasson 2015).

There is promising news. Compared to the performance of ‘Ōiwi students enrolled in traditional public schools, those enrolled in culture-based Charter Schools do better on math and reading tests, and they have better attendance and engagement in their education (Kana‘iaupuni and Ishibashi 2003). Across both private and public schools, teachers who employ culture-based educational strategies, versus those who do not, results in ‘Ōiwi students with greater cultural knowledge and values, stronger cultural identity, greater emotional and cognitive engagement in their education, and greater sense of place and community engagement (Kana‘iaupuni and Ishibashi 2005). It is clear that cultural-based educational programs are making a difference for ‘Ōiwi learners.

This special issue of *Educational Perspectives* focuses both on innovative and proven approaches to educating our ‘Ōiwi learners of all ages that are inspired by or grounded in ‘Ōiwi cultural values, perspectives, and practices. From the use of art for healing and educating youth on the social and cultural determinants of health to “growing our own” physicians, scientists, and teachers, the articles in this special issue illustrates how they are erecting Nā Pou Kihi – the metaphoric four corner posts of our educational hale to achieve social justice in education. These four corner posts are *Ke Ao ‘Ōiwi*, *Ka Mālama ‘Āina*, *Ka Hana Pono*, and *Ka Wai Ola* (Kaholokula 2014).

■ **KE AO ‘ŌIWI** ■ here means “the native world.” It highlights the importance of our ‘Ōiwi cultural spaces and practices to our health and wellbeing, which includes our natural resources and sacred spaces; our cultural values and

customs; and our rights as Indigenous Peoples that define us as the host and indigenous population here in Hawai‘i. It refers to our ability to exercise our indigenous prerogatives and aspirations and express our cultural identity, without discrimination or prejudice across all contexts and settings in Hawai‘i. Ke Ao ‘Ōiwi is necessary for ensuring our ‘Ōiwi learners’ cultural identity, preferred modes of living, and aspirations are supported, in fact encouraged, within our educational systems and curricula. Education is an agent of cultural reproduction (e.g., the transmission of cultural values and norms from generation to generation) through the process of socialization, intentional or not, occurring within educational settings (Blasko 2003). How do we ensure that Ke Ao ‘Ōiwi -- the cultural environment -- is in place for our ‘Ōiwi learners to reach their full academic potential while promoting ‘Ōiwi values, perspectives, and norms? How can our educational milieu foster ‘Ōiwi cultural reproduction?

❧ **KA MĀLAMA ‘ĀINA** ❧ here means “the caring of the land,” which is also a strong Hawaiian value of good resource stewardship. It highlights the importance of the physical environment to Native Hawaiians and their ancestral kuleana (responsibility) to mālama ‘āina. It is a reciprocal relationship because, in turn, the ‘āina provides the needed resources for life. The importance of this pou kihī is illustrated by the ‘ōlelo no‘eau (proverb), *Mohala i ka wai ka maka o ka pua*. Its poetical reference speaks to the fact that “Flowers thrive where there is water, as thriving people are found where living conditions are good” (Pukui and Elbert 1991, 237). In the context of this special issue, Ka Mālama ‘Āina focuses attention on the educational physical environment of ‘Ōiwi learners to ensure the needed resources are in place for them to learn in ways applicable to real-world experiences and relevant to their own lives and cultural context. How are our educational systems and curricula utilizing place-based education (e.g., learning based on the unique history, environment, culture, art, etc. of a particular place) for our ‘Ōiwi learners? At the same time, how are they instilling the kuleana of mālama ‘āina into our learners?

❧ **KA HANA PONO** ❧ here refers to “the right behaviors.” With a nurturing cultural and spiritual environment (Ke Ao ‘Ōiwi) and physical environment (Ka Mālama ‘Āina), learners are able to make better choices that directly affect their health and wellbeing, such as eating healthy, exercising, and fostering positive relationships with teachers,

students, family, and community while avoiding harmful substances (e.g., cigarettes) and other negative influences -- factors that affect a student’s ability to learn and interact effectively with others. Studies of ‘Ōiwi youth and their ‘ohana show that strong positive family relations and supportive home environments are associated with less behavioral health problems (DeBaryshe, Yuen, Nakamura, and Stern 2006) and with greater academic achievement (Carlton et al. 2006). Greater physical fitness is also associated with greater academic achievement (Carlton et al. 2006). A healthy learner, emotionally and physically, and the home environment have an impact on academic performance. How can the educational system and curricula promote individual and family resilience and wellness? How can they involve family and community members and resources to meet the individual learners’ needs?

❧ **KA WAI OLA** ❧ literally means “the life giving waters.” Metaphorically, it highlights the importance of social justice through educational achievement and improved economic conditions for Native Hawaiians. This pou kihī depends on the successful erection of the three previous pou kihī -- Ke Ao ‘Ōiwi, Ka Mālama ‘Āina, and Ka Hana Pono. An educational system can either perpetuate inequities across ethnic groups in society or it can catapult a person to a stronger socioeconomic position (Okamura 2008). The collective aspiration of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi is to achieve the highest level of education and economic success while perpetuating our cultural values, perspectives, and preferred modes of living. How do we as Kānaka ‘Ōiwi initiate systemic change in education?

The articles in this special issue, to varying degrees and in different ways, are helping to erect Nā Pou Kihī to rebuild our educational hale. The rebuilding is being led by Kānaka ‘Ōiwi for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi with ‘Ōiwi perspectives and approaches. They are answering the questions posed here under each Pou Kihī in their teaching philosophies, methodologies, and curricula across different settings and disciplines. In doing so, they are providing greater educational opportunities for our ‘Ōiwi learners and thus positively altering their trajectory and that of their ‘ohana and larger community. The articles represented in this issue are only a small sample of the great work happening in our larger community of ‘Ōiwi educators, learners, and their institutions. ‘A’ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho’okahi!

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