The Hawaiian-American Cultural and

Familial Context: What Can It Tell Us?*

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Nearly all anthropologists argue--and sometimes must defend--the relevance of culture to education. This is especially true when anthropologists consult to those interested in helping minority, ethnically different, or disadvantaged populations. We hope to show the relevance of our creed. We believe that community context, family setting, cultural values and beliefs--that is, the things that make an ethnic minority "different"--will also make a difference in the classroom.

Cultural considerations have had an important and complex impact on the KEEP classroom. The Hawaiian-American children at KEEP are exposed to Hawaiian cultural themes in songs, dancing, crafts, field trips, and in many classroom activities. In addition, the KEEP staff has the cultural sensitivity to Hawaiian-American parents and children which promotes understanding essential to interpersonal relations in any school setting. Although these activities and attitudes are important for KEEP, they are not in themselves likely to help teachers train children to read. KEEP is a culturally sensitive research school, yet Hawaiian-American children at KEEP did not rapidly improve in their reading skills simply as a result of this concern. More than sensitivity is needed if family and ethnographic data and insights are to be fully exploited in educational programs.

This section introduces KEEP's analysis and solution of Hawaiian-American children's reading problems by describing the uses of family, demographic, and cultural data in that process. Two aspects of Hawaiian home and community settings will help set the stage for the description of the KEEP classroom research: (1) demographic and familial variations in the Hawaiian-American population; and (2) some core cultural characteristics of Hawaiian families influencing classroom learning styles. Finally, some of the general issues in transferring cultural data to classroom teaching will be discussed.

Diversity of Hawaiian-American Social and Cultural Settings

The wide diversity in Hawaiian-American family types and demographic characteristics necessitates great care in inferring any single "Hawaiian"-centered social characteristic useful in planning educational change. Intra-ethnic diversity is surely a powerful and influential phenomenon, whatever the relative importance of commonly held ethnic characteristics might be. A whole range of social indicators for the Hawaiian-American KEEP families show great diversity in the population. These include martial status, family size, family organization, Hawaiian cultural activities, length of household residence, family income, the sources of family income, the range of occupations in the Hawaiian-American families, whether both or only one parent is employed, and a number of other typical indicators of class and family structure.

Extensive interviews based on the social and demographic indicators listed above were conducted with the mothers (N=73) of the students enrolled at KEEP during the school year 1974-75. These interviews provided the data for the statistics given in this report. Three-fourths of the families in the KEEP school are drawn from lists of families receiving financial assistance from the state. The rest are selected from lists of Hawaiian-Americans who applied to the Kamehameha School regular primary school program but were

not selected. (Three-fourths of the KEEP children are Hawaiian-American, and the remainder are low-income non-Hawaiians, mostly Samoans). The demographic statistics presented below include Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians, in order to provide a picture of the neighborhoods from which KEEP draws its students, which are similar to those in which many Hawaiian-Americans live in the State.

Of the sample interviewed, nearly half (46%) of the families lived in two-generation, conjugal households. Another 11 percent had grandparents or grandchildren living in the household as well. Forty-three percent were female-headed households. One in four households (24%) consisted of mothers and their children living separately. Eleven percent had a boyfriend or fiance of the mother living in the home, and eight percent had grandparents or aunts living in the house with the mother and helping care for the children. Although there are a large number of female-headed households present relative to the proportion in the state as a whole, this group (24%) is far from characteristic of KEEP Hawaiian-American families as a whole, who run the range from standard nuclear families to the expanded or extended family unit.

Fifty-nine percent of all the children lived in households where married parents resided with the child. Another 31 percent lived with their divorced or separated mother, and seven percent lived with a never-married mother. Although Hawaiian-Americans on the average have more children and live in larger household groups than non-Hawaiian populations in the state, the range of family size is enormous. Thirty percent of the families have only one or two children. Forty-five percent have three to four, and 25 percent have five to nine children living with them in their households.

Central Core Cultural Patterns

Turning now to KEEP families of Hawaiian ethnicity, there is a similar range in the reported practice of a series of traits considered to be characteristically "Hawaiian." We asked mothers about a wide range of such traditional Hawaiian cultural practices, and compared the frequency and presence or absence of these traits. The traits included the frequency and duration of visits with relatives; the amount of extended kin ties and contacts the family usually has; how often other kin visit or take care of the KEEP children (that is, the influence of aunts and uncles); the frequency of family luaus; the use of Hawaiian terms and phrases spoken in the home; the use of Hawaiian Creole or pidgin; and the religious affiliations of some families which can also be an indicator of Hawaiian cultural identity. This Hawaiianness indicator is not intended to replace careful ethnographic work on cognitive style, language use, and lifestyles of different families, but it does provide a general sense of the great diversity in the practice of these customs among KEEP families.

Although the family organization and demographic characteristics of the Hawaiian-American families are very diverse, there are certain cultural patterns and child-caretaking styles which are fairly common among many of the Hawaiian-American families in the KEEP population. Three of these themes have been identified in earlier work on Hawaiian-Americans (Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan, 1974; Alan Howard 1974) as well as in our own surveys of the KEEP families, and they are important to the understanding and interpretation of some of the subsequent papers in our symposium; these are sibling caretaking; affiliation motivation; and peer orientation. Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan (1974:101) have further described three core features of the Hawaiian-American family system: interdependence, shared-functioning, and benevolent authoritarianism. Interdependence refers to the family-centered lifestyle, values, and reliance

on others for aid. Shared functioning in families involves role flexibility, and joint responsibility for essential family tasks and obligations--many family members share in work responsibility. Benevolent authoritarianism refers to respect and obedience to older family members, and to the indirect exercise of control and discipline by parents through coordination of other family members, especially older siblings.

Sibling caretaking provides a good example of an important home and cultural experience likely to influence school behaviours and useful in interpreting educational outcomes; it is involved in many aspects of peer orientation and affiliation, indirect relations with adults, non-adult learning and teaching styles, and the interdependent shared-function family.

How frequent is sibcare among the KEEP families, and what forms does it take? We have direct observational evidence (Weisner, Gallimore & Tharp, in preparation) that sib care is important in KEEP families. In an intensive naturalistic observational home study, children were major caretakers a total of 31.6 percent of all afternoon home visits--35 percent of the time for girls, and 26 percent for boys. In thirty percent of the 156 home observations there was no responsible caretaker observed during the visit. Excluding these observations, children were involved in child care a total of 40 percent of the time when any caretakers were noted. Mothers were present and judged the primary caretaker only slightly more frequently than children--43 percent of the time. An analysis of mothers' reports concerning sib care and task responsibility revealed that "watching out for" other siblings as a general responsibility dimension occurs more often than the complex of specific child-caretaking tasks involved in the domestic routine. Twenty-seven percent of the KEEP mothers reported in the interview study (Weisner, 1977) that their 5-to-8-year old boy or girl was never or seldom caretaking younger sibs, while over 73 percent said sometimes, often,or always.

Sibcare thus appears to be widespread in the home; but how might sibcare be related to educational performance or classroom behaviors? Several relationships have been suggested: relative attention and orienting to adults or peers in the classroom (high sibcare children being more accustomed to attending to their peers); the amount of elaborated verbal instructions used by mothers compared to peers (high sibcare children experience fewer elaborated verbal instructions); social skills and social rank in the classroom (high sibcare children are likely to be more skilled and higher in status); and others related to cognitive styles and sex differences.

General Issues in the Uses of Cultural Data

How might these kinds of familial and cultural data be used in classroom research and teaching applications? Sibcare research, and the studies presented in this report illustrate many of the very different ways this transformation takes place. Simple mimicking of a home cultural pattern is rarely or never sufficient to gain classroom goals. Educational experiments and transformations done in the practical arena of the classroom nearly always are needed to prove the heuristic value of community and cultural data.

Some of the cultural data may be highly relevant to fairly direct classroom innovations. Jordan's (see p. 31) qualitative descriptions of informal learning and teaching styles in the classroom have many parallels in the informal peer interaction styles observed in the family context. Au's analogies between reading instructional programs emphasizing comprehension and the Hawaiian narrative style of "talk story" is another study where knowledge of cultural language styles may have an important transfer value in understanding classroom learning situations (see p. 39).

Other cultural features may be largely neutral to classroom use--although they certainly need to be explored. Gallimore's data on the Hawaiian Creole-Standard English language interference hypothesis suggest that classroom

teaching does not need to take pidgin/Creole facility directly and overtly into account, except for specific and manageable phoneme interference (see p. 23). Neutrality for learning to read does not mean that sensitivity to pidgin use is not important, however. KEEP does not discourage pidgin use among children in school; for instance, KEEP teachers use mostly Standard English, and pidgin as appropriate. Each group can understand the other, and each uses the verbal style most natural and familiar. This is an example of a neutral or noninterference policy on culturally different language dialect styles, a policy which research confirmed to be an effective strategy. An observer in the classroom, then, does not notice any special overt "Creolization" of instruction in language and reading, not because this cultural feature was ignored, but precisely because it was taken into account—and no special intervention was indicated.

Still other cultural/familial features may need to be <u>reversed</u> in some contexts of the classroom setting; Tharp's summary of the attentiveness/ industriousness research illustrates this result of cultural understanding (see p. 16). Children reared in a shared-function sibcare, peer-affiliative family milieu have to learn to be attentive to adult teachers long enough to profit from instruction, and need to be industrious enough in their work that they do not spend all their time talking to their classmates or engaging in karate displays with the furniture! An observer in the KEEP classrooms will see rather industrious children doing school tasks most of the time; they will see adult, women teachers commenting and giving instructions and encouraging participation. This is not what one would see in the modal Hawaiian-American home. As Tharp emphasizes, however, the process of creating a relatively task-oriented classroom used insight into Hawaiian socialization patterns. Also, a great deal of informal peer teaching and assistance and general child conversation and sociability are going on in these classrooms,

which are certainly not quiet, still workhouses! The KEEP classrooms

are a refracted image of Hawaiian culture, one that exploits the strengths

of the children and treats their differences as differences, not deficits.

This refracted mixture of reversal of some cultural patterns, neutrality

or noninvolvement in other patterns, and positive emphasis and encouragement

of still others characterizes the uses of familial/cultural data at KEEP.

The issue raised by these multiple uses is clearly not "Should cultural

input be used, and is it important, for classroom work of this kind?

Clearly it is. The question is, which cultural data will be relevant for

what kinds of classroom situations—and if relevant, should familial/

cultural behavioral patterns be encouraged, ignored, or reversed?

Anthropologists are not yet at a point where predictions and situations

can be specified in enough detail to provide such advice; and classroom

teachers and educators are similarly not certain enough about teaching and

learning situations to specify what from the cultural/community settings

may be effective in helping children learn. The answers to person-by-situation

issues such as these can only come from an interaction between classroom

experiments, and ethnographic interpretations and question-generation

between educators and cultural and behavioral researchers. It is this

kind of process we are describing in our report.

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