

Hawaiian Language Programs

Kauanoë Kamana and William H. Wilson 1996

During the first two decades of this century Hawai'i underwent a massive language shift from its indigenous Polynesian language to Pidgin (Hawai'i Creole English) as the primary home language of Native Hawaiians and also large numbers of locally born non-Hawaiians. This shift was the result of English-Only legislation that closed down the Hawaiian medium public schools of Hawai'i. The legislation not only nearly exterminated the Hawaiian language and culture but also had disastrous effects on literacy, academic achievement, and even the use of Standard English among Native Hawaiians. Out of nearly 200,000 Native Hawaiians in Hawai'i, the 1990 census listed only 8,872 speakers of Hawaiian. While there still remains one small island where Hawaiian is the language of the entire community, elsewhere Hawaiian speakers are scattered and often elderly. There is, however, a coordinated community and state government effort to save the Hawaiian language and culture from extinction through reestablishing schools taught in Hawaiian serving those who wish to continue to use or revive the language in their homes.

We were the first of a number of couples in Hawai'i who have revived Hawaiian as the first language of their home

and children. Both of us are faculty members in the Hawaiian Studies Department at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo.

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Pūnana Leo Hawaiian Medium Preschools

In 1983, we were part of a small group of Hawaiian speaking educators who formed the 'Aha Pūnana Leo to reestablish Hawaiian medium education. At that time, the Hawaiian medium public school system of Hawai'i had been closed for nearly 90 years and the last generation in which Hawaiian was the common language of all Hawaiians was in their seventies. The focus of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo was to assist the few families trying to revive Hawaiian in the home and the tiny community that still used Hawaiian at all age levels by beginning family run preschools. Ours was the first family to re-establish Hawaiian as the sole language of the home and we were determined that our children would attend preschool and public school in Hawaiian.

The 'Aha Pūnana Leo (a non-profit organization) now serves approximately 175 children in nine Pūnana Leo preschools in the State and develops materials and teachers for them.

Instruction in these full-day eleven month schools is totally through Hawaiian. Parents must 1) pay tuition (based on income), 2) provide eight hours in-kind service per month, 3) attend weekly language lessons, and 4) attend monthly governance meetings. The program has been very successful in its language revitalization, academic, and family-involvement goals and has long waiting lists. The administration of the schools is through Hawaiian and most of the employees are parents of former and current students. The Papahana Kaiapuni Hawai'i (Hawaiian Immersion Public Schools) grew out of the Pūnana Leo, serves Pūnana Leo graduates, and receives financial and other support from 'Aha Pūnana Leo.

Papahana Kaiapuni Hawai'i (Public School Hawaiian Immersion Program)

The Hawai'i public school system, including the first high school west of the Rocky Mountains, was once taught and operated entirely through the Hawaiian language. The Hawaiian language was banned in all private and public schools in 1896 and this ban continued until 1986 when it was rescinded through Pūnana Leo lobbying. In 1987, parents and administrators from the Pūnana Leo preschools persuaded the State Board of Education to open two kindergarten-first grade combined classes to serve Hawaiian speaking children from the Pūnana Leo.

These initial children are now in ninth grade Kaiapuni Hawai'i

classes and the program has expanded to include eleven official sites and two unofficial ones. One thousand and one children were served in the Fall of 1995. Most of the children are educated in schools where a Hawaiian medium program shares a campus with an English medium program, but there are two official totally Hawaiian medium schools. Children are educated entirely in Hawaiian until fifth grade where English language arts is introduced as a subject -- often taught through Hawaiian. English continues to be taught for one hour a day through high school. Intermediate and high school aged children are also taught a third language. A long range study of the program has shown academic achievement equal to, or above that, of Native Hawaiian children enrolled in the state's typical English medium programs, even in the area of English language arts. Problems include finding and developing teachers and materials and assisting a public school administration that does not know Hawaiian and has institutionalized barriers to enrollment and development of the schools. Strengths are strong interest in revitalizing Hawaiian in the community, strong parent leadership, and cooperative work with the Pūnana Leo preschools, the state Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and the University of Hawai'i system.

Hawaiian Language at the University Level

The Hawaiian language has been taught at the University level since 1921 when all Hawaiian adults and many non-Hawaiian adults were both fluent and literate in the language

but young children had shifted to Hawai'i Creole English. In the 1970's a cultural renaissance resulted in more young Hawaiians studying the language in order to compose music and learn their culture from elders. This developed in the eighties and nineties into a language revitalization movement associated with the Pūnana Leo preschools and Kaiapuni Hawai'i public schools. Hawaiian is offered at the two four-year campuses of the University of Hawai'i and at all state community colleges. It is also offered at most private colleges and universities in Hawai'i as well as at most high schools. Total university enrollments for the fall of 1994 totaled approximately 2,300. In the spring of 1995, students at the Manoa campus lead a system-wide protest against budget cuts to Hawaiian language classes that lead to a promise from the University of Hawai'i president that Hawaiian language would be a protected area of study during this time of state fiscal difficulties.

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo has special responsibility for the Hawaiian language within the University of Hawai'i system. We are not only the largest language offered on campus, we are also the largest major in Humanities with 116 majors on a campus with about 3,000 students. All upper division course work in the Hawaiian Studies Department is taught through the medium of Hawaiian. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo has also been designated to establish the first masters degree in Hawaiian language and literature within the next few years and has also been

approved to develop a teacher certification program for teachers planning to teach in those public schools taught through the medium of Hawaiian.

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo is also the site of the State's Hale Kuamo'o Hawaiian language center. The Hale Kuamo'o produces curriculum materials for Hawaiian medium schools including math and science texts. Besides curriculum materials the Hale Kuamo'o produces a newspaper in Hawaiian and two computer services in the language. A lexicon committee is responsible for coining new terms and disseminating them to the public. The State of Hawai'i is a member of the Polynesian Languages Forum through the Hale Kuamo'o. The Forum is a cooperative effort among the different governments within Polynesia focusing on the promotion of their indigenous languages for use in government and private business.

Conclusion

Nineteen ninety-six was officially declared by the governor of Hawai'i the Year of the Hawaiian Language in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the banning of Hawaiian in the schools by those who overthrew the Hawaiian Monarchy. The observation from Hawai'i is that in order for our languages to survive they must be used in all facets of our contemporary life and we must take responsibility for using and developing them. We cannot depend of having elders forever. In this regard, Hawaiian is

one of the languages in most danger as most Hawaiian elders today cannot speak Hawaiian. On the other hand, there have never been as many families actively using Hawaiian as the language of the home in the last fifty years. Much of the progress in Hawai'i has been made by insisting that policies and laws reflect the desire of the Hawaiian people that the Hawaiian language be a living language for Hawaiians today.