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To Learn and to Belong: Case Studies of Emerging Ethnocentric Charter Schools in Hawai'i

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Abstract

The fast growing charter school movement may be impeded if charter schools are perceived as a vehicle for stratifying, segregating, and balkanizing an already ethnically, socio-economically divided population. This article defines ethnocentric schools and describes three Native Hawai'ian charter schools. While they are very different in curricula and in emphasis on the Hawai'ian language and other features, they all have strong community support and a high degree of parental

involvement and have access to funds available only for Native Hawaiian programs. It may be easy to support the expenditure of public funds for ethnocentric charter schools in areas like Hawai'i where ethnic minorities have traditionally been underserved. The issues raised in this study may have broader implications for the evolution of American public education. The question is not what criteria to apply to distinguish schools of "good" choice from schools of "bad" choice. In final analysis we must ask, are schools of choice truly schools of choice, or not?

Charter schools are the most rapidly growing force within the school choice movement. Based in a quasi-market ideology that couples parental choice with school autonomy (Whitty, 1997), charter schools have strong political support from both the conservatives and liberals (Kolbert, 2000; Rees, 2000). Some support for charter schools is a thinly disguised attempt to privatize K-12 education. Others support them as a natural extension of the larger school reform movement that seeks to improve public schools for all students (Peterson, 1998). Yet others favor them as one way to avoid vouchers. One social issue that has the potential to impede the progress of charter schools is the possibility of re-stratifying, re-segregating and further balkanizing an already ethnically, socio-economically divided population (Bolick, 1997; Cobb & Glass, 1999; Crockett, 1999; Education Commission of the States, 1999; Shokraii, 1996). In this paper, we define ethnocentric schools and discuss the difficulty in arriving at such a definition, discuss historical factors that have contributed to the creation of ethnocentric charter schools in Hawai'i, describe three ethnocentric Native Hawaiian charter schools, and suggest implications that these cases might have for the charter school movement in general.

Initially, this article was intended as a detailed study of ethnocentric charter schools in Hawai'i in an attempt to isolate common characteristics of such schools. As the reader will see, however, the extent to which such schools are subjectively self-defined led us to focus more on policy issues on which to determine the extent to which further (or expanded) support for such schools might be based.

Ethnocentric Schools

In the past, public schools focused on building democracy and assimilating ethnic minorities into a homogenized, uniquely American culture (Hlebowitsh & Tellez, 1997; Tyack, 1974). Today however, American society has become an increasingly diverse 'salad bowl' where each group remains distinct and yet contributes to a pluralistic American culture (Ravitch, 1990). The charter school movement has become one channel whereby an increasingly diverse public school population can translate demography into curriculum.

Ethnocentrism has been defined as "the feeling that one's group has a mode of living, values, and patterns of adaptation that are superior to those of other groups" (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2000). Ethnocentric schools have roots in the Black Power movement of the 1960's and received impetus as the Council of Black Institutions established several afrocentric schools in the 1970s to teach "children from the standpoint of their centeredness rather than their marginality" (Asante, 2002, np). Later magnet schools became a vehicle for Native American and African American educators to deliver ethnocentric education (Coffey, 2002).

Not all ethnocentric schools are the same. In general, they emphasize change in one or more of these areas: social environment, content, pedagogy, and/or language. Ethnocentric schools may provide a social environment that embraces cultural traditions and interpersonal relationship styles designed to improve student self-esteem and promote cultural identity. For example, students from the Columbus Afrocentric School strive to adhere to principles of "unity (*Umoja*), self-determination (*Kujichagulia*), collective works (*Ujima*), cooperative economics (*Ujamaa*), purpose (*Nia*), creativity (*Kuumba*), and faith (*Imani*)" (Coffey, 2002, p.3). In Hawai'i, students from Makai Charter School "*kuai I ka nu'u*" ("strive to reach the highest"). Ethnocentric schools may also change the content emphasis to reflect the contributions of their ethnic group. For Afrocentric schools that has meant teaching African history and relying on texts written about, and/or by, Black writers. For Native Americans, it has meant viewing history from an indigenous people's perspective. For Hawai'ian schools, it means "to apply the wisdom of our past to critically understand the present and create our legacy for the future" (Makai Charter School Detailed Implementation Plan). Ethnocentric schools may also adopt different pedagogies and teaching styles that they believe better match cultural teaching and learning. For example, the Native American schools may adopt a collectivistic, rather than individualistic, pedagogy that features collaboration and cooperative learning (Capozza, 1999). In addition to these changes, ethnocentric schools may incorporate native languages. Some start from English instruction and incorporate native words. Others may immerse students in their native language and assume that these students will practice English outside of school. We refer here to schools in which all or a major part of instruction is conducted in a language other than English as immersion schools.

In this study, we initially defined ethnocentric charter schools operationally as schools whose mission is the promotion and study of one ethnic group as a means of providing students with a link to their cultural heritage, sometimes including language. (As the reader will see, we eventually conclude that this definition, itself, deserves further scrutiny.) As a result of participation in such schools, students may feel increased pride and confidence in their membership in the group. Ethnocentric schools employ teaching strategies that are congruent with the learning styles and preferred ways of processing and acting on information that reflect the cultural heritage of their target population. The stated goal of such schools is to use these as vehicles for generating improved performance from students underserved by traditional schools. The definition of Native Hawai'ian varies depending upon the organization proffering the definition. For example, as a criterion for service eligibility, both the Kamehameha Schools (a multi-billion dollar private academy funded by the estate of Bernice Pauahi Bishop for the "education of the children of Hawai'i") and the Office of Hawai'ian Affairs (established by the State of Hawai'i to manage funds held in trust for Native Hawai'ians) define as Native Hawai'ian any person who can prove Hawai'ian ancestry, while the Department of Hawai'ian Homes (another agency which assists citizens of Hawai'ian ancestry to take up residency on lands that were originally held by the Hawai'ian monarchy) requires that a person have 50% blood quantum to be considered Native Hawai'ians. Throughout this paper, we use Native Hawai'ian and part Hawai'ian to encompass any person of Hawai'ian ancestry.

Ethnocentric Schools and the National Charter School Movement

National and state charter school reports provide data about the ethnic/racial and 'at-risk' distribution of students in state or chartering districts (Center of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of Texas - Arlington, Texas Center for Educational Research and Center for the Study of Educational Reform at the University of North Texas, & Center for Public Policy at the University of Houston, 2000; Nelson, et al, 2000; Public Sector Consultants Inc., 2001; Wells et al., 1998). So, for example, a Michigan study reports "the percentage of minorities in the study-area charter schools is higher than in both the state as a whole and the traditional public school districts in which the charter schools are located" (Public Sector Consultants Inc., 2001, np). However, Crockett (1999), in her study of California charter schools, found that charter schools were 63% Whiter than their sponsoring districts. Other researchers note that aggregate data reported in such national and state studies may actually mask ethnic stratification (Berv, 1998; Cobb, Glass & Crockett, 2000; Fusarelli, 2000). These reports focus on the issue of White flight and skimming the brightest students into elite schools. They, however, fail to explore the impetus for, and dynamics demonstrated in, the purposeful creation of ethnocentric schools of choice for indigenous students, students of color and minority populations.

Native Hawai'ian Charter Schools

Hawai'i is the only single -district state in the United States. An elected Board of Education (BOE) appoints the Superintendent of Schools, serves as a policy-making governing body and establishes priorities for the allocation of state funds subject to the political realities within which it must operate. In 1994, pressure from school reform advocates resulted in legislation that allowed for 25 existing schools to convert to student-centered schools, specifically avoiding the term charter school. Student-centered schools were given some budgetary control and the opportunity to request waivers of some rules and regulations from the Department of Education (DOE). Only two schools out of 253 chose to convert.

Legislation enabling twenty-five New Century Public Charter Schools including start-ups, school-within-school programs and whole school conversions was passed in April of 1999. By September of 1999, over thirty groups had submitted letters of intent to become charter schools. The new law clearly attracted two distinct populations whose needs were not met by the current system. The first group consisted of Native Hawai'ian communities (50% of the letters of intent from throughout the state). The second overlapping group consisted of programs and groups from the neighbor islands (60%). In Hawai'i the central administration of the DOE and most other government agencies are located on the island of Oahu, geographically small but with the largest population. The other inhabited islands are often referred to as the neighbor islands. The primary reasons for starting charter schools in Hawai'i appear to be autonomy from a distant center of control and the desire to serve a neglected special population of Native Hawai'ian and part Hawai'ian children.

Although some form of state governing board for education exists in all fifty states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, the state of Hawai'i is the only statewide school district lead by a single state superintendent responsible for all public k-12 education accountable to a single Board of Education. This reflects the history of the state that, until as recently as 1955, was controlled by an elite, primarily White oligarchy

of plantation owners. The vast majority of citizens are descended either from displaced Native Hawaiians or from populations imported from Japan, China, Korea, Portugal, and other countries to work in the fields (Langlas, 1998).

Both the organization and the philosophy of the Hawai'i State Department of Education has tended to reflect its heritage, with highly centralized decision-making, dependence upon rules, regulations and rubrics, and the pervasive view that the central administration knows best (Dotts & Sikkema, 1994). The Department of Education oversees two hundred fifty-three schools, one hundred eighty thousand students and sixteen thousand employees (Office of the Superintendent/Planning, Budget, and Resource Development Office, 2001). This is complicated by recent dramatic increases in the number of at-risk students. Since the 1990-1991 school year the total school enrollment has grown by 8.3% while the number of students who receive free or reduced lunches has grown by 66%; are identified as in need of special education services by 97%; and have limited English proficiency by over 70%. Only 49.4% of the school population is considered not disadvantaged (Office of the Superintendent/Planning, Budget, and Resource Development Office, 2001). This comes at a time when Hawai'i leads the nation in unemployment and 31% of Hawai'i's children live in families where no parent has full-time, year round employment (PRB/KIDS COUNT, 2002). Hawai'i has also been cited as having one of the largest average school sizes in the nation and the lowest annual increase in spending for education of comparable states (Office of the Superintendent/Planning, Budget, and Resource Development Office, 2001). It is not surprising that this has resulted in a school system that is given a grade of C or less by 73.9% of the people in the Hawai'i Opinion Poll on Public Education 2001.

Adding to the stresses placed on Hawai'i's school system has been a growing realization on the part of indigenous Hawaiians that society in general (and the school system in particular) was neither meeting their needs nor sensitive to their culture (Buchanan, 1998). Native Hawaiians make up 0.8% and part Hawaiians 17.5% of the population of Hawai'i (Schmitt, 1998). A variety of structures unique to the state of Hawai'i originated with the forcible overthrow of Hawai'ian Queen Liliuokalani. Hawai'ian as a medium of instruction in the public schools was banned in 1896. Beginning in the late 1960s a cultural renaissance began that resulted in the revival of dance, music, cultural practice and language. In 1978 the Hawai'i Constitutional Convention declared Hawai'ian to be one of the two "official" languages of the state and mandated the provision of educational programs in Hawai'ian language and culture. By 1984, a determined group of Hawai'ian speakers successfully launched the first Punana Leo and Kaiapuni Hawai'i program that created preschool language immersion programs (Kaponu, 1998). Legislation in 1986 expanded the immersion program k-12 with the result that immersion programs became, for the first time, a responsibility for the already-overburdened public education system.

Like many social movements, the demand for educational reform initiated in 1983 by "A Nation at Risk," reached Hawai'i (in the middle of the Pacific, 2500 miles from its nearest neighbor) considerably later than on the mainland. Indeed, it was not until 1989 that the Hawai'i Legislature directed Hawai'i's Department of Education to design a School Community Based Management approach to incorporating parents, community leaders and teachers into educational decision-making. The SCBM program, though relatively short lived in Hawai'i, was notable primarily for two features; the extreme limitations placed upon genuine efforts at reform by the central administration and the

incorporation of traditional Hawai'ian values such as *lokahi* (harmony), *kokua* (helpfulness), *laulima* (cooperativeness) by local groups seeking reform. The community-based decision-making that was allowed required consensus and emphasized avoidance of embarrassment over substance (Hawai'i State Department of Education, 2002).

In 1995, the Legislature, recognizing that the Board of Education was unable or unwilling to bring about genuine school reform, passed legislation empowering local groups (under strict limitations) to form "Student Centered Schools" which, while public in most ways, were allowed limited local autonomy under a local school advisory board. These were to become the precursors of the Charter School movement in Hawai'i. Although, typical of Hawai'i, the two conversion schools which were established under this legislation were located in two of the most economically elite areas in the state. The population of students at each of these two schools identified as indigenous Hawai'ians or part Hawai'ian are only 20% and 13% respectively while the largest ethnic populations at these schools are 59% White at one and 42% Japanese at the second. Although nominally locally controlled, these schools operated with virtually the same faculty and school level administration, followed almost all Department of Education curricular, financial, and personnel procedures, remained in the buildings which they had previously occupied and, for many, were distinguishable from traditional public schools in only superficial ways.

In 1999, when the Legislature, abandoning even more aggressively its efforts to bring about change within the state educational system, passed Hawai'i's first real Charter School empowering legislation, the two Student Centered Schools became Hawai'i's first "New Century Charter Schools." Soon, with the encouragement of the Federal Charter School Program, more than 30 groups prepared to compete for the remaining twenty-three charters permitted under the law. This paper, however, focuses on an unexpected (by some) phenomenon which emerged as the various planning groups developed Detailed Implementation Plans (DIPs) in pursuit of the much-sought-after Charters and, thereby, some freedom from the central Department of Education.

Sixty percent of the founder groups were located on islands distant from the state capital (Honolulu) located on the island of Oahu. And, even more striking, 50% identified themselves as being ethnocentrically Hawai'ian. For some, this meant a focus on the language and, indeed, five charter schools are currently conducted all or in part in Hawai'ian (referred to in Hawai'i as "immersion" schools). For others, the focus was on Hawai'ian culture as a nurturing environment (absent, the argument went, in traditional public schools) within which disadvantaged students of Hawai'ian ancestry were more likely to learn. Still a third group sought to apply Hawai'ian epistemology as a means of conveying both traditional and Hawai'ian subject matter.

What began as a law to empower the creation of a limited number of charter schools became a strong force for ethnocentric education in the state. This paper examines three Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter schools on the island of Hawai'i (referred to universally as the "Big Island" to distinguish its name from that of the state).

Methods

We selected three self-defined ethnocentric charter schools operating on the Big Island.

Although all three share certain common characteristics, their significant differences permitted examination of a variety of different approaches. The first—a total immersion Hawai'ian language charter school—is situated on the campus of an existing traditional Department of Education school that conducts its classes in English. While the charter school classes are conducted in the Hawai'ian language, its curriculum and structure reflect traditional knowledge and skills. Having previously operated as a school-within-a-school on its campus, it might appropriately be considered a conversion charter school in many ways. This school—called Makai Charter School (MCS) for this report—is located in a community with an extremely high percentage of Native Hawai'ian residents.

The second, located some sixty miles from MCS, came into existence as Koa Public Charter (KCS) school by combining three components: a 9th – 12th grade school-within-a-school sited on a local traditional high school campus, a pre-existing private primary (preschool – 4th grade) total immersion Hawai'ian language school and a newly-created 5th through 8th grade middle school. Classes are conducted in English, although the Hawai'ian language is heard frequently from both students and teachers. At the time of its formation as a public charter school, the school moved out of its previous site on a high school campus and might appropriately be seen as a start up charter school. The ethos of the school reflects the founders' belief that traditional Western education has both failed Native Hawai'ian children and has eroded traditional Hawai'ian value systems.

The Hilo Charter School (HCS), a start up charter school underwritten by an existing Foundation dedicated to the preservation of Hawai'ian culture and values, lies somewhere between the other two in its educational philosophy. It is conducted in English (although, as above, the Hawai'ian language may be heard everywhere throughout the school) and, while heavily devoted to the "Hawai'ian way of life," is less negative about the perceived failure of traditional Western education. Of the three schools, HCS draws most heavily on its connection to the local community and to the Hawai'ian elders (kupuna) associated with its sponsoring Foundation. It is located on a fourteen-acre site provided by the Foundation and looks forward to significant construction of classrooms and instructional facilities.

In Hawai'i, as a condition of being granted a Charter by the state Board of Education, each school must submit a Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP) setting forth the philosophy, pedagogy and organization of the proposed charter school. We, co-founders of the University of Hawai'i Charter School Resource Center, have followed the development of charter schools in Hawai'i from the start. We began by studying the DIP from each of the three schools, with particular focus on statements about ethnic identity and the values of ethnicity and the use of the Hawai'ian language. From this, we identified the following questions to be directed to the schools:

- What historical factors contributed to the creation of this ethnocentric public charter school?
- What major changes stimulated or discouraged the creation of your school?
- In what way does the actual operation of the school reflect the ethnocentric goals of your mission?
- How are resources (including physical space and human resources) funded? How accurate were the initial estimates of school costs? How are decisions made when funds are insufficient to cover all costs?

- What is the interaction between physical space and school mission?
- What implications do you think your school has for the charter school movement in general?

In addition to interacting closely with these schools in the pre-start-up period and reviewing the DIPs, we visited each school at least once to conduct formal interviews. Students were observed at work and at play. Members of the staff were interviewed. Since two schools have been operating for less than a year and one for two years, objective evaluation of educational effectiveness is not yet available. This report seeks to address (1) the extent to which the affect of the entire school reflects its ethnocentric nature and the goals of its founders, (2) the degree to which the founders and members of each school community have been able to create an institution which reflects the aspirations in their DIP and (3) anecdotal evidence of the extent to which the Department of Education has supported or impeded school development.

The results reported here are less designed to be exhaustive than to identify public policy issues related to ethnocentric charter schools for which further study is indicated.

Case 1 – Makai Charter School

Finding the office of Makai Charter School (MCS) is a challenge. No signs distinguish it from the other classrooms and offices that house both a k-6 regular DOE school and Makai charter school. According to the most recent School Status and Improvement Report (2001), 24.2% of the students at the DOE school are Hawai'ian and another 66.3% part Hawai'ian for a total of 90.5%. Hawai'ian/part Hawai'ian student enrollment at Makai CS is above 94%. This can be compared to the two nearest DOE elementary schools whose student bodies are 46% and 33% Hawai'ian/part Hawai'ian respectively.

The old wooden structures appear to need refurbishing, and the hallway that leads to the MCS office passes a storage area of broken desks and other miscellaneous furniture. The office is a semi-underground area with painted pipes and exposed wiring running along the ceiling. Despite the less than ideal physical surrounding, the principal, secretary, and clerk are productively engaged at their computers and phones preparing for the 8:15am to 2:15 pm school day to begin. They interrupt their normal routine and, joined by a young counselor, all enthusiastically greet us and answer questions with pride about their school.

Originally, MCS was a Hawai'ian Language Immersion school-within-a-school (SWIS) established as continuation of a Punana Leo language immersion preschool, part of the Native Hawai'ian cultural renaissance. As a school within a school, there was tension between the regular DOE and SWIS staff. Becoming a charter school meant new autonomy and self-determination. It empowered the staff to make more decisions about how and what to teach as well as how to schedule their time. This is the first year of operation as a charter school. The 149 students are grouped into seven classrooms (grades k/1, 1/2, 3/4, 4, 5, 5/6, 6). Even though efficiency concerns have forced the school into multi-grade groups, one class still houses 31 students. MCS has adopted a trimester calendar and extended school day that facilitate language learning by replacing summer vacation with fall, winter and summer inter-sessions with the longest a one month summer inter-session. This is also designed to counteract the effects of Hawai'i's short school year, the shortest of any state.

The MCS classrooms contain typical k-6 colorful posters and student work evident on the walls, hanging from the ceiling and stored on shelves around the room. Before these students enter the school for the day, they gather outside on the lawn and ask permission to enter the school. The principal's chant gives them permission to enter and reminds them of their responsibilities to learn and behave. This Hawai'ian protocol is followed each day. In one class a 6th grader stands at the front and spells one of the weekly words and then reads his sentence to the class. In another, the teacher reads a story, and yet in another students work independently on math worksheets. All the teachers at MCS are licensed by the Hawai'i State Teacher Standards Board.

The MCS vision is "Inspired by our past. Empowered by our identity. Prepared for the future." Its mission is to be a "culturally-based indigenous k-6 Hawai'ian Language Immersion school..." that "promotes Hawai'ian ways of knowing to strengthen and revitalize a Hawai'ian identity..." in "experiential-based Hawai'ian learning environments" (DIP). The school's goals for students are the development of literacy and communication skills, personal and social responsibility and thinking and reasoning skills. The Experiential-Based Activity Model (EBAM) designed to help students explore interdisciplinary problems and practical applications of knowledge and information (Moersch, 1994) is one of the main strategies employed at MCS. The Hawai'i Content and Performance Standards II (HCPSII) that are mandated for use by all DOE schools guides the curriculum at MCS along with a commitment to Hawai'ian language immersion, culture and values. Since the Hawai'i Assessment Program has no tests translated into the Hawai'ian language, the school is considering whether to begin formal English instruction earlier (currently being in 4th grade) and thus become more fully bilingual. There is a tension between helping Native Hawai'ian students be successful in the modern world and restoring the native language that may not contribute to economic or social growth.

To assess student progress toward meeting HCPSII, the school has adopted Work Sampling System's developmental checklists (Rebus Planning Associates, 1994) to replace traditional report cards. In addition, MCS has adopted the Hawai'i State Superintendent Accountability Design and the National Study of School Evaluation as part of a school accountability system in addition to adopting a sound fiscal responsibility plan.

Students of any ethnicity may apply to MCS but the full immersion curriculum clearly places practical limitations on entering students. Students who enter without Hawai'ian language preschool experience, have experienced only English instruction in grades k-5, or do not speak Hawai'ian at home are less likely to succeed in the immersion program. The first item on the application asks parents to:

Please initial before the box ALL that are applicable:

The student is currently attending {language immersion school within a school} and will be returning in SY 2002-2003.

The student is a sibling of a returning student.

The student is a transfer student.

[] The student has no Hawai'ian language background. (For Kumu info only.)

The sense of community and inter-generational continuity is an essential part of the Hawai'ian culture. Indeed, the immersion school movement has, from its very beginning within the DOE, provided for mandatory parental involvement. This continues to be one of the most striking characteristics of Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter schools. Before selection is made, parents must complete an agreement to participate form that states:

I (We) understand and agree that my (our) child(ren) will be educated through the medium of the Hawai'ian language. I (We) understand that one (1) formal English class will be introduced in the 4th grade and will continue through 6th grade.

I (We) understand and agree that I (we) actively support my (our) child's (ren's) learning through the availability of Hawai'ian language classes, self-help books with cassette tapes and pre-taped video coursework if I (we) are not yet fluent in the Hawai'ian language.

...enrollment is contingent on space availability and acceptance of the charter school's vision, mission and goal statements.

In addition parents must agree to attend at least three parent meetings a year, two student activities a year and contribute two hours per month in volunteer work for the school. Currently 6% of the students are non-Hawai'ian. Many students come from out of the geographic area.

Case 2 – Koa Charter School

Upcountry Hawai'i offers lush landscape, almost constant wind and alternating sun and clouds and rain. Koa Charter School (KCS) is off the main road unannounced by signs and situated on 6 acres of agricultural land lent to the school by the Department of Hawai'ian Homelands and another 4 acres used in collaboration with the YMCA about 10 miles away. The first site has a house that has been converted into offices: the nerve center of the school. Approaching the office one passes a large warehouse, two large and one small white-tarped quonset huts. The warehouse serves as a computer and technology lab, library, lunch distribution site and instructional space. The two quonset huts are divided into two classrooms each with bookshelf dividers between the rooms. Usually two adults work with eight to twelve students on a variety of skills each morning. The huts have cement floors and slanting sides that have wire strung to hold brightly colored student work. Whiteboards are set along the walls and bright Hawai'ian cloth is suspended from poles that support the hut. One side is usually open but can be closed by fastening tarps at both sides. Most students are in multi-aged groups. School always starts with Hawai'ian protocol like the one described above at MCS.

One formal English class we visited consisted of eight 2nd – 6th graders who were all on about the same level studying English sight words, copying them on one page and using them in sentences on another page. Some students have come to KCS from language immersion programs and others from regular DOE schools, so skills in English and Hawai'ian make instruction a challenge for KCS teachers. Children from the two classes in the hut gathered outside on the lawn before lunch to *pule* (pray); an important activity

at any gathering of Native Hawaiians.

The KCS vision is to become a comprehensive education and service center for Hawaiians of all ages. The school evolved from two antecedents: one a 9th-12th interdisciplinary academy school within a school, and the other a Hawaiian Immersion preschool – 4th grade. These combined and included the intermediate grades to form a k-12 bilingual charter school. Its founders believe that indigenous peoples have the right to design and control their own education and further that Hawaiian people can be successful in the 21st century without giving up their culture, language and traditions. The founders believe that Hawaiian culture has deteriorated because of Western philosophy, religion and laws that advocate that man subdue the earth for profit and personal gain rather than exist as stewards of the land. Another impetus for the school was a desire to slow the out migration of Hawaiians and develop an economy that would allow Hawaiian graduates to remain in the islands. The KCS vision is "strive to reach your highest potential" (DIP). Students and staff at KCS are expected: to love one another, take care of their responsibilities, give and receive help, and be thankful for what they have.

Eighty-eight-percent of the school's 150 students are Native Hawaiians/part Hawaiian. With Federal funding in addition to the per-pupil DOE allotment, the school has been able to operate with 51 'teachers', some licensed and others educational aides or specialists. In addition to grants specifically for Native Hawaiian education, KCS receives Title 1 funds. They serve 15 (10% of the KCS population) special education students and provide gifted and talented activities through a federal Native Hawaiians grant for all students. KCS boasts an attendance rate of 97%, one of the highest in the state. By comparison, the nearest DOE school, a middle school, reports a population of 34.3% Hawaiian/Part Hawaiian. 13.7% of the students at the DOE school participate in special education programs and average daily attendance is 91.4% (Department of Education School Status and Improvement Reports, 2000-2001).

The KCS curriculum is a balance of culturally driven and standards based strategies that emphasize: reading, writing and communication in both Hawaiian and English; the ability to apply math and science; the ability to access, evaluate and use a variety of technologies; to apply critical thinking and problem solving; the mastery of academics, culture and workplace skill; and the development of work ethics necessary for economic self-sufficiency.

Originally, the plan was to have two multi-aged groups of students with approximately 25 elementary, 25 middle and 25 high school aged students in each group. Each group was to remain together for a full year and work on theme-based interdisciplinary projects related to Hawai'i that had social significance for Hawaiians. Through the projects students would demonstrate essential competencies and performance standards including technology and career explorations and would contribute to sustaining healthy economy in the community. Each group would spend two days each week at a lab site; either the Hawaiian Homelands site in the rainy, forest or the dry-land ocean site. They would spend the other two days documenting their projects. On Fridays, students would participate in Student Development Workshops where they would explore careers, engage in community service and work with mentors in the community on personal development such as health and fitness. Everyday Monday through Thursday students would: 1) use the Hawaiian language for opening and closing protocol; 2) have 20 minutes of Total Physical Response that emphasized both the Hawaiian language and

physical fitness; 3) do a problem of the week to assure that students engage in problem-solving and record their work in a journal; and 4) engage in sustained uninterrupted reading for pleasure.

However, when the school opened, the teachers found that it was difficult to meet the needs of k-12 students within a single group. They modified the grouping so one group consist of k-5th grade and the other 6th – 12th grade students. Mornings are used to develop basic skills. Each student is pre tested in reading, writing, and math and multi-aged group according to skill. In the afternoon, these same groups engage in projects. This unanticipated change in the basic format of instruction is too new to allow either the school or the authors to evaluate the extent to which it re-defines the original goals of the founders. It does, however, provoke some suspicion about the ability of even the purest educational philosophy to withstand educational reality and the day-to-day pressures of dealing with undereducated children.

Case 3- Hilo Charter School

Seventy students, 5 core teachers and many volunteer community members conduct classes on an undeveloped fourteen-acre site and several subordinate sites (all located within about a mile of each other) in a community with one of the highest populations of Hawai'ians (and, not coincidentally, one of the lowest economic levels) in the state. One hundred percent of the students at HCS is Native Hawai'ian. Ironically, the location of the sites (some of which front directly on the Pacific Ocean) makes the land on which the school sits some of the most valuable in the state. As the beneficiary of its sponsoring Foundation, Hilo Charter School will, in the future, enjoy facilities beyond the reach of many schools. For now, however, the site is largely undeveloped and classes are held in various structures ranging from a large undifferentiated room in a brand new community hall to an open air structure constructed of pipe frames and agricultural tarpaulins. Students play in an open field combining breathtaking beauty with a total lack of recreational facilities. The campus, as is the case at KCS and several other ethnocentric Hawai'ian schools, is heavily planted with indigenous plants; most of which have economic, cultural or spiritual significance to the Hawai'ian people . Agriculture (and aquaculture), geneology, and navigation/astronomy form the core of the educational experience at KCS and in Hawai'ian culture, which places emphasis on the relationship of people to each other and to the land and the sea.

The school conducts classes for children from 7th through 12th grade. A pre-school operated separately by the Foundation occupies a site at the far end of the campus. A separate large room with few partitions and no interior walls serves as school office, staff workroom, lunchroom, meeting room, etc. Multiple activities are conducted in the single-room community hall. Four or five classes simultaneously meet in corners of the room. One portion of this large space is given over to fifteen new lap top computers that sit on low, Japanese-style tables and are in heavy use by students. The contrast between the rustic nature of the site and the enviable array of technology is striking.

The relative quiet and calm demeanor of the students at the school, even during lunch and recess, was noteworthy. With few teachers in evidence and no intrusive adult supervision during recess free play, students seem happy and self-directed. The end of recess was announced by the blowing of a conch shell (a traditional Hawai'ian call) by one of the teachers. It was interesting to observe the relative ease with which the

students finished their field games (most involving a dodge ball-type game) and returned without complaint to their lessons. Familiar boy-girl posturing often observed on 7th -12th grade campuses was not in evidence. Lessons are conducted with the students sitting on the floor (in traditional local fashion, everyone removes his or her shoes at the door). In some cases, the students were arrayed in semi circles around the teacher. In others, the classes were obviously more diffuse, with the students reclining at short-legged tables while the teacher moved from group to group.

Observers used to traditional classrooms might find the room unsettling. There are no chairs and few tables. There was not a blackboard in sight. No walls separated one class from the others. The room was, however, surprisingly not chaotic. Noise level was at a minimum because there was very little off-task talking between the students in different groups. In fact, it was difficult to find a student whose face was not intently directed either toward the teacher (in those classes where teachers stood at the front) or at his or her work (in those classes where the teacher moved from group to group).

Lessons cover traditional topics (ultimately state legislation requiring evidence of adherence to Hawai'i's Performance and Content Standards both motivates instruction and limits the extent to which innovation can occur) but there was obviously a project-based flavor to the classes. One group, for instance, combined art, science and language as they worked on landscape plans for the campus. Other groups study the Hawai'ian approach to astronomy, their relationship to the land and the sea, ecology and Hawai'ian health. Apart from the physical arrangement, the classes did not look substantially different from those in most schools. The difference was in the affect; in the expectations (and proffering) of respect that Hawai'ian children traditionally give to adults.

The Hawai'i charter school law does not require it, but one of the Director's first comments was that all teachers at HCS were licensed. He gave us a tour of the campus and then sat down for an extensive interview and discussion. "Hawai'ianness" at this school manifests itself primarily in two ways: focus on Hawai'ian-related, project-based instruction and respect for the Hawai'ian environment and community with which the school closely relates. Subject matter selection is driven largely by the Hawai'i Performance and Content Standards and is, therefore, not that dissimilar from other, non-ethnocentric schools. It is not clear which is cause and which is effect; the traditional manner in which all of the teachers have been trained or the fairly traditional pedagogy.

"Regular" classes for students take place both on the main campus and on two nearby sites; one for agricultural projects and the other for ocean-related activities. Teachers teach from Monday through Thursday and meet together on Fridays. On Fridays, the school imports local resource persons to provide an enriched elective environment with heavy emphasis on Hawai'iana (hula, fishing, canoeing).

Perhaps the most significant evidence of the ethnocentricity of the school, as reported by the Director, is its situation within the local, Native Hawai'ian community. Relations with parents and community leaders are very close, with parents and (importantly in the Hawai'ian community) grandparents being seen as members of the holistic educational team. The importance of kupuna (Hawai'ian elders) is infused throughout the school.

HCS is eligible for a variety of federal and private supplementary funds without which

they would not survive. HCS is also fortunate because its sponsor Foundation has access to significant land (of the three schools studied, Hilo is the only one with its own campus for which it can make permanent plans) and sources of funding. This means that HCS can focus its energies on educational development; not finding and funding facilities.

Discussion

The questions that originally motivated this study were modified to be more consistent with the Hawai'ian tradition of 'talk story'(Dotts & Sikkema, 1994). The respondents were obviously very proud of what they had created and "wanted to talk about what they wanted to talk about;" firmly but persistently resisting efforts to re-focus. Upon reflection, we were reminded that Native Hawai'ians rely on verbal, rather than written, history (Langlas, 1998). We concluded that the best course of action was to let the study take us wherever it went. The discussion which follows attests to the value of that approach.

The three schools studied were at once significantly different and strikingly similar. Each school is a Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter school largely on the basis of self-definition. All three DIPs and sets of promotional materials describe the unique and fragile nature of Hawai'ian language and culture. MCH writes of "Hawai'ian ways of knowing" and "experiential-based Hawai'ian learning environments" while KCS emphasizes "the Hawai'i indigenous people culturally-driven educational milieu" and HCS advocated "rebuilding a Hawai'ian intergenerational community." Although the literature contains descriptions of Hawai'ian epistemology (Meyer, 2001) and attempts to describe the Hawai'ian worldview, we observed few attempts made by these ethnocentric schools to define their own terms. One is left with the sense of "we know it when we see it." However, both state and federal statutes place severe limitations on the ability of a publicly funded charter school to discriminate in any fashion. Therefore, the actual extent to which the ethnicity of any Hawai'i public charter school can be identifiably Hawai'ian can be attributable to location (schools located in ethnically identifiable neighborhood tend to draw from the locality; particularly in regions with limited public transportation) and parental selection (not surprisingly, an emphasis on Hawai'ian language and culture is disproportionately of interest to ethnically Hawai'ian families). Nevertheless, the populations of the three schools are overwhelmingly composed of students who identify themselves as Hawai'ian or part Hawai'ian (MCS - 94%, KCS - 88% and HCS -100%).

Each school clearly identifies itself as a member of the Hawai'ian ethnocentric school subset of Hawai'i public charter schools. In 2000, the leaders of one of the three schools founded Na Lei Na'auao, an organization of identifiably Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter schools that has grown to include 12 such schools in the state. In addition, a statewide Hawai'i Association of Charter Schools (HACS) with representatives from ethnocentric and non-ethnocentric charter schools meets periodically to liaise with the Department of Education and to lobby for improvement (or lobby against deterioration) of state charter school enabling legislation. However, Na Lei Na'auao remains as a clearly identifiable "ethnocentric schools only" organization. A bill passed by the Hawai'i Legislature in April, 2002 would allow non-profit organizations such as Kamehameha Schools to run conversion charter schools with augmented operational funds from their non-profit organization in geographic areas that have large populations of Hawai'ian/part Hawai'ian

students. Kamehameha Schools was founded at the beginning of the last century by the estate of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop for the "education of the children of Hawai'i." It has grown to a multi-billion dollar private educational institution serving only children of Hawai'ian ancestry. The entrance of this institution into the establishment of Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter schools may significantly change the financial and political balance of the charter school movement in Hawai'i.

While Wells, Lopez, Scott and Holme (1999) identified a composite category of California charter schools that were termed "urban, ethnocentric, and grassroots charter schools", the ethnocentric charter schools in Hawai'i share characteristics that do not fit this category. Hawai'i schools are primarily rural and focus on the indigenous Native Hawai'ian culture. The three cases reported here can be described in a number of dimensions: physical environment, personnel, sources of funding, relationship with parents and the community, curriculum structures, pedagogy and language, and educational goals.

The physical environment seemed determined by whether the charter school was a new start-up or a conversion program; true for non-ethnocentric conversion and start-up charter schools as well as the ethnocentric schools. In our sample, the conversion SWIS, MCS, remained in a traditional classroom setting which appeared to contribute to a more traditional delivery of instruction. The two start-up charter schools, KCS and HCS, were challenged by the need to create new physical spaces and adapt to non-traditional classroom spaces and these uncommon settings appeared to make it possible to try innovative programs in more natural settings. So, for example, students at HCS could spend their afternoon classes at the beach studying water quality or conducting reef fish surveys as part of their course of study.

While many of the teachers and members of the staff at the three charter schools are Hawai'ian, the percent of teachers of Hawai'ian/part Hawai'ian ancestry was lower than that of the school population. At both MCS and HCS, all of the teachers were licensed and the school leaders valued the credibility that this brought. At the more rural KCS, the leaders used federal, state and private grant funds to hire 51 "teachers." Of these only 5 are licensed. KCS is currently using federal grant money to fund an alternative Hawai'ian teacher education program that will enable them to grow their own licensed teachers.

At this time every non-ethnocentric charter school in Hawai'i has experienced broken fiscal promises and bureaucratic interference. Indeed, three start-up charter schools have litigation (Note 1) in progress against the state and the Board of Education asserting that charter schools receive substantially less money than other public schools and, more specifically, less money than they were originally promised. It is notable that none of the three are Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter schools. While it is not the purpose of this article to examine the validity of these claims, it is unarguable that the financial condition of Hawai'i's charter schools is bimodal. Ethnocentric charter schools are surviving; the rest face bankruptcy. The three schools in this sample all have outside funding from federal grants specifically earmarked for Native Hawai'ian education, health and environment and several state-based Native Hawai'ian foundations. In addition, the Hawai'ian charter schools have access to land and in some cases existing buildings that can be or are being used to house schools.

While all schools recognize the value of parental involvement in their child's education,

the Hawai'ian charter schools each have a characteristically Hawai'ian commitment to parental and community connection to the school. KCS envisions "a comprehensive Native Hawai'ian learning center or *kauhale* which can address the educational and cultural needs of all stakeholders from womb to tomb." HCS is determined to be a part of the Hawai'ian community so shares space with a pre school and a hula *halau* as well as other social services by and for Native Hawai'ians. Within each school, parents are expected to engage in their children's education in a variety of ways. At MCS students are expected to learn the Hawai'ian language along with their *keiki* (child). At all three schools, parents participate in parent-teacher conferences and attend performances of their children during the year. There is also a strong *kupuna* program that encourages grandparents and aunts and uncles to come to the school and work with students. They may teach Hawai'ian crafts, tell '*Olelo No'eau*, traditional stories, or perform more mundane tasks like serving lunch or accompanying students on excursions.

The curricula at these ethnocentric schools are often based on topics of particular relevance to Native Hawai'ian culture such as genealogy, navigation, and aquaculture. They also include instruction in traditional crafts and cultural practices. However, the pedagogy seems to reflect what Wells, Lopez, Scott and Holme (1999) characterize as progressive and student-centered pedagogy as distinct from factory-like "modern" public schools. All three schools report the use of project based, experiential, interdisciplinary curricula. They also use a variety of alternate assessment techniques and hands-on learning and performance-based tasks that are infused with technology. Two specific grants have provided state of the art computers and provide for gifted and talented education for all students. All of these characteristics are recommended practices for all students from all ethnic backgrounds.

Another distinction between the schools is the use of the Hawai'ian language. This varied considerably in the three schools in this sample. MCS relied on full immersion for k – 3rd grade students and introduced the formal study of English in 4th grade. KCS aimed to provide bilingual instruction and accommodate all Native Hawai'ian students. The language is important for the connection to the culture and deeper understanding of things Hawai'ian but not to the exclusion of English, the language of commerce and entrance into socio-economic self-sufficiency. HCS did not focus on the language for utilitarian reasons or language renaissance per se but used it as a connection to the community and connection to the past that would improve student perceptions of self in today's world.

Finally, these charter schools articulated a need to prepare students educationally for the future for different reasons. MCS wanted their k-6 students to be able to enter any middle school and be successful as speakers of Hawai'ian and agents of the culture. That has led them to reconsider the introduction of English instruction. KCS clearly expect its graduates to "perpetuate Hawai'i native culture, language and traditions into the next millennium" ...and... "transform their neighborhoods into more sustainable communities, and agents for the preservation of Hawai'i's unique natural resources." They expect students to go to the community college or local university and return to their community to stop the out migration of successful Native Hawai'ians. HCS wants students "to sustain and develop the local, traditional community, natural environment and people. The children and school are resources that focus on community energy and pride. The Foundation that supports HCS is dedicated to making life in the community better and more prideful.

Although all three of the schools described in this study were located on the same island, they lie a significant distance from each other in communities with very different demographics, climates, and economic bases. However, Hawai'i's unique single-district educational system make them all part of the same structure. They are all painted both by their ethnocentricity and by their need to survive as charter schools in an essentially hostile environment. Indeed, it may be difficult to determine which plays a more central role in the formation of the character of the three schools: being a charter school or choosing an ethnocentric theme. What appears clear, however, is that organizations cannot develop on the strength of *what they are not*. Rather, even as efforts are made to break from educational practices which no longer serve the needs of our children, successful schools are those which stand *for* something, not *against* something.

The temptation to postpone judgment about the effectiveness of public ethnocentric charter schools in Hawai'i or the propriety of spending public funds on them is tempered by an appreciation of the disagreement over what constitutes "effectiveness" in this context. Proponents of objective normative evaluations of student learning could legitimately argue that the data aren't yet available. But our observations of the extreme satisfaction exhibited by all stakeholders in the ethnocentric charter schools we examined leads us to question the traditional criteria used to evaluate public schools. It is clear to us that these schools serve a purpose; they provide an education strongly preferred by its target client group which shows no obvious signs of being inferior to that provided by the over-burdened traditional system. If some normative evaluation is justified, it is nevertheless clear that it should not be the only criterion on which to assess the success of these schools.

Charter schools in Hawai'i, whether ethnocentric or not, are almost all associated with one or another special interest group. One, for instance, is clearly populated by children and grandchildren of the white "children of the sixties." Another was founded on the premise that nutrition (both its study and practice) is at the center of good learning. Still another relies heavily on the Waldorf approach. Nationally, charter schools can be found based upon a military/patriotic model or a Great Books (largely written by dead white males) curriculum. Each of these uses public funds for openly parochial purposes. It is our experience that these extremely diverse schools share essential characteristics: 1) their school communities are very satisfied and happy with them; and 2) they have had to overcome significant obstacles placed in their way by the traditional educational establishment.

In some aspects, the Hawai'ian ethnocentric charter schools we observed exemplify best practices that are almost universally acknowledged. They are small schools in a state which has the largest average school size in the country. They employ a self-selected group of teachers whose passion and enthusiasm lead them to endure significant hardship (tenure, retirement benefits, salary levels at charter schools are all issues in a state with universal public sector collective bargaining). High levels of parental involvement and community support for these charter schools are the envy of their traditional counterparts.

It may be easy to support the expenditure of public funds for ethnocentric charter schools in areas where ethnic minorities have traditionally been underserved. What is more problematic is contemplating what might happen if other special interest groups (ethnocentric or not) made similar educational arguments. Would one make the same

supportive arguments in favor of an ethnocentric charter school in New York, for instance, seeking to connect students to their Italian roots, or a Chicago charter school conducted entirely in Polish? Are schools of choice schools of choice, or not?

We believe that the question is not what criteria to apply to distinguish schools of "good" choice from schools of "bad" choice. Rather, we should be looking at what this whole phenomenon presages for American public education. It seems likely to us that we are observing the opening rounds of a long term struggle between schools of choice and the traditional educational system. On one side are a growing number of individuals banded together into groups by their mutual interests and values who have stopped trying to fix the public school system in favor of struggling for the right to start their own. On the other side is a much larger group advocating the continuation of the current system and resisting change. The United States saw a similar phenomenon approximately one hundred fifty years ago.

We are witnessing a serious reassessment of some of American education's most cherished axioms. The inclusion of minorities loses its attractiveness when it is AGAINST THE WILL of those minorities. The maintenance of a free, appropriate public education loses its luster when clients challenge its appropriateness. Ultimately, we believe that public education is facing its own choices: lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Notes

1. New state legislation passed in May, 2002 (Senate Bill 2512, Hawai'i State Legislature), forbids lawsuits by Charter Schools against the Department of Education.

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