EDITOR'S FORUM

EDUCATION, CHANGE, AND ASSIMILATION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY HAWAI'I

by William E. H. Tagupa

Education in nineteenth century Hawai'i effected dramatic changes in cultural behavior in the Hawaiian population, all within a period of a little more than two and a half generations. It is the purpose of this essay to analyze the influences and policies of formal education upon the Hawaiians in two major aspects: 1) the role of education as a civilizing and socializing institution through which changes in behavior were altered or eliminated and 2) the role of education in the gradual elimination of the Hawaiian language.

The arrival of the first missionary company of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (A.B.C.F.M.) in 1820 marked the beginning of an important phase in Hawaiian history. The overt purpose of the American missionaries was clear. They would teach "industry by the aid of art, science, and piety" as well as "rear the altars of Jehovah and establish institutions, civil and literary, for the improvement and happiness of a people now barbarous and wretched."[1] The initial attraction of the Hawaiians (particularly the principal chiefs) to the missionaries was long-standing interest in the ability of the foreigners *(haole)* to transact by means of paper and script. As early as 1809, only thirty-one years after contact with the western world, Hawaiian interest in acquiring literary skills was noted, although resident foreigners were not willing to impart such knowledge.[2] The political value of literacy was clearly recognized by Liholiho, the ruling chief of the islands, who initially ordered that literacy *(palapala)* be taught only to chiefs and favored commoners.[3] Indeed few of the chiefs were "delighted at the idea of being able to communicate their thoughts to friends at a distance" without hazarding misunderstanding.[4] To that effect, the chiefs intended to monopolize the *palapala* for themselves.[5] Only though adamant insistence by the missionaries did the chiefs relent in their initial strategy.

Missionary acquisition of the Hawaiian language was a laborious but deliberate process. The arrival in 1822 of William Ellis of the London Missionary Society was a fortuitous occasion for the American mis-

sionaries. Ellis, a printer by trade, had spent six years in Tahiti acquiring fluency in the cognate Polynesian language. For approximately two years Ellis instructed his evangelical colleagues in the fundamental principles of the Hawaiian language. After the missionaries achieved some linguistic proficiency, the arduous and occasionally disputed process of producing a standardized Hawaiian orthography *(Pi-a-pa)* commenced.[6] Literacy was the primary by-product of the missionary system. The initial popularity of the *palapala* was due to a large extent to the prevailing belief that the material and technological advantages of the *haole* was linked to the *palapala*--a sort of word magic.[7] As far as the Hawaiians were concerned "the real difference between their culture and the European was that theirs was non-literate, the other literate. The key to the new world with all its evident power was the written word."[8] Formalized education underwent considerable travail during its inaugural years largely as a result of Hawaiian misunderstanding of literacy and its true value. School master Reverend Lorrin Andrews remarked:

> The ideas of natives as to what the nature of instruction is has been and probably is now to a great extent a hindrance to improvement. The opinion is almost universally prevalent, that the whole of instruction and the benefit to be derived from it, consist in being able to read, or saying over the words in a book, or out of it, as the case may be, with very little or no regard to the meaning. . . . While, therefore, as before, it may be admitted that some few have gained real matter for reflection from what they have committed to memory, it is very evident that a vast major ity of the scholars rest perfectly satisfied with their attainments when they have the words in their memories. This is manifested by the avidity with which they commit to memory long lists of names contained in genealogies, and even abstract numbers; and when it is done feel as fully rewarded for their trouble, as though they had gained a new chapter on morals or religion.[9]

Once such misconceptions on the mystical value of the *palapala* were realized, Hawaiian interest in education and Christianity faded dramatically.[10] Though missionary alarm over such developments became evident, they focused their energies in preparing a select group of students for leadership roles in the forthcoming evangelical society. The establishment of the Lahainaluna Seminary in 1831 was the first step in the creation of an educated elite. The primary purpose of the Seminary was to produce "well qualified teachers."[11] In addition, the Seminary served to:

1) aid the mission in order to "introduce and perpetuate the religion of our Lord . . . with all its accompanying blessings, civil liberty, and religion.
2) disseminate "sound knowledge throughout the islands, embracing general literature and science, and whatever may tend to elevate the whole mass of people from their present ignorance and degradation; and cause them to become a thinking, enlightened and virtuous people."[12]

By 1836 Lahainaluna was converted into a boarding school patronized by the chiefs who provided food subsidies and land grants. In advancing literacy, the most important contribution of the Seminary was the initiation of Hawaiian journalistic history with the publication of (Ka) *Lama* Hawaii (The Hawaiian Luminary) in 1834. The purposes of the newspaper were:

1) to give the scholars "the idea of a Newspaper--to show them how information of various kinds was circulated through the medium of a periodical."
2) to communicate "ideas on many subjects . . . such as we should not put into sermon nor into books written formally for the nation."
3) to serve as a "channel through which the scholars might communicate their own opinions freely on any subject they chose."[13]

Other institutions were also established in support of Lahainaluna. The successful Hilo Boarding School was instituted in 1836, serving as a "feeder" school for Lahainaluna.[14] The following year the Female Boarding School was founded at Wailuku, Maui, an event which marked commitment to distaff education of Hawaiian women. The unique purposes of the school were:

1) the training of females "who may becme suitable companions for the young men educated in the Seminary at Lahainaluna" which was a "consideration of incalculable importance."
2) "suitable training of females" in household employment.
3) the "reformation" of "uncleanly, indolent and vicious" habits which contributed to high infant mortality.[15]

As late as 1855 the importance of female education was reiterated and noted by one commentator to have achieved some success:

> It is doubtless to be looked for, mainly in the progress of true religion, of sound education, and civilization in all its various forms; but . . . something more direct and specific in the way of female education than we now have would tend greatly to improve the domestic condition of natives. To be convinced of this, one needs only to visit the houses of those native females who have been educated in the female seminary at Wailuku, and observe their domestic conditions and how superior it generally is to that of others who have had no such training. What the Hawaiian people want is *mothers, mothers, mothers,* to train the sons and daughters to reign in the domestic circle, and make homes, quiet, well-ordered, clean and happy homes.[16]

A dominant pedogogical theme which persisted throughout the "select" school system was instruction and practice in the nobility of the work ethic. As noted by one education official:

> The inculcation of industrious habits upon the native children is slow and difficult work. Indolence is natural to man; industrious habits are to be acquired, and when parents are indolent, and do not appreciate industry, as is unhappily to be much the case here, the work of training their children to the love of labor is doubly difficult and must be necessarily slow.[17]

In 1885 such a policy was restated, reaffirming that morality was part of the educational function.

> The public teacher who neglects the moral culture of his pupils, fails to perform his whole duty. . . . The nature of children can not be properly developed and cultivated without that moral instruction which teaches them industry, honesty, sobriety, chastity, and reverence for their superiors and rulers; and all the other virtues which are an ornament to society; and the basis of every good government.[18]

It was clear that not only did education serve subject matter instructional purposes but that it also was used to change and socialize the Hawaiians into the New England view of fervid, well-ordered life and behavior. In attempting to inculcate a regimented form of learning behavior among the Hawaiians, the missionary influenced educational system was

partially successful in producing and certifying a cadre of educated elite who were prepared to play important roles in public life. The missionary-induced educational system represented the primary motives and purposes inherent in evangelical proselyting. Implicit in such endeavors was the belief that Christianity possesses a universal validity for any society to emulate. Education, the process of inducting the maturing individual into a new heritage, therefore becomes a part of acculturation or perhaps domestication of individuals who must learn things from the school which others have already learned. Though the missionary-influenced educational system conceived of itself as propagating a particular religion, it was in fact propagating a particular culture which required changes in behavior and attitudes much of which exceeded the bounds of reasonable demands.

The educational system did not have solely evangelical purposes. There was an abiding strain of philanthropy which compelled a more flexible response to community needs and which required pedogogical attention. The large number of non-missionary foreigners and the growing number of mixed-blooded children and orphans invoked a more secularized reaction from the missionary community. In 1833 the Oahu Charity School was founded, an event which signaled a mild *rapprochement* between the feuding missionary and commercial elements in Honolulu. The initial question raised was whether the medium of instruction should be English or Hawaiian. Those that favored Hawaiian argued that any "invidious distinction" between children based on linguistic differences should be avoided. To the contrary, those who favored English felt that the "half-caste children" are "one in their character and in their interests with the foreign population." Therefore, "the only question under the existing circumstances was, whether they should be taken, and by proper cultivation, be prepared for usefulness and duty in the world, or by being left to baleful influences to which they were exposed, be fitted to become the pests and curses of society."[19] It was clear to the benefactors of the school that the future of the students lay with the commercial community, a circumstance which augured for the future policy direction of education in Hawai'i. In Diell's words:

> The commercial interests of these Islands . . . are chiefly in the hands of those who speak the English language. These children are growing up more and more in the use of that language; they have frequent and increasing intercourse with those who speak it. Their future usefulness and prospects of success in various departments of business depend, in no small measure, upon the

> degree of their acquaintance with the English language. Indeed, situated as they are, such knowledge may be regarded as indispensable, if we would but leave them to be blanks in society, or if we wish to raise them up to any higher or more useful employment than that of spending the day in cock-fighting, or riding donkeys, and the night at the bowling alley. If they go to sea, how shall they rise to any higher berth than one before the mast; if they have received no other education, no further knowledge of the English language, then what they have acquired in the forecastle, to enable them to study navigation and such other branches of knowledge as will fit them for a higher education? Or, should they attain stations as apprentices, or as clerks, how could they fill them usefully to themselves, or their employers, (who in cases like these must be foreigners), without such an acquaintance with the English language, and with the elementary branches of education as are to be acquired from the instruction of a school taught in that language.[20]

The arguments favoring English as the language of instruction prevailed. For the next six years, the Oahu Charity School was the only public institution to utilize English as the mode of instruction.

In May 1838, upon the suggestion of William Richards, the chiefs petitioned Reverend Amos S. Cooke to "teach the young Chiefs of the nation."[21] The chiefs had refused to send their offspring to the same schools as those of the commoners. There was some resistance to the petition from some of the missionaries because they did not want to encourage distinctions between the chiefs and the commoners.[22] It, however, became imperative to educate the young chiefs since the educational sophistication of the general population was increasing and threatening to outstrip that of the chiefs themselves.[23] Instruction in English was determined to 'be the policy. It was noted that although the students "would have learned more if their studies had been pursued in native (Hawaiian), but from this time forward they will learn a great deal faster. . . . They now use very little native (Hawaiian) even among themselves in common conversation."[24] By 1846, it was proudly reported that:

> Next to establishing their moral and religious character, in which are involved the interests of the coming generations in the Hawaiian Islands, the first object was to give them a knowledge of the English language, and that object has been so fully attained that some of the younge pupils speak the English language better

> than they do the Hawaiian. The rudiments of knowledge as usually taught in English schools have been taught here. A commencement has been made in some of the higher branches of knowledge, including geometry, electricity, chemistry and other branches of natural philosophy, algebra, astronomy, general history, etc.
>
> The pupils have made proficiency credible to themselves . . . and may well inspire the highest hopes of their parents and the nation. When time and firm moral and religious sentiment shall have put the finish on their characters, there will be nothing wanting to make them all that a nation can desire or need in rulers.[25]

Aside from this, the primary challenge to the Cookes in the education of the young chiefs was the imperious behavior of their students. According to Richards:

> Children of the Chiefs hitherto have had their own way, and been their own masters. It is yet to be decided whether or not they will consent to be ruled. If they know not how to be ruled, they will never know as they should, how to rule.[26]

The issue was settled when Alexander Liholiho, the heir to the throne was disciplined by Mrs. Cooke. Alexander's older brother, Moses, protested that such punishment should be meted out to the son of a king, whereupon Mrs. Cooke replied that she was "King of the School."[27] The general educational and behavioral strategies employed at the school were successful in producing a new generation of ruling elite. This design needed to be effected on the population as a whole.

As early as 1840, William Richards wrote, "Unless the natives can rise and cope with foreigners in trade, agriculture and various sorts of business, they will never be anything more than heavers of wood and drawers of water to foreigners. But there is hope yet," Later Richards asked:

> Why is it that all the trade of our economy and many other kinds of business are conducted by foreigners? Is it because the foreigner has capital and we not? This is not the main reason. Some of the most wealthy foreigners on our shores came here poor; and some of the most prosperous plantations on our islands were commenced by energy and intelligence, and not by capital. Indeed, very few of all the foreigners who are now in prosperous

> businesses in our midst brought a large amount of capital with them. It has been acquired by intelligent industry. Let the Hawaiians be equally intelligent and industrious, and they would enjoy numerous advantages from the acquisition of wealth.[29]

Again in 1853, Richards pushed his case further regarding needed changes in educational policy:

> But the intercourse of Hawaiians with those who speak and write the English language has so increased and became so . . . important. So much of the business transactions of the nation is done through the medium of that language.
>
> On my tours around the Islands, I have found parents everywhere, even on the remote island of Niihau, most anxious to have their children taught the English language; and the reason they generally gave was a most sound and intelligent one, that without it--they will, bye-and-bye, be nothing and the white man everything.[30]

Richards and the government in general were advocating a change, replacing Hawaiian as the language of instruction with English." The reasons were obvious. The influx of foreigners, especially from California, were integrating themselves into the political, economic, and social life of the islands. Unlike the foreign residents of a decade ago, the new constituency was non-competent in Hawaiian, yet exercised influence over the society disproportionate to their own numbers. The issue for government then became almost paradoxical. Should the predominantly Hawaiian population be linguistically integrated into the dominant language of commerce in the islands? There was no question that the Hawaiian government, with the aid of the educational system, was attempting to inculcate increased Hawaiian participation in the economic life of Hawai'i. To that end, a root change in educational policy was contemplated which required that English be made the language of instruction without mandating that Hawaiian be formally eliminated from the educational system.[32] Opposition to such changes was evident:

> Experience convinces us (the missionaries) that the useful acquisition of English is, with few exceptions, impracticable for this people, and that while a few choice minds, or those with increased opportunities in White families, may gain a profitable knowledge of it, the sole medium through which the masses are

> to be taught and addressed, is that language wherein they were born.[33]

Missionary opposition to secularized changes in education was based essentially for pragmatic reasons. A vast corpus of religious literature was published in Hawaiian. Any change in the *lingua franca* of the islands would have a dramatic impact on their congregations and their evangelical purpose. In addition, the fading yet visible missionary community still resented the temporal distractions of urban life and preferred that the Hawaiian remain in agricultural pursuits.[34] Proficiency in English would eventually accelerate the move to the port areas of Hawai'i at the expense of the rural communities. Additional resistance took yet another position. The high chief Mataio Kekuanao'a, father of both Kamehameha IV and Kamehameha V, inveighed against any changes to English:

> The theory of substituting the English language for the Hawaiian, in order to educate our children, is as dangerous to Hawaiian nationality, as it is useless in promotion of the general education of the people. The true policy of an independent Kingdom should be to encourage a patriotic spirit and a local pride among the people for its language, its King, its laws, and its institutions for the public good. No better way could be devised to destroy those feelings which underlie the stability of all nations than to allow the people to acquire a contempt for their native language; and no better way to teach them that contempt than the establishment by Government of a few expensive and well supported schools for the purpose of giving a foreign language.[35]

Changes in educational policy in the face of opposition followed a more careful course. Attrition would soon become the governmental strategy in achieving its own desired end. The Education Report of 1880 comments:

> The continuance and increase of the public day schools for teaching Hawaiians the English language has been construed to imply the gradual supplanting of the Hawaiian by the English language, and the final extinction of the Hawaiian language; and the Educational Committee (of the legislature) . . . at its last session expressed grave doubts as to the wisdom of such a policy. The Board do not admit in the establishment of English Schools they aim at the suppression of the Hawaiian language. It is not evident that the Hawaiian tongue can be so easily rendered obsolete.[36]

The Board of Education argued that popular support for English as the language of instruction was as popular now as initially reported by Armstrong:

> It has been the settled policy of the Board of Education, for some years past, being in accordance with the general wish of Hawaiian parents, to educate the youth of the country in that language which is the world's great vehicle of thought and commerce. It would be an anomaly, indeed, were they to do otherwise. The English may said to be the prevailing language of the Kingdom, legally and industrially. The decisions of the highest tribunals of the land are in English; the commercial houses keep their books in English; it is the language of the plantation and of industrial arts generally. Can it be a marvel, therefore, that the Hawaiian, the Portuguese immigrant, the Japanese, and the ever conservative Chinaman should give preference, and even demand that English be the main language of the schools.
>
> Through the rapid industrial and commercial development of these islands within the past few years, new conditions have arisen. The old schools taught in the Hawaiian language were good enough in their time. They served their purpose; but like all other things they are out of joint with the times, they must and ought to give place to institutions more in consonance with their environment.
>
> In giving preference, however, to schools taught in the English language, no desire is entertained to suppress the Hawaiian schools or language. Indeed, such is not possible, were it desirable.[37]

The Board of Education then revealed its social policy in favoring English as the instructional mode:

> There are other reasons for English being the language of the schools. Besides the making of good citizens and the giving as nearly as his inherited mental and moral faculties will admit; every child will be given an equal start in the race of life, the public schools are intended to make a homogeneous people. . . .
>
> In the future, therefore, if these heterogeneous elements are to be fused into one nationality in thought and action, it must be by the means of the public schools of the nation, the medium of instruction being the English language chiefly.[38]

The policy of attrition strategem then turned to a more active form of neglect, bordering on administrative consternation:

> The common schools of the country have, in their time, been useful, but their day of usefulness has nearly gone by. The moment that the parents began to earnestly desire that their children should learn English that moment their decay has commenced. They have not only ceased to be useful, but in some cases they have become detrimental. They are useful in places where it is absolutely impossible to obtain teachers who know anything of the English language. . . . In such places funds at the disposal of the Board hardly warrant the expenditure of even twenty dollars a month upon a teacher.
>
> Those schools are detrimental in places where an English school is being established, a few pupils linger on in the native school out of *aloha* for the teacher. The parents send their children till they are from ten to twelve years of age, and they enter them in the English schools. The result is very unsatisfactory. To learn a language thoroughly it must be learned during the tender years.[39]

By 1896, W. D. Alexander, President of the Board of Education announced that "the schools taught in the Hawaiian language are dead. . . . Petitions are before the Board for the conversion of these schools into English schools and by the next report, Government schools taught in Hawaiian will have no place."[40]Alexander concluded on a note of triumph:

> The work of making English the language of the country is well nigh accomplished. Eight years ago the idea that all the schools could be taught in English was almost scouted. Today it is an accomplished fact. . . . To have accomplished this would be a credit to the Board.[41]

A statistical summary of the decline and disappearance of the Hawaiian language schools are in themselves quite revealing in juxtaposition with their English language counterparts.

	Hawaiian Language Schools		**English Language Schools**	
	Number	**Students**	**Number**	**Students**
1864	240	7,632	13	665
1874	196	5,522	8	846
1884	114	2,841	44	3,489
1894	18	320	107	7,732

The precipitous decline of the Hawaiian language school can not be attributed to the popularity of the English languages schools, but rather to a concerted government policy of neglect and opposition. Maui lost its last school in 1890 and by 1896 the last three of the Hawaiian language schools on Oahu "passed away." The island of Hawai'i still had two left in that year, with predictions that they would be soon closed. Only a single elementary school on Ni'ihau remained as Hawai'i entered the twentieth century.[42]

Changes in the educational policies in Hawai'i and its assimilative effects can not be examined without reference to concurrent changes in island society as a whole. Initially, Christian philanthropy was the prevailing policy during the early years of formal education in Hawai'i. Fundamentally, the missionaries desired to prepare the Hawaiians properly in the arts and manners of contemporary Christian life. As the strength of the evangelical spirit declined in influence, new developments and outlook began to assume the forefront of policy-making in education. The dominant American community began to forsake the previously long-held policy of maintaining the independence of the Hawaiian kingdom in the face of external adversity and began to seriously consider preparing Hawaii's people for assimilation into the American body politic.

A major policy change in this latter respect was an educational, political, and social emphasis on the homogeneous nature of island society. The possibility of a multi-lingual community would have been adverse to particular objectives on the verge of being consummated in the political arena. Consequently, among the major targets changed was the use of the Hawaiian language in the public school system. Though education officials continually denied that the suppression of the Hawaiian language was the objective of educational emphasis on English as the mode of instruction, it was equally clear that such individuals were not willing to support a bilingual solution to the question. Therefore, it would be forthright to conclude that assimilation into the American ethos was the primary policy of education.

NOTES

1. Hiram Bingham to Calvin Bingham. February 1, 1820. Bingham Letters, Hawaiian Mission Childrens Society Library (H.M.C.S.L.)

2. Archibald Campbell, *A Voyage Round the World,* (Honolulu: 1967), 122.

3. *Journal of Lucia Ruggles Holrnan,* Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum Special Bulletin No. 17 (Honolulu: 1931), 30. *Life and Times of Lucy G. Thurston . . .,* (Ann Arbor: 1921), 42.

4. Captain F. W. Beechey, *Narrative of A Voyage to the Pacific and Beering Straits,* (London: 1821), 419.

5. Judd to Anderson, October 8, 1835, A.B.C.F.M. Letters, H.M.C.S.L. (photocopy).

6. *Missionary Herald,* Vol. XIX (1823), 42. See generally Wesley D. Hervey, "A History of the Adaptations of an Orthography for the Hawaiian Language," Unpublished Ph.D diss. (1968), 25-76.

7. Lorrin Andrews, "Essay on the Best Practicable Method of Conducting Native Schools at the Sandwich Islands," *Report of the A.B.C.F.M., 25th Annual Report.* (1834), 166.

8. G. S. Parsonson, "The Literate Revolution in Polynesia." *The Journal of Pacific History,* vol. II (1967), 44.

9. Andrews. *op. cit.,* 159.

10. *Missionary Herald,* Vol. XXXIX (1834), 159.

11. Edwin O. Hall, "Conditions of the Common Schools at the Sandwich Islands," *Hawaiian Spectator,* Vol. I (October 1838), 353.

12. E. W. Clark, "The Origin, Progress and Importance of the Mission Seminary at Lahainaluna," *Hawaiian Spectator,* Vol. I (October 1838), 340.

13. Andrews to Anderson, October 1834, A.B.C.F.M. Letters, H.M.C.S.L.

14. Ralph Canevali, "Hilo Boarding School: Hawaii's Experiment in Vocational Education," *The Hawaiian Journal of History,* Vol. XI (1977), 78.

15. Rev. J. S. Green, "Female Education at the Sandwich Islands," *Hawaiian Spectator,* Vol. I (January 1838), 41-43.

16. *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction* (1855), 12.

17. *Ibid,* Report (1855), pp. 24-25.

18. *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education* (1882), 12.

19. Rev. John Diell, "The Oahu Charity School," *Hawaiian Spectator,* Vol. I (January 1838), 24.

20. Diell, p. 26.

21. Mary A. Richards, *The Hawaiian Chiefs' Childrens School, 1839-1850,* (Honolulu: 1970), 21. "Extracts from Steen Bille's Report on the Voyage of the Danish Corvette *Galathea* . . . in the Years 1845-47," *The Friend,* (March 1863).

22. Richards, *op. cit.,* 27.

23. Richards, p. 42.

24. Richards, p. 173.

25. *Report of the Ministry of Public Instruction* (1846), 8.

26. Report 1846, p. 51.

27. *Ibid.,* Report 1846, p. 24.

28. Armstrong to Chapman, December 3, 1840, Armstrong Letters, H.M.C.S.L. (photocopy).

29. *Report of the Ministry of Public Instruction* (1847), p. 9.

30. *Report of the Ministry of Public instruction* (1853), pp. 58, 66.

31. "Answers to Questions Proposed by His Excellency R. C. Wyllie . . .," May 1846. Archives of Hawaii.

32. Answers.

33. *Missionary Herald,* Vol. LIX (1863), 298-99.

34. Benjamin O. Wist, *A Century of Public Education in Hawaii, 1840-1940,* (Honolulu: 1940), 70.

35. *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education,* (1864), 7.

36. *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education,* (1880), 9-10. The report outlined two policy reasons for establishing English language schools as being first, to comply with popular demand for instruction in the English language, second, teachers in English were better qualified to upgrade the educational system. *Ibid.,* 10. In 1877, Lahainaluna, the major teacher's institution, switched instruction to English. Wist, *op. cit.,* 94.

37. *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education* (1886), 5-6.

38. Biennial Report 1886.

39. *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education* (1890), 22-23.

40. *Biennial Report of the President of the Board of Education,* (1896), 21.

41. Biennial Report 1896. p. 107.