

**INTERVENTION OF**  
**NA KOA IKAIKA O KA LAHUI HAWAII**

**Item #: 6      Topic: Education & Culture      Presenter: Le'a Kanehe**

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving Na Koa Ikaika o Ka Lahui Hawai'i this opportunity to address the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and take the floor again to lend our voice to the discussions on Indigenous education and culture.

By virtue of our right to self-determination, we have the right to freely pursue our cultural development. Education is a critical component for Indigenous Peoples' cultural survival. This must include education in our own languages, delivered in a culturally appropriate manner and using culturally appropriate methodology and delivery systems, spanning all disciplines. We also need the means to train Indigenous educators skilled in developing Indigenous curriculum.

In Hawai'i, through the great effort of the Native Hawaiian peoples, and funding from private, state and federal sources, we have been able to develop a system of Hawaiian language immersion schools and a growing number of Hawaiian culturally-based charter schools. Much of the curriculum of these schools is land-based. For example, some schools offer opportunities for the students to learn science while working in the lo'i (taro patches) and associated streams and water ways. The children are simultaneously learning to take scientific measurements and observations, while cultivating our peoples' staple food. Companion technology courses offer the students opportunities to produce videos documenting the work in agricultural projects. A class like this demonstrates that it is misinformed and ignorant to think that traditional Indigenous education cannot keep pace with modern technology.

Other schools offer astronomy and physics by teaching the open-sea voyaging practices of our ancestors who navigated by the stars, currents, and winds of the Pacific. Still other courses are able to integrate math, earth science and biology through the propagation of endangered native species showing our youth and the world that we can live as our ancestors did, in harmony with the environment, in a sustainable and non-toxic society.

Much of the success of these schools are the result of combining the wisdom of our Native elders and cultural practitioners in the classroom working along side a predominantly Native Hawaiian teaching staff as well as western non-Native instructors. While not all the kupuna (elders) have western degrees, they provide a wealth of knowledge from our ancestors which has been passed to them and does not need the conferring of a western degree to be considered legitimate. We have found that these Native Hawaiian educators are better able to serve the needs of our Native children.

Although these programs have proven to be a successful means of educating our youth, they still suffer from underfunding as compared to their mainstream English counterparts. Nevertheless, they stand as examples of how positive avenues for education can be achieved without sacrificing our cultural values. We would also like to recognize the efforts of our Maori cousins in Aotearoa (New Zealand) for their significant contributions to the advancement of Indigenous education models in the Pacific Basin. Other Indigenous Peoples in our region, as well as elsewhere throughout

the World, want and deserve the chance to educate their children in a similar way. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, we offer the following recommendations:

First, for the Permanent Forum to facilitate the development of programs with UNESCO and other appropriate UN agencies to promote Indigenous education efforts that will incorporate culturally-based and culturally appropriate curriculum. A necessary component of these efforts must include training of Indigenous educators at the university level.

Second, for the Permanent Forum to prevail upon the observer states to make available all forms of education, including modern technology, to Indigenous children within their own nations. Equal access to education when applied to Indigenous children does not necessarily mean the same as that for the mainstream public education systems. What it does mean is the opportunity to educate our peoples in our own way, with the ability to access both traditional and modern modes of education.

Our youth are our future. By investing in our youth today, we are making an investment that will bare precious fruit to nourish our peoples for the future.

Thank you again for your time and attention. Aloha.