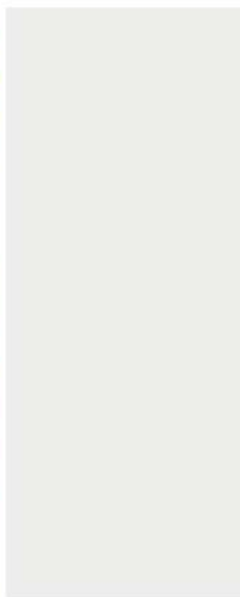


# Culturally Sustaining Strategies: **Place-Based Education**

January 2024



# DEFINITION AND OVERVIEW OF PLACE-BASED EDUCATION



*Place-based education can be understood as a community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life.*

— Gruenewald and Smith, 2014

Place-based Education (PBE) is the process of adapting students' educational experiences to the places and characteristics of their communities to make learning more "practical, relevant, and meaningful", and to help them become creators, not just consumers of knowledge (Ledward, 2013; Fukuda, Ah Sam, and Wong, 2010). PBE curriculum is developed around particular attributes of place, such as geography, ecology, sociology, politics and other dynamics (Woodhouse and Knapp, 2000) and uses these attributes as a foundation for the study of subjects across the curriculum (Liebtag, 2018; Metzger, 2013). Also, PBE has multigenerational and multicultural dimensions, bringing students into contact with community resources (Woodhouse and Knapp, 2000). While PBE coheres around local contexts, it is a multidisciplinary approach to education which draws from a variety of purposes and practices, including experiential learning, contextual learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, outdoor education, democratic education, multicultural education, service learning, personalized learning, and more (Liebtag, 2018; Fukuda et al. 2010).

PBE has existed for decades and in recent years has experienced a renewal in practice. PBE is considered timely and important for many reasons. Chief among them is the assertion that place-based approaches help students make direct, positive impacts on the well-being of the communities and ecological places in which they live (Gruenewald, 2003). For instance, PBE is relevant to the goal of increasing civic and democratic engagement by helping students to see how they are connected to others, place, and the environment (Anderson and Gurnee, 2016). Indigenous communities in the U.S.

(and elsewhere) have increasingly turned to PBE as a means of countering mainstream education's denial of place and history, which has bound students to "common" standards, curriculum, and assessment, evacuating the reality of community diversity from learning (Altman, Stires and Weseen, 2015). "Place-based curriculum provides meaningful educational experiences for Native students as it promotes authentic learning that supports communities in revitalizing their world views and associated lifeways" (Jansen, Underriner, and Jacob, 2013).

PBE has been employed across a wide array of settings with positive effects. According to a study conducted by the American Institutes of Research (AIR), students participating in PBE programs across the U.S. have demonstrated increased achievement, including improved test scores, higher-order thinking skills, and enthusiasm for learning (AIR 2005 in Fukuda et al., 2010). A series of school case studies supported by the Kellogg Foundation across the Mississippi Delta, Navajo Reservation, Sangre de Cristo in New Mexico, Appalachian regions of Kentucky, Virginia and Missouri found increases in student test scores, attendance, and parental and community involvement, as well as a reduction in drop-out rates after engaging in place-based curricula (Hynes, King, Wilson, Parker, Cochado, Newell and Hobbs, 2003). Project Connect, a place-based science and mathematics program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) in five Louisiana-based elementary and middle school, also yielded positive outcomes for participating students. Most schools demonstrated gains in English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies test scores. Beyond standardized test scores, schools and community partners developed lasting relationships: "place-based learning is serving as a hook to get students excited about learning...kids are interested in going outside of the school buildings and learning within the context of their environment" (Emekauwa, 2004, pg. 8).

## Best Practices and Examples in Place-based Education (PBE)

PBE practices, by their nature, cannot be formulated. The development and implementation of PBE is highly dependent on the creative interaction between learners and the conditions and possibilities generated by the specific places in which they live (Gruenewald and Smith, 2014). However, there are some consistent principals of practice notable throughout varied contexts of PBE implementation. (Gruenewald and Smith, 2014; Sobel 2004; Loveless, n.d.).

- 1. Stay local.** Use the local community and environment as a starting point for teaching concepts in subjects across the curriculum, such as Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, and others. When student learning is tied to local contexts they develop solutions directly applicable to their communities and potentially beyond.
- 2. Use learner-centered approaches.** Educators should keep the lessons learner-centered, meaning that students should find the curriculum personally relevant and feel empowered to independently explore community issues. "Students' questions and concerns are central to the learning process" (Yamauchi and Purcell, 2009).

3. **Use inquiry-based methods.** Students conduct inquiries into subjects and are allowed to use a variety of tools to explore.
4. **Emphasize hands-on and real-world learning experiences.** Experiential learning can improve student achievements, help them form stronger connections to their community, create a greater appreciation for the natural world, and foster a sense of commitment as citizen members. Particular considerations for working with Pacific and Indigenous groups can include the integration of local ecological knowledge (LEK) into the curriculum via community members and resources. LEK is considered deep knowledge that Indigenous people have about their homelands and have developed ways of living that reflect these understandings. Lessons are often delivered in the form of stories and detailed demonstrations requiring close observation (PCCP, 2015).
5. **Regularly and authentically assess.** While PBE emphasizes the experiential, goals and expectations for learning should be clearly communicated and students should be regularly assessed in formative and summative manners. Particular considerations for Pacific and Indigenous groups are as follows:
  - Allow students some choice to show what they have learned;
  - Allow students to collaborate and help each other (this is not cheating);
  - Consider observing student interactions;
  - Provide opportunities for students to model or demonstrate their learning;
  - Use multimedia supports, such as visuals, artwork, graphs, 3-D constructions;
  - Allow for whole group/choral responses;
  - Use statements instead of direct questions to provoke responses; and
  - Have large/whole group conversations and ask for more open-ended responses (PCCP, 2015).

# PLACE-BASED EDUCATION IN HAWAII‘I

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*The ‘āina is as much a theater for learning as it is a repository of life. ‘Āina can be a teacher, a classroom, and a living laboratory for education in next-century skills, sustainability, and self-determination. It provides a rich context for developing critical thinking and problem solving, communication and team-building, and political consciousness.*

— Ledward, 2013

In Hawai‘i, PBE has been at the center of education reform for decades with connections to the broader and ongoing movement for Hawaiian sovereignty and self-determination. The use of PBE gained traction within the **Hawaiian-Focused Charter School (HFCS)** movement in the early 2000’s (Goodyear-Ka’opua, 2013; Kana’iaupuni, Ledward and Jensen, 2010) and has become the cornerstone of a variety of educational programs in both public and private settings today. PBE in Hawai‘i is interwoven, and often synonymous, with Culture-based Education (CBE), as a sense of place is foundational to Hawaiian culture, identity, and learning (Fukuda et al., 2010). The outcome measures of the HFCS’s “vision of the graduate” exemplify this hybridity well:

Cultural Knowledge, Responsibility to ‘Ohana, **Community and Environment:** Demonstrate, understand, apply Hawaiian values, respect and honor genealogy, recognize and accept leadership roles to manifest cultural knowledge, **know a place (history, resources) as a piko and a foundation for making larger connections**, understand importance of reciprocal relationships and responsibilities in a cultural context (Keehne, 2017)

The following are additional examples of PBE in action, where PBE is practiced and foundational to curriculum development, teaching, and learning in Hawai'i.

**Place-based Learning and Community Engagement in School (PLACES) and Place-Based Afterschool Literacy Support (PALS)**

are two complementary PBE programs supported by University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Office of Student Equity Excellence & Diversity (SEED) on the Waia'anae coast. PLACES works with teachers and communities to plan and implement Place-based Cultural Projects (PBCP) in Wai'anae schools, drawing from an array of community resources. The goal of these projects is to "provide authentic opportunities for children to engage with the community and develop habits of social activism and environmental stewardships while simultaneously developing the skills and strategies outlined in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)". The PBCP curricular framework uses multiple cultural and community locations with which students are familiar so as to maximize their learning and engagement.

PALS is a place-based out-of-school learning program for predominately Native Hawaiian youth who live on the Wai'anae coast. The goal of PALS is to develop "multiple literacies" (in addition to traditional reading and writing) through place-based learning projects within the community. Projects engage multiple subjects, such as history, technology, the arts, cultural practices, gardening, and nutrition. According to research conducted on the program, PALS has a record of raising students' literacy achievement on standardized tests. PALS students, compared to their non-PALS counterparts in their

schools, have demonstrated higher cognitive engagement, behavior engagement, and voluntary literacy at statistically significant levels (Fukuda, 2010). More information may be found at: <https://placeshawaii.org/place-based-learning/>

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The **Mālama 'Āina Foundation** operates programs that focus on educating students in math, science, and Native Hawaiian culture through 'āina and project/service-based learning. Currently, their program, Mahope O Ke Kula Ke A'o Mau Ana, offers: (1) in-school science and math support for middle school students and teachers via curriculum training, tutoring, teaching, and mentoring; (2) after school, hands-on learning and cultural experiences in STEM content which align to the common core math and next generation science standards (NGSS); and (3) additional culturally responsive learning opportunities in STEM during intersessions. More information may be found at:

<https://malamaaina.org/mahope-o-ke-kula-ke-ao-mau-ana-program>

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The **Stream Biodiversity** initiative, pa'ēpa'ē o nā wai 'ekolu, is a collaboration between the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and Iolani School to educate the public about Hawai'i's native freshwater species and the impacts that humans have on them. This initiative has developed classroom and field protocols for K-12 public and private schools in the Honolulu area to use, emphasizing environmental awareness through sequential



freshwater stream and watershed lessons. More information may be found at: <https://www.nawaiekolu.org/n-wai-ekolu-curriculum>

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The **Pacific American Foundation** has developed the Aloha 'Āina curriculum for education programs working with students in grades 3-12. Originally developed for the Kāne'ōhe ahupua'a on Winward O'ahu, units of the curriculum have been adopted and adapted by public and private schools across the state to provide place and project-based learning experiences. The curriculum focuses on a balance of spiritual, social, and scientific education grounded in Hawaiian culture. More information may be found at: <https://www.thepaf.org/alohaaina/>

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**Ho'okāko'o** is a community of three, public conversion charter schools in Hawai'i: Kamaile Academy (Wai'anae), Kualapu'u Preschool and Elementary School (Moloka'i), and Waimea Middle School (Hawai'i Island). These schools have integrated culture and place-based education into their philosophical and pedagogical frameworks. The curriculum

features place- and project-based learning that involves family and community members in excursions to traditional sacred sites, agricultural sites, forests, and other places of local significance. Students engage in authentic assessments of learning, such as ho'ike, to demonstrate the connections they have made. They also conduct regular formative and summative assessments to demonstrate how their learning is aligned to college and career readiness standards. More information can be found at: <https://www.hookakoo.org/culture--place-based-learning->

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**Mālama Honua Charter School (MHPCS)** engages in rigorous, values-, and place-based education for grades K-5. Inspired by the Worldwide Voyage of Hōkule'a and Hikianalia, the mission of MHPCS is to integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and Indigenous Hawaiian values to cultivate the "mind of a navigator" among students and teachers alike. More information can be found at: <https://www.malamahonuapcs.org/>

## Other Examples of PBE for Indigenous Students

**Te Kete Ipuranig** is a Māori history curriculum design program in New Zealand for grades 1-8. The program supports teachers to build content using a place-based framework, the premise of which is that the stories and histories associated with the geographic location of their schools will “instill a deeper sense of personal identity and belonging” for students. Lessons/modules are developed around five core concepts inspired by Māori culture, which are aligned to the social science achievement objectives of the New Zealand Curriculum. Among its pedagogical recommendations are that curricula be created with student interests (what is relevant to them), community input, field and community-based experiences, and history projects relevant to local places. The full curriculum guide can be found at: <https://maorihistory-live-storage-assets3bucket-f9j7pru0hado.s3.amazonaws.com/public/Uploads/Te-Takanga-o-te-Wa-Maori-History-Guidelines-English-1.pdf>

**Identity Through Learning (ITL)** is a curriculum development project grounded in place-based approaches which supports educators in Native language revitalization. ITL was developed by the Northwest Indian Language Institute (NILI) and has been employed across three contexts in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. (Oregon and Washington). ITL is described as “community centered”, using seasonally-based modules to link learners to local people and place and to ancestral and ceded lands more broadly. ITL is also “experiential” in that it engages students out of the classroom, and “collaborative” in that it engages community members and partnerships (Jansen, Underriner, and Jacob, 2013). More information on ITL can be found at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290393825\\_Responses\\_to\\_Language\\_Endangerment\\_In\\_honor\\_of\\_Mickey\\_Noonan\\_New\\_directions\\_in\\_language\\_documentation\\_and\\_language\\_revitalization#pfee](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290393825_Responses_to_Language_Endangerment_In_honor_of_Mickey_Noonan_New_directions_in_language_documentation_and_language_revitalization#pfee)



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