



The Living Classroom

Lānaʻi students practice hands-on learning through place-based education



ABOUT PHOTO

At the end of summer, students who participated in the E ʻIke Hou iā Lānaʻi Cultural Enrichment Camp received certificates of completion from Senator Brian Schatz and Mayor Alan Arakawa. PHOTO BY SIMON TAJIRI

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✓ **Lānaʻi itself became the students' greatest teacher.**

A collaboration between Lānaʻi Culture and Heritage Center (Lānaʻi CHC), Lānaʻi High and Elementary School (LHES), businesses, agencies and the local community resulted in the creation of free programs and workshops for Lānaʻi residents. These programs deviate from the traditional “three Rs” instruction and instead use place-based education, where students learn essential skills and gain knowledge from the island’s own culture, history and environment.

After receiving a three-year grant in 2013 from the Native Hawaiian Education Council, the collaborators realized the program, “E ʻIke Hou Iā Lānaʻi: Embracing Lānaʻi’s History Through Language and Literacy.” The three-week field school held this past June engaged and educated 35 students grades 6 through 12 in Hawaiian language, lifestyles, archaeology, marine biology, watershed systems, stewardship and literature.

“They did both Hawaiian and English reading,” says Kepā Maly, executive director of Lānaʻi CHC and senior vice president of the Pūlama Lānaʻi Culture and Historic Preservation sector. “They learned map and compass skills, how to identify the features of the landscapes that were surveyed based on native testimonies of the 1860s and ’70s. They evaluated environmental changes: They went into the reefs and took soil samples, where the reef is being buried by sedimentation. Then they connected it with the work they did upland, identifying erosion areas.”

In addition to their acquired knowledge, the students gained a deeper appreciation for the land and their kūpuna.

“A part of the condition of the kanaka and the life of the land, the honua ola, this living environment that we are the stewards of, is that there’s been such a great disconnection,” says Maly. “Through this program, our youth, their families, can be reconnected to the honua ola, and the legacy can be passed on. And the students see it; it changes them—particularly for our Hawaiian youth. There is this pride of being a part of something that is uniquely yours as a Hawaiian.”

At the close of the program, the students transformed into teachers and presented their findings and proposals at an open house on resource management. However, this was only the beginning. The goal is to ultimately implement place-based education within Lānaʻi’s school-wall curriculum. Who knows, maybe these students will still be the ones teaching.



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BY AOLOA PATAO

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