

Importance of Cultural Awareness and Understanding of Students in Hawaii's Schools

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Introduction

In order to be effective teachers and really reach our students and have a positive impact on their lives, we as teachers need to become aware of the culture that we are teaching in. When we are aware and have a clear understanding of the history, traditions, language, and other types of qualities that make up a culture, we as teachers are able to adjust how we teach students because we know about their background. This paper focuses on the elements teachers need and should take into consideration when teaching in Hawaii. Not only do we have Hawaiian students, but a variety of other students who come from Asian and Polynesian ancestry. This paper will provide information on what types of things a teacher in Hawaii should be aware of when teaching here. Not only can this analysis be used just for students of Hawaii, but there will be many common themes and practices that can be transferred and effective in classrooms throughout the world. It is part of a teachers' professional responsibilities "to develop our skills to help student achievement wherever we teach" (DiGiulio, 2004).

From the history of Hawaii to today's contemporary society, this paper will also take a look at the professional dispositions in a few select INTASC Standards that I feel are the most important as a teacher in Hawaii, as much as for others who read this paper.

The following literature review was conducted to provide information about the culture and traditions in Hawaii:

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Literature Review

History and Education Development

Pre-Missionary/Arrival of Influence

Before the missionaries, and before of the “discovery” of Hawaii from Captain James Cook, Hawaii (along with other Polynesian islands and cultures) survived and lived from the land. Hawaiians had lived more than a thousand years without outside influence (Dotts & Sikkema, 1994) and relied on passing down knowledge by elders or *kumus*, who taught those below them about fishing, sailing, and growing plants. A main focus was to appreciate the land in all aspects, the *ahupuah'a* system of using the land for resources from the mountains, plains, and to the sea was an important part of learning about “if you take care of the land, the land will take care of you” (Handy & Pukui, 1958).

Chun describes that there was a high literacy rate among Hawaiians during the “post contact period” (2006). Because of the arrival of American missionaries and the introduction of the Bible, learning how to read was an important skill to have. Many missionaries started their own schools before the more organized school system was created. The call for “Americanism” went through the islands – schools, businesses, politics – to make Hawaii a typical American community (Rayson, 1994). The main focus of the missionaries for Hawaii’s people and students was to learn English (Dotts & Sikkema, 1994).

Pre-Statehood

The Hawaiian Monarchy was founded in 1795. In 1893, there was an overthrow of the Monarchy and a new government was established. On Friday, August 12, 1898, the transfer of sovereignty to the United States took place. Hawaii was no longer an independent nation

(Rayson, 1994). This made Hawaii a territory of the United States. Before and during this time of transfer of status, McKinley High School opened in 1895, followed by Hilo High School in 1905. Because of the immigration of more Americans from the mainland and people from Asian countries to Hawaii, a school system needed to be developed. By 1915, there was at least one high school on each of the major islands and all of the schools emphasized on one language, English (Rayson, 1994). County governments were later established in 1905, to give a voice to the island communities rather than just the voice to the territory making decisions for all people throughout the territory. In the early 1930s, Roosevelt, Farrington, and Kaimuki High Schools were in place (Johnson, 1991).

In July 1936, Mayor George Fred Wright called for a development of playgrounds and an increase in school construction because of the population growth. Filipinos formed the largest single ethnic component of the rural work force by the mid-1930s (Johnson, 1991).

When World War II broke out, schools were closed immediately after the attack on December 7, 1941. Schools on Oahu didn't reopen until about February 2, 1942 while other schools waited from one to two months longer. Because of the war efforts, schools lost about 25% of teachers, and a majority of high school seniors to focus on the war effort. Schools and students developed programs to help out in any way possible through volunteer services (Rayson, 1994).

Post-Statehood and Education Today

Hawaii officially became a state in 1959. With that change in government, Rev. Abraham Akaka (Dotts & Sikkema, 1994) called for a reform to create new political, economic, and social changes. Throughout the 1960s, there was pressure to reform the way public education was and the need to redevelop curriculum. Not only was reform happening in the Pre-K through grade 12

education, but Governor John A. Burns called for a statewide expansion to the University of Hawaii. This expansion was for the addition of eight more campuses by 1973. Burns also helped guide the public school system (through allocating financial support) to become the nation's 9th largest centralized system (Rayson, 1994). In 1968, Hawaii's progressive early childhood education was organized by placing three teachers be in a class that was doubled in size. They called this arrangement, the 3-on-2 classroom. The idea for this was to greatly increase the attention paid to a given child, so that a child might work more nearly at their given pace (Coffman, 1972).

Throughout the 1970s, there was a call for cultural revival and identification (Chun, 2006) of the Hawaiian culture within the schools of Hawaii. Soon Hawaiian Studies programs sprung up within all public and most private schools which taught students about the Hawaiian history and culture (Rayson, 1994). Governor Burns' helped in doubling the amount of money to each school. Teacher salaries increased up to 70%, and the numbers of classrooms grew from 5,400 to 7,400 (Coffman, 1972).

In 1978, the Hawaii Constitution promoted Hawaiian Studies in Article X Section 4 "to further support the progression of Hawaiian history and culture" (Rayson, 1994).

The reforms of the 1970s were generated from the concerns of the school and community because of the number of graduates who did not have reading and other essential life skills needed to function in society (Rayson, 1994).

Currently, the State of Hawaii Department of Education has a partnership with Kamehameha Schools (all students from Hawaiian descent) in order to provide the students of public schools with support to Hawaiian students (State of Hawaii Department of Education, 2008). Other initiatives, such as the P-20 (providing support to students of Hawaii from grades

preschool through the age of 20 in college), is bringing together “various education and community stakeholders under a common goal to support the youth to gain skills and knowledge necessary to contribute...as citizens as well as compete in a global society” (State of Hawaii Department of Education, 2008). To achieve student success to those with Hawaiian or other cultural backgrounds living in Hawaii, schools and teachers need to create and integrate a culturally sensitive learning environment to accommodate the needs of the diverse population of students.

Culture

Knowledge

To be knowledgeable, teachers must understand different types of cultures and students in the school or community in which they teach. By doing this, teachers become more effective and able to achieve not only in their professional success, but of the personal success of their students. INTASC Standard 3 states that:

The professional educator understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

By understanding, identifying differences, developing different approaches, teachers can achieve the desired dispositions and performances and skills.

Dispositions

- All children can learn and help all children achieve success
- Values human diversity
- Respects students as individuals
- Sensitive to community and culture

Performance and Skills

- Designs appropriate instruction for the stages of development
- Focuses on the needs of those with learning differences
- Seeks to understand students' families, cultures, and communities to connect instruction to experiences
- Creates a learning community where differences are respected and accepted

Contributions

Each student brings something unique to the classroom, when teachers make themselves knowledgeable and interested in the cultures of the students that make up their classroom. Teachers can integrate this knowledge to help build a community within the class.

Significance and Values in Culture

To know what type of cultural background a student comes from, learning more about their students, teachers can connect with them to help them participate in the classroom and get to know other students with different backgrounds. In order for teachers to be effective, they must encourage that local culture and service learning partnerships be present in the lives of their students to become sociable and culturally sensitive (State of Hawaii Department of Education, 2008).

Immigration

Because of a tremendous flow of immigrants into Hawaii, there was a need to have more schools. Filipinos started arriving in Hawaii in 1906 and because of an increase of children from plantation workers which filled the schools and caused for the development of more schools to be built in the mid-1930s (Johnson, 1991).

Impacts on Student Learning

Students who may have immigrated with their families to Hawaii may have had a harder time getting use to the new culture(s) of Hawaii. By making students comfortable, knowledgeable, and accepting of each others' cultures and differences, teachers can develop trust and respect between students and the teacher. Getting students to feel comfortable in the classroom helped to improve their learning and desire for learning.

Language

History of Language Usage

Upon Captain Cook's arrival to Hawaii, there was a language developed from Hawaiian to speak to foreigners. Throughout the first arrivals of the missionaries, the Hawaiian alphabet was slowly developed. The Hawaiian alphabet has the fewest sounds of any language and is made up of only 12 letters: a, e, i, o, u, h, k, l, m, n, p, and w.

Current Language Use

Today's use of the language is not as prevalent as it was before Captain Cook and missionary arrival, the use today is being revived. On one of the Hawaiian islands, Niihau, the only language spoken there is the Hawaiian language. Today larger public schools are offering it as a language course for students to learn. Since Hawaii has a variety of cultures, the development of "Pidgin English" was to help immigrants and Hawaiians with the ability to communicate to each other. Pidgin is made up of words not only from English, but from Hawaiian, Portuguese, and other languages from the vast range of immigrants to the islands.

Charter Schools and Hawaiian Immersion

In a few specialized schools, Hawaiian language is the only language spoken up to certain grade levels. The purpose of these schools is for students to be proficient and experts in this “dying” language and to learn the Hawaiian culture, history, traditions, and practices.

Impact and Success

Because of a number of charter and immersion schools, the number of students speaking the Hawaiian language has increased and they are much more knowledgeable in the Hawaiian culture.

Plans for Development

Because the charter and immersion schools are doing so well for Hawaiian students, there have been plans from the State of Hawaii Department of Education to add more schools and put more funds and money into the programs for the students.

Public Schools

Besides offering Hawaiian as a language for students to take, schools need to offer services for students who don't speak English as their first language. All schools offer some sort of English language learning programs. Some students who don't speak English may be placed in certain classes, while most are in an inclusion class to learn the English language and the content.

Becoming More Effective in the Classroom

Instructional Strategies

Chun's (2006) books about understanding Hawaiian culture and learning patterns, contains a list of the patterns of education that Hawaiians seemed to follow when learning

knowledge and skills from a *kumu*. These patterns can easily be applied and carried out within any classroom (not just in Hawaii) because these types of things are universal in any classroom:

1. Observation
2. Listening
3. Reflection
4. Doing
5. Questioning

All these things can be carried out with the right educational tools and experimentation to help in student achievement and learning.

Instructional Strategies and Teacher Qualities

In just about every book about how teachers should be effective and the types of qualities they should possess in order to be effective – there is a great commonality and consensus that a variety of qualities are necessary and there are always particular ones that always appear.

DiGiulio (2004) states that teachers need to be “skillful, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, caring and able to possess the qualities that are essential for student achievement and to student socialization.” Or in the case of living in Hawaii, all of the above and ... “acts of kindness, friendliness, helpfulness... (also known) as the *aloha spirit*” (Wheeler, 2005). Along with our instructional strategies, whenever we spread the *aloha spirit* we are “promoting goodwill among people” (Wheeler, 2005) and by doing so we will be able to pass on to our students the qualities of prosocial interactions (DiGiulio, 2004). By creating a community within the classroom, it helps develop respect between teacher and students and between students and students.

Values on Learning

By developing respect in the classroom, students are going to be more enthusiastic to learn by “teaching through acceptance” it allows for constructive learning and encouragement and good listening (DiGiulio, 2004) amongst teachers and students.

INTASC Standards and Dispositions

By focusing on learning about the community and cultural background of students, we are able to meet the INTASC Standards and Dispositions required of us as teachers. Standard 3, already covered in this paper is just one of the few standards that teachers can really achieve when incorporating the knowledge of student background.

By learning the history, culture, and types of language used in Hawaii (or anywhere in the world), teachers can be successful in all areas of the INTASC Standards. By achieving the standards, and being able to carry out the important and required dispositions, teaching students will become easier and students will appreciate teachers more because of their knowledge about them. By modeling the dispositions, teachers can model to their students how to be respectful to others, create a positive environment, be a contributor, and be willing to make mistakes to learn from them. For a teacher to accomplish this, not only will it become easy to teach the students about content matter, but to also teach them about other important qualities in life that people should possess to help the well-being of others. Not only can teachers model to their students, but can also be a model teacher within the school for other teachers or even administration can look to.

All of the INTASC Standards are important, but in my opinion the following standards are also ones that are important for teachers to really touch upon in Hawaii’s schools and education system:

Standard 2:

The professional educator understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.

Knowledge

- Understanding of students' physical, social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development influences learning and knows how to address them when instructing

Dispositions

- Show respect for the diverse talents of all learners
- Use students' strengths for growth and to learn from errors as an opportunity of learning

By understanding the cultural backgrounds of the diverse student population, will help any teacher help other teachers and other students about culture awareness, differences, and acceptances.

Performance and Skills

- Leads students to next level of development
- Provide opportunities and encourage students to assume responsibility
- Encourages discussion, listening and responding in group interactions

Standard 5:

The professional educator uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction in the classroom.

Knowledge

- Uses motivation from foundational sciences of psychology, anthropology, and sociology to develop and support individual and group work
- Understanding of social groups
- How to help people work productively and cooperatively in social settings

Dispositions

- Create a positive climate in the classroom
- Values students in promotion of each other's learning
- Commitment to development of individual students' abilities

By understanding where students come from, teachers can create a more comfortable and safe environment in the classroom for the students to enjoy learning and grow as learners. In the classroom environment, students can help each other learn more successfully if they are aware of each other's differences and are open to help one another be successful.

Performances and Skills

- Create a functioning learning community, where students work collaboratively and independently
- Possesses strong communication to set classroom goals
- Create a climate of openness, respect, support, and inquiry

Standard 7:

The professional educator plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, the community, and curriculum goals.

Knowledge

- Understanding of theory, subject matter, student development to meet curriculum goals
- Takes into consideration goals, students' experiences and knows how to adjust plans

Dispositions

- Plans must be open for adjustment and revisions based on the needs of the students

For a teacher to be flexible in their teaching and planning is a quality that some teacher's just won't be able to obtain in their careers. To be able to be flexible is a great quality and attribute of a teacher or any type of position not only in education, but in all areas of professions.

Performances and Skills

- Provides learning opportunities that address the variation in learning styles and performance modes
- Creates a variety of levels to meet the developmental and individual needs of diverse learners

Standard 10:

The professional educator fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

Knowledge

- Understands schools as organizations within the larger community

- Understands how factors in the students' environment outside of school may influence students' life and learning

Dispositions

- Concerned about all aspects of a child's well-being
- Consulting with other adults regarding the education and well-being of the students
- Respects privacy of students and the confidentiality of information

Performances and Skills

- Makes activities designed to be a productive learning environment
- Makes links with the learners' other environments by consulting
- Identifies community resources to foster student learning
- Establishes respectful and productive relationships with parents/guardians from diverse home and community situations, seeks to develop partnerships to support student learning and well-being
- Talks and listens to the students, sensitive and responsive, investigates, and seeks outside help
- Advocate for students

Conclusion

From the “discovery” of Hawaii, the influence of missionaries, the growing population from immigration, to the development of a school system, Hawaii’s culture and environment has emerged as one of the most unique in any educational system in the United States. It is pertinent that teachers who work in Hawaii fully understand the importance of having a good perceptive and background knowledge of Hawaii’s history, culture, language, and education. The State of Hawaii Department of Education is continuously working towards the “development of programs and activities that address students’ academic and personal needs in order that they can succeed in school” (State of Hawaii Department of Education, 2008). One of the ways to develop and address the needs of the students is to make sure teachers have a clear understanding of Hawaii’s unique situation to lead the students in successful learning in the classroom, community and contributions to society and the world. With educational tools, strategies, and dispositions, teachers can make students in Hawaii successful, as well as everywhere else that they teach.

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