

'Olelo's Partnership Efforts with Teachers and Youth: More than Media Literacy

—Angela Angel

It is graduation day; but it is not your typical graduation day where a large group of high school seniors eagerly wait to turn their tassels round. This graduation ceremony is taking place at the Ihilani Resort and students, teachers, parents, leaders, and dignitaries are arriving dressed in tuxedos, gowns, and kihei (cape). An oli (chant)—presented by students—gives 'chicken skin' to the assembled observers. Some hold hands, some shed tears, some smile; but everyone is bound together with a deep sense of pride at a ceremony held to recognize the accomplishments of the graduates of the fourth annual Wai'anae Summer Media Program. There is a pervasive sense of taking part in something powerful and good—a joint effort of the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center (QLCC), Alu Like, and 'Olelo Community Television.

“We get involved because students need to be aware of the power of media, but that’s just the beginning,” says 'Olelo President/CEO, Keali'i Lopez. “Their participation is a way of tapping into their interest in the medium and of exposing them to issues and events that are important to them and their communities.” It’s a way of easing students away from the ‘private life’ of passive television viewing into the ‘public life’ of active community participation by involving them in media activities such as creating programs that have an impact on their community. 'Olelo Community Television has served the O'ahu community for over 16 years. It offers community members training in television production, and it provides access to Oceanic Cable channels 52 through 56—the five cable channels that 'Olelo currently manages. 'Olelo is a non-profit, public, educational and government (PEG) access organization that seeks to create a foundation for the exchange of ideas. 'Olelo's mission is to build stronger, healthier, more engaged communities based on the principle of free speech and through the use of cable television. Over the past four years, 'Olelo has partnered with schools and the University of Hawai'i to operate media centers in a variety of diverse communities. It has helped to establish nurturing educational environments where Hawai'i's youth, teachers, and community members can join together to learn about the power of television in communicating ideas. 'Olelo's community media centers and special services

such as 'Olelo's Summer Media program and the statewide Youth Xchange Video Competition have created new opportunities for students to learn media literacy. As a result, access to these empowering tools is at an all-time high.

Empowering the West Coast

A buzz of voices fills the Wai'anae Media Center as students and adults busy themselves with the details of video production. A man enters and looks for his son. He finds him. “Do I have to go now? Just one more minute,” the boy pleads. His father watches as his 11-year-old son mentors a 40-year-old man on computer editing. He is surprised, thrilled, humbled. “Okay, we can go now,” says the boy. “No rush, boy, if you need some more time,” father replies with barely suppressed pride.

The Wai'anae Community Media Center is the home to several enrichment programs for students. It is in its sixth year of operation. Since 2002, groups of students aged 14 to 17 have been taught the art of video production in the Summer Media Program and have learned to produce programs focusing on organizations in their communities. The results, however, have been more than simply the production of television shows. “The Wai'anae program is about video production, but video production is used to enhance the lifestyle of our community and more importantly our children,” says Junior Ekau, a community development facilitator at Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center (QLCC). “We are building a new community that cares, that participates, that helps one another. And we will build this community one child at a time. It's a winning combination.”

The schedule for students is grueling. On a typical day they learn how to operate complex video equipment in the morning, and then turn around and shoot one or two productions in the afternoon. “We work them hard but they all eventually feel empowered to write, shoot, edit, and air video programs that give exposure to their work and voices to their communities,” says Kawika Nahoopii, the Wai'anae Center Manager. “We provide video training but the rest is really character-building skills. They learn to care for their community as their extended *ohana* and their projects demonstrate that.”

QLCC and 'Olelo also offer follow-up activities that have inspired some students with special educational needs to improve their grades following the Summer Media program. Some students in danger of dropping out of school have been motivated to complete their high school education. Some students have even continued beyond high school, enrolling in television production programs at Leeward Community College and on the mainland.

Ka'imanaloa Samson, this year's 11-year old summer media mascot and a certified volunteer at the center, boasts: "This is a good place. Everybody that I know who comes here gets a good education in media, and I always encourage others to come. Once you do, you're hooked."

A Multi-lingual Voice for Waipahu

A student sits in the corner of the room, painfully shy and too afraid to participate. The instructor invites her to join in. No luck; until her friend walks over, takes her by the hand, and pulls her before the camera. The friend stands beside her and asks her to share what she is thinking. Slowly, the student begins to speak. They have just taken the first steps in leadership and teamwork.

At Waipahu Elementary School (WES), the challenge of communicating among students, teachers, and parents is complicated by the twenty languages currently represented on their campus. Sparky Rodrigues, 'Olelo's Community Development Manager, has a solution: "We're building a bridge with media, where students and teachers are able to relate, and reduce tension and cultural differences by working together as a team. Our goal is to break down the language barriers and create a place where technology connects them."

English as a Second Language (ESL) students at WES were recently trained on the use of a remote multi-camera production system. The students, who now call themselves the *Tech Trekkers*, had an ambitious first project—taping Mayor Mufi Hannemann's address to the Waipahu community. The crew of fifth graders—whose heritage languages include Spanish, Filipino, Micronesian, Chuukese, Kosraean, and Samoan—directed, ran audio, operated cameras, and recorded the entire two-hour presentation that later aired on 'Olelo's channels. "The kids understand the importance of sharing valuable information with the rest of their community," comments Sparky. "Instead of only reaching a few hundred people in the school cafeteria, the Mayor's address, with the assistance of the Tech Trekkers, can now reach tens of thousands."

"The 'Olelo project has really affected the boys and girls," says WES teacher Daryl Jean Kamaka. "We've seen their self-confidence soar and their communication skills improve as they are encouraged to take chances and overcome their reluctance to convey their ideas and feelings."

When 'Olelo staff are not working with the WES students, they're out developing programs at Waipahu High School and August Ahrens Elementary School. Soon they will be working at other complex area schools such as Waipahu Intermediate School. The success of the Tech Trekkers has engendered a lot of interest in 'Olelo, resulting in a WES teachers' meeting about incorporating video skills into the classroom and curriculum. In one Trekker's view, "It's not really about the cameras, it's teamwork and safety... we're all mini-professionals. You don't see fifth graders like us videotaping a special visit every day, you know."

Growth by Big Numbers in Honolulu

After taking a video production course at the Palolo/Kaimuki Community Media Center with other Kaimuki High School (KHS) teachers, Tertia Yee, a KHS teacher of 15 years, did something innovative with her senior Sociology class. She introduced community television to over one hundred of her students. "I wanted to offer the students a hands-on project and give them knowledge that would prepare them for experiences beyond high school," says Yee.

For the first three months, the students conducted surveys, compiled research to include in their documentaries, and made pre-production preparations. For the next three months, the students trained as producers, camera operators, and directors, and studied interviewing and editing techniques. Student topics ranged from crystal meth use to Micronesian immigrant student issues.

Yee comments: "In all the years I have taught, this has been the best project I have assigned my students. It is one of the few where I have seen every—and I mean every—student actively involved."

The students' hard work resulted in 16 documentaries, each 5–10 minutes in length. Their programs included interviews with topic experts and community members. The shows premiered in the classroom and aired on 'Olelo.

"I wasn't into the camera thing, I was more into the old-fashioned way, taking tests, studying," says KHS student Hermeleen Amond. "But this was a really good experience for me...becoming a leader. That's what I've learned." "Students who wouldn't normally participate are

now actively engaged in media,” says ‘Olelo trainer, Gigi Miranda. “One boy’s mom attended his ‘FirstWorks’ screening where we showcase volunteers’ first productions. She was so inspired that she attended some classes herself, and came to our last board meeting in support of her son and his education. It’s great to be a part of something that not only brings students together, but brings families together, too.”

Pat Dunkin-Maile, KHS Mac lab teacher is enthusiastic: “Having video become an educational tool is really exciting because instead of just seeing something on TV, the [students] are becoming a part of it.” Kaimuki High School plans to expand their efforts in using video production as a communications tool by including students in their junior year in the next round of training sessions. They plan to have the world history classes initiate potential video projects. This will increase the number of KHS students who are directly exposed to the power of media from 100 to over 200 students each year.

Every Student Counts on the North Shore

A student enters ‘Olelo’s Kahuku Media Center with a friend who needs to edit a program. The student begins to ask questions and is invited by ‘Olelo staff to become involved. She trains, and gets certified. Her passion for video grows. She soon becomes a leader among her peers and recruits other students as video volunteers. Her mother indicates that video production “lit a fire in her and helped her find direction in life and in school. Without this media outlet, she would have fallen through the cracks.”

The Step Ahead Internship program pays students from low-income families to learn job skills at a worksite for 20 hours during the regular school year and 40 hours in the summer. The Kahuku Center has been a participating worksite for over three years. “I’ve learned that kids can do a lot more than some people think,” says Kahuku Center Manager Tammy Toma. “The light goes on and they become determined to do anything they set their minds to.” Participating students have turned into talented non-linear Final Cut Pro (FCP) editors. The after-school program gets students involved in their community through hands-on videotaping of community events and the editing of programs for air on ‘Olelo’s channels.

“I’ve seen media bring people in the community together,” says Joey Trisolini, currently a freshman majoring in journalism at the University of Hawai‘i. He began at ‘Olelo

when he was a freshman at Kahuku High School. “I got to know people who lived right next door to me that I never knew before. Helping them to edit shows exposed me to issues that were important to my neighbors.” By creating programming that reflects the community they live in, the students gain a fresh perspective on the activities and opportunities that surround them and that are available to them. The Step Ahead Internship program is in its fourth year.

New Possibilities Open on the Windward Side

A group of teenagers are training in the art of oral history. At their first shoot, they film kupuna (elders) relating their stories. The students soon realize that they are now the keepers of this oral tradition, and that their videos will spread this knowledge far beyond those who read or hear their stories. Viewers will not only get to hear these stories but will get to see them through the performance of their kupuna.

‘Olelo’s newest media center, opened this fall at Windward Community College, is collaborating with the QLCC to produce a series of one-hour programs exploring traditional Hawaiian grieving practices. Teenagers from QLCC have interviewed kupuna to learn more about how to deal with the loss of a family member. “The kids are honoring their elders by letting them know their stories are significant and worth saving. What a gift for future generations,” says Windward Center Manager, Alan Sutterfield. “There’s a synergy that happens when you bring young students together with elders by way of technology. Empowering a person of any age with technology is a contribution both to that person and the community at large.”

Another Windward group that is partnering with ‘Olelo to put media tools in the hands of young people is Hale Kipa, a Kane‘ohe non-profit organization that provides services to at-risk teenagers. Hale Kipa has formed a media club, made up of staff and clients, to provide public service programming of interest to Windward viewers. “We’re taking courses to learn how to operate cameras and it’s actually opened up a whole new world for me and the youth that I work with,” says Brad Grady, Youth Counselor for Hale Kipa. “They have been using their new found talents. It’s really been a great thing being on the campus as well, seeing what college life is like out there and opening up a new opportunity for them to further their education.”

The Reach is Statewide

A hush falls over the room as Senator Carol Fukunaga gingerly opens the envelope to announce the winner. As soon as she speaks, high-pitched squeals fill the room. All eyes turn to look for the winning team. It is difficult to spot them in the crowd. They are several, small, giggling, blushing third graders who step adroitly onto the stage to accept their well-deserved trophy from the senator's hands.

In 2004, 'Olelo's *Youth Xchange* became Hawai'i's first issues-oriented student video competition, offering Hawai'i students a unique and creative venue in which to address the concerns that directly affect their lives. Growing from over 150 entries in its first year to 210 in 2005, *Youth Xchange* has shown that students across the state, from kindergarten to twelfth grade, can bring critical community issues to the forefront through the creative use of video. More importantly, they have proved that they have the media skills and talent to address these challenges in varied and compelling ways. Critical social issues such as drug abuse, drinking and driving, the environment, smoking, and teen suicide were among the top concerns of students. "Teens have an opinion

and we just want to get it out there," says Marisa Kiethanom, an award-winning videographer from Moanalua High School. "It's not just in our minds anymore. Everyone can see what we're thinking."

With the exception of a new 'Experts' category that includes college entries, students are judged within their grade divisions: Elementary (K through grade 6), Middle (grades 7–8) and High School (grades 9–12). Video entries are submitted in one of the following categories—news, public service announcement, mini-documentary, music video, animation, or film shorts. "This is a great idea to bring awareness to the kids, have them be involved in something they can sink their teeth into and let them really become aware of the issues," says Karl Okemura of Sony, Hawai'i.

With sponsors such as Sony, First Hawaiian Bank, Ko'olina Resort, Verizon, and General Growth, 'Olelo has been able to invite finalists to a memorable awards banquet and provide high quality Sony digital cameras to the winning schools. These cameras have literally saved one winning school's video program. And in both 2004 and 2005, the contest, winning schools, teachers, students, sponsors, and 'Olelo were honored by the Hawai'i State Legislature for the diligence, commitment, and creativity that marked their participation in *Youth Xchange*.

Kipapa Elementary School: Youth Xchange winners in the short film category.





‘Olelo trainer Gigi Miranda shares camera tips with a Jarrett Middle School student at the state capitol.

PEG Access Affecting Our Future

The state Capitol building is packed. It’s the opening day of the legislative session. Forty students wielding ten cameras quickly disperse into the crowded halls to interview legislators for an ‘Olelo series called Capitol Commentary. At the end of a very long day, students are tired; but all agree that the exposure was an eye-opener and find comfort in knowing that the process has allowed them to share their concerns directly with their legislators.

To fulfill its mission of service to the community, ‘Olelo strives to ensure diversity of voices and programming. It aims to contribute to the creation of an informed and engaged community and to promote lifelong learning. Additionally, ‘Olelo develops and supports initiatives aimed at increasing civic participation in the democratic process. One initiative is *Capitol Commentary*—an “open mic” service that has been giving community leaders a connection to their constituents for over ten years. Since 2003, the service has included a student education element.

“We’re interested in having the public participate in the democratic process,” states ‘Olelo CEO, Keali’i Lopez. “By researching issues and videotaping legislators in their districts, students are exposed to government, and we hope that will lead them to become more involved—especially as they get older.”

“Talking with some of the representatives and senators, we learned more than what they teach you in school, because if ever we want to bring up our own bills or bring something up to the state level, we now know how to do it,” acknowledges participating Halau Ku Mana student, Christian Nahoopii.

“It’s invaluable, the experience that students get helps them build their confidence, helps them feel they’re a part of the system,” says Chris Arnold, a teacher from Sunset Beach Christian School. “I really think it’s the beginning of them being involved.”

Involvement is the key. The commitment to create extended learning opportunities for students usually means more work for teachers and a struggle for resources, but ‘Olelo wants to help. Each of ‘Olelo’s Community Media Centers (CMC) offers training for anyone interested in sharing a message with the community. Facilitated training for groups is also available (See www.olelo.org and click on the training link for the latest course offerings at the Mapunapuna CMC). For facilitated group training, contact a CMC near you [see panel for contact information]. Once students and teachers are trained and certified, access to high-end video equipment is literally right at their fingertips and expands their educational experience beyond the classroom.

The path from media literacy to civic participation is an adventure. With ‘Olelo’s guidance, the knowledge you’ll gain on your journey is sure to last a lifetime.