



WORLD
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EDUCATION

A program showcase

Pūnana Leo o Kawaiahaʻo, Hawaiʻi, United States

by Michael Kalinowski and Noelani Iokepa-Guerrero



“When our young children master their language, they master themselves. When they master themselves, they can achieve anything.”

Hawaiʻi State of the State, 2011



Pūnana Leo o Kawaiahaʻo is the ninth of 11 Pūnana Leo preschools in Hawaiʻi. Established in 1995, Pūnana Leo o Kawaiahaʻo is currently located on the Kawaiahaʻo Church grounds occupying the historic adobe schoolhouse building of Kawaiahaʻo. This historical site was home to one of the first schools west of the Rocky Mountains established in 1835 to teach English to Native Hawaiian children. Today at the Pūnana Leo o Kawaiahaʻo the building is once again used to educate Hawaiʻi's children, but now through Hawaiian language and culture. According to the 'Aha Pūnana Leo website (www.ahapunanaleo.org/index.php?/resources/):

The indigenous people of Hawaiʻi are commonly known as Hawaiians and the indigenous language of Hawaiʻi is commonly known as Hawaiian. The other peoples of Hawaiʻi are referred to as the people of Hawaiʻi or Hawaiʻi people. Those who are longtime residents, including Hawaiians, are also known as local people. Many Hawaiians and other local people are of mixed racial ancestry. There is a

single Hawaiian language spoken throughout Hawaiʻi. For centuries an oral tradition, Hawaiian has been a written language since the 1820s.

The Pūnana Leo program is built upon and guided by the Kumu Honua Maui Ola (KHMO) philosophy. Connection and responsibility to environment, connection and responsibility to one another, and self-identity and life-force elements of spirituality, language, mannerisms, and traditional knowledge compose the conceptual framework of the Kumu Honua Maui Ola. This framework is the backbone of the educational program of the Pūnana Leo.

According to the program web site:

The Kumu Honua Maui Ola Philosophy Statement was prepared in 1998 by a group of Hawaiian-speaking educators to document and clarify the basis of schooling through Hawaiian. To ensure a wide representation of perspectives, the group was comprised of three generations of native and second language speakers of Hawaiian. These individuals came from all levels of teaching from preschool through university. At the core of the philosophy's foundation lies the *mauli* Hawaiʻi, the unique life force, which is cultivated by, emanates from, and distinguishes a person who self-identifies as a Hawaiian. If tended properly, this *mauli*, like a well tended fire, can burn brightly. If not, like a neglected fire, it can die out.

The four major elements of an individual's life-giving mauli are:

- Ka 'Ao 'ao Pili 'Uhane: The spiritual element
- Ka 'Ao 'ao 'Ōlelo: The language element
- Ka 'Ao 'ao Lawena: The physical behavior element
- Ka 'Ao 'ao 'Ike Ku 'una: The traditional knowledge element





change, a successful model for Indigenous education. As a parent noted:

“Pūnana Leo is a fun and loving place to grow as an ‘ohana. The foundation of Hawaiian language, culture, and Hawaiian values have made my children secure in their identity, respectful, and caring about their community. Pūnana Leo prepared them academically as well. They can read and write and are very prepared for kindergarten. I would recommend Pūnana Leo to anyone.”

For further information, please contact:

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The program serves 24 children ages 3 to 5 annually, and 342 children/families since it was established in 1995, all in a large, single classroom, with one site coordinator and three teachers.

The Pūnana Leo curriculum is culturally based and taught entirely through the medium of the Hawaiian language. Developmentally appropriate and academically rigorous, and meeting the standards of early childhood education, the curriculum is grounded in Hawaiian values and traditions: the importance of place and environment, family, community and relationships, responsibility, and stewardship.

Pūnana Leo, a Kula Maui Ola, laboratory school of Ka Haka ‘Ula o Ke ‘elikōlani College of the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, is unique in its approach to education. Pūnana Leo weaves the cultural pillars of language revitalization and indigenous ways of knowing with early childhood education, family building and strengthening, and community development and social



The Program Showcases are developed by Michael Kalinowski as a component of the World Forum on Early Care and Education.

They are intended to highlight the work of particularly interesting, unique, and/or exceptional early childhood programs around the world.

Selected programs will appear in future issues of *Exchange*, and are also available on www.ChildCareExchange.com.