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Community Involvement in a Place-Based Program for Hawaiian High School Students

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This study examined the development of community involvement in a place-based high school program for at-risk youth. Teachers and community members founded the program to address concerns about low achievement and high dropout rates among Native Hawaiians. In addition to funding, community members provided program development, supervision of students’ service-learning, cultural consultation, political support, and teacher and curriculum development. Collaborations were sustained by open communication, the development of a common set of values among a diverse group of people, and flexibility of community members’ schedules. Challenges to community involvement included a lack of support from school leadership, teacher burnout, and occasional interpersonal conflicts.

Since 1999, we have participated in the development of a place-based educational program in a rural public high school in Hawai‘i. The program began at a grassroots level by teachers and community members who were disturbed by the high dropout rate and low achievement among youth in their area, the majority of whom were of Native Hawaiian ancestry. The founders felt that a focus on local concerns and Hawaiian Studies in general would promote school engagement among more Hawaiian students. As we describe, one of the characteristics of place-based education is a mutual involvement of community members in education and students in community affairs. Since its conception in 1995, community organizations have been involved in the Hawaiian Studies Program (HSP), and at one point over 15 such organizations participated. The purpose of this article is to describe the development of community involvement in the program, including how and why community members became involved and what sustained and diminished their participation.

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1In this article, we use the words Hawaiian and Native Hawaiian interchangeably to refer to people of Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian ancestry.
PLACE-BASED EDUCATION AS SCHOOL REFORM

Place-based education involves a focus on the local context in which students and others live (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b; Smith, 2002). As Gruenewald (2003b) suggested, most school reform efforts do not highlight local places. The mandated emphases on conventional accountability and standardized test scores shifted the focus away from the social contexts in which students and formal education are a part. In contrast, place-based education works against the isolation of schooling’s discourses and practices from the living world. . . . It aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experiences of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there. (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 620)

Smith (2002) pointed out that, although there are a number of differences across various approaches to place-based education, they are united by five common characteristics. First, place-based education incorporates aspects of the particular places in which students live. Second, place-based education applies a constructivist approach to education, whereby students create knowledge instead of just being passive recipients of it. Third, students’ questions and concerns are central to the learning process. Fourth, teachers become colearners with their students and “brokers of community resources and learning possibilities” (Smith, 2002, p. 593). Finally, school and community are not separated, as community members become active in education and students are likewise active in their communities. These five characteristics provide the rationale for why place-based education has the potential to engage students from a diverse range of backgrounds. Learning in this approach is meaningful and active, key elements of engaging schooling (National Research Council, 2004).

The HSP can be considered an example of place-based education. The program was located at a rural school on the far western coast of the island of O’ahu, Hawai‘i, and served a large at-risk student population. Approximately 2,000 students enrolled in the high school overall. However, the HSP created a smaller learning environment within the large public high school (see Yamauchi, 2003, for more details on the program). The program was open to all students in Grades 10–12, although the majority of students was Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian. Participation was voluntary, and all students who requested the program were accommodated. The program typically served 60–100 students each year.

The HSP incorporated Smith’s (2002) five characteristics of place-based education. First, the program emphasized aspects of the local community in which students lived. It was an academic program that integrated learning about the local community with more traditional secondary curriculum in science, social studies, and English. A hallmark of the HSP was its weekly full day of service learning, in which students and their teachers participated in projects developed by students and other community members. For example, groups of students worked with professional archaeologists to map and excavate cultural sites that had not been previously documented. Community members used this documentation to testify against commercial development of the area. Another group of students and their teacher studied the environmental effects of the city’s diversion of water from local streams for household consumption. Using data from their studies, they convinced city officials to divert less water from community streams and agreed to continue to monitor the environment to study the effects of these actions.

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2The program still exists but has changed since these data were collected. Our description of the program reflects implementation in 2000–2003.
Second, the HSP incorporated a constructivist approach, such that students were creators and not just recipients of knowledge. Students’ service-learning activities resulted in documentation of archaeological sites and analyses of the environmental effects of stream diversion. The structure of activities promoted a constructivist approach because educators were learners alongside their students. Many of the service-learning projects required knowledge and skills that the teachers did not have before they and their students began these activities.

The third characteristic of place-based education is that students’ questions and concerns are central to the learning process (Smith, 2002). Students’ interests initiated many of the HSP service-learning projects. For example, when students who volunteered at the health center began to study nutrition and diseases caused by poor diet, they wondered about the nutritional content of fast food in their community. They decided to conduct a nutritional analysis of locally available fast food. All seniors in the HSP completed a final project that developed from their interests and program activities. This aspect of the program promoted the development of students’ own questions and academic inquiries.

Smith’s (2002) fourth characteristic of place-based education is that teachers become learners alongside their students as well as negotiators of community resources. This was evident in the HSP. The teachers did not have prior expertise in many of the areas of the program, including archaeology, water quality studies, and native plant reforestation. The teachers enlisted community members who had this expertise and became learners with their students. HSP educators became community brokers, identifying resources that were compatible with students’ interests and the program themes.

Finally, the HSP exemplified Smith’s (2002) fifth characteristic of place-based education. This characteristic suggests that in these programs, school and community are not separated, as community members become active in education and students are active in their communities. Students’ participation in community affairs was a centerpiece of the HSP. In addition, community members had always been involved in the program, as teachers and community members were cofounders. At the time of this study, 10 community-based organizations assisted in program planning and implementation.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

In general, community-based organizations may have different roles in formal schooling. In some cases, agencies provide access to medical, dental, and social welfare services on school campuses to better coordinate health, educational, and social services (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996; Dryfoos, 2003; Nettles, 1991). These efforts were initiated by a shift toward a more holistic approach to youth development and by parents’ dissatisfaction with access to services for their children (Kritek, 1996). Another approach to partnering with community-based organizations focuses more on school–community collaborations with the purpose of enhancing academic learning and developing more meaningful curriculum. This second approach characterizes community partnerships in the HSP.

An emphasis on community involvement as a means of improving student learning stems from research suggesting that learning is enhanced when new material is tied to what students already know (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000). Much of what is taught in school is often abstract and not intended to be applied in a real-world setting until later (Engeström, 1991;
National Research Council, 2004). Involving community-based organizations in school activities can help to tie academic content in more meaningful ways to students’ lives outside of school. Through such activities, students learn applications of school concepts that are valued by a particular community. These contexts promote relevance for schooling because a community’s values, knowledge base, and ways of interacting are more likely to be included (McCarty, 2002; Tharp et al., 2000; Yamauchi, 2005). Partnerships with community-based organizations are also beneficial in widening the circle of caring adults with whom youth can relate in positive ways and from whom they may seek assistance (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994).

A number of problems have been identified as barriers to school–community partnerships. School personnel, particularly in rural and low-income communities, often do not come from the same neighborhoods as their students (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2000; Riley, 1998). These educators may have different goals, values, perspectives, and norms for interacting than those who live in the communities surrounding the school and who work in community-based organizations (Corbett, Wilson, & Webb 1996; Heath & McLaughlin, 1994; Tharp et al., 2000). Such differences can hinder efforts to build partnerships and productive collaborative activities. In low-income areas, where schools are often low-performing, there may be a tendency for educators and community members to blame each other for the situation, hindering efforts to build potential partnerships (Corbett et al., 1996).

Heath and McLaughlin (1994) pointed out that even with common goals, schools and community-based organizations often operate in isolation from each other. Many times, there is little communication and coordination between similar efforts in and out of school. Barriers may exist around whose responsibility it is to educate youth. Community-based organizations often view school collaborations as difficult because educators may be hesitant to share decision-making with others who have not been trained as teachers (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994). Indeed, research suggests that school–community partnerships that have a more dispersed authority, rather than one that is centralized within a particular person or organization, are better able to resolve problems regarding buy-in of all partnership members (Shaver, Golan, & Wagner, 1996). Bureaucratic barriers may exist, such as legal issues related to confidentiality of student information, which may make it difficult for schools and outside organizations to coordinate their efforts in assisting youth (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994). Finally, Sanders and Lewis (2005) suggested that there is much less community involvement in high schools, compared with elementary campuses. They pointed to unique barriers to community involvement in secondary settings, such as school size, structure, and staff orientation and training.

In this study, we investigated the development of community involvement in the HSP, a high school program for at-risk Hawaiian youth. Our study focuses on (a) the ways in which community members collaborated on the program, (b) how and why they became involved, and (c) what sustained and diminished their involvement. We also discuss implications for the development of community partnerships at other schools and for school reform for at-risk students.

METHODS

Our Roles As Researchers

We have been involved with the HSP as community partners from the university (the first author since 1997, and the second author since 1999). At the time of this study, the first author was the
principal investigator of a project that provided professional development for HSP teachers and program documentation and evaluation. The second author conducted her dissertation research on the HSP, spending one year of fieldwork at the high school. When data for this study were collected, she was working in California for the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), the research center that funded the first author’s project. The focus of CREDE was to understand how to best educate students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We felt that the place-based approach of the HSP was one that other educators might use as a model for developing programs for diverse learners. When we shared information about the HSP through our work at CREDE, some teachers were unsure about how they would go about establishing connections with community organizations, to become what Smith (2002) called “community brokers” (p. 593). We began this inquiry as a case study of one program’s efforts to cultivate and sustain community involvement.

Neither of us is from the community that is the focus of this study; nor are either of us Native Hawaiian. The first author grew up on the same island, but in an urban area 35 miles away. The second author was raised in California. We admit that, at times, our position as outsiders created challenges to our role as researchers. Although, generally, the teachers appeared to be comfortable with our position, community members sometimes questioned our intentions. For example, as we began our work in this locale, one community leader asked how long we would be there and for what purposes the data would be used. After a long discussion, she agreed to support our work. Certainly, over the years, the trust between us and other community partners appeared to strengthen. However, it is possible that community members who were less trusting of us may not have been as open or honest in their interviews or when we were present at meetings. We acknowledge that skepticism, particularly in a community that has been studied and written about by many outsiders and portrayed in ways that do not represent their points of view (e.g., Kaomea, 2005), is both appropriate and understandable.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

We conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 4 HSP teachers and 15 members of 7 community organizations involved with the program during the 2000–2001 school year. The community participants included (a) four members of Ka‘ala Farm, a community agency devoted to sustainable living on the western coast; (b) four members of a nonprofit agency devoted to the social welfare of Hawaiian children and their families; (c) two public health professionals from the local health center; (d) the manager of the local community access cable television station; (e) the proprietor of an independent archaeological firm; (f) a biologist from the U.S. Army; and (7) the program director of an environmental protection agency. Participation was voluntary.

The snowball technique was used to recruit community member participants. Initially, potential participants were nominated by teachers and contacted. All but two of these individuals agreed to participate. When contacted, these community members also suggested others in their agencies that could be recruited as participants.

The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted using a semistructured format. The interviews and focus group discussions were approximately 60 to 90 min long and focused on the participants’ roles in the program, how they became involved, and the barriers to community–school participation. Most of the participants were interviewed individually. However, focus
group discussions were conducted with the teachers and with members of two of the community organizations. Data from the teacher focus group were part of a larger study of the development of the program. The interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Participant Observations

During the 2001–2004 school years, the first author observed students, teachers, and community members participating in service-learning projects. She also made participant observations of meetings between the HSP teachers and members of four of the community organizations involved in the program. In addition, participant observations were made of annual retreats to evaluate the program and to plan for the coming year.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the interview, focus group, and participant observation data by first coding them with a “start list” of initial codes generated by the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These initial codes were: (a) roles, (b) how community organizations got involved; (c) benefits to involvement, (d) school–community collaboration, and (e) barriers and issues. After reviewing what had been coded under “benefits,” six subcodes were generated: (a) benefits to community organizations, (b) benefits to the HSP, (c) benefits to the community, (d) benefits to the students, (e) benefits to the school, and (f) personal benefits. The category of “benefits to community organizations” was further divided into the following subcodes: (a) fulfillment of agency’s mission, (b) recruitment of participants for existing programs, (c) engagement of a volunteer workforce, (d) recruitment of students to a profession, (e) public relations, and (f) community organizations members’ personal sense of community service. The text coded under “barriers and issues” was further divided into three subcodes: (a) a lack of support from the school system, (b) teacher burnout, and (c) interpersonal conflicts. Finally, the data coded under both “collaboration” and “barriers and issues” were also further analyzed by looking for similarities among what was said regarding sustaining collaboration. Three subcodes emerged: (a) communication, (b) the development of common values, and (c) flexible schedules.

RESULTS

Community Collaboration in the Program

Community collaboration in the HSP took a variety of forms, including community partners providing funding, program development, supervision of students’ service-learning, professional development for teachers, curriculum development, cultural consultation, and political support. Table 1 presents the community organizations that were involved and ways in which they participated.

Funding. A number of HSP activities required funding beyond what was provided by the school system. For example, the most crucial need was funding for transportation to students’ service-learning sites. When the program started with just 30 students, the social welfare agency
TABLE 1
HSP Community partners and their collaborative activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Type of agency</th>
<th>Collaborative activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aki Sinoto Consulting Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence</td>
<td>Private archaeological firm University research center</td>
<td>Supervision of students’ fieldwork Funding, program development, curriculum development, professional development, political support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Land and Natural Resources Ka’ala Farm, Inc.</td>
<td>State governmental agency Nonprofit community development organization</td>
<td>Supervision of students’ fieldwork Funding, program development, curriculum development, professional development, supervision of students’ fieldwork, cultural consultation, political support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature Conservancy</td>
<td>Nonprofit environmental protection agency</td>
<td>Supervision of students’ fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Ölelo Television</td>
<td>Local satellite of community access cable television station</td>
<td>Supervision of students’ fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center</td>
<td>Nonprofit social welfare agency</td>
<td>Funding, program development, professional development, cultural consultation, political support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Hawai‘i West O‘ahu The U.S. Army Wai‘anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center</td>
<td>Higher education institution Federal governmental agency Local health center</td>
<td>Supervision of students’ fieldwork Supervision of students’ fieldwork Program development, supervision of students’ fieldwork, cultural consultation, political support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

provided a van and driver to take students to their sites. However, as the program grew to accommodate more students, the same agency provided funds to contract school buses. When the agency could no longer provide funds for this purpose, two other organizations paid for transportation. The teachers viewed funding for transportation as their greatest need because service-learning activities were located in places that were not easily accessible by the city bus.

**Program development.** Four community organizations were involved in program development, which included organizing and facilitating activities to plan and evaluate the HSP. Early in the program’s history, Ka’ala Farm, an organization devoted to sustainable living in the community, played a central role in these activities. Most of the community members interviewed said that they first became involved in the HSP through their contacts with Eric, the director of Ka’ala’s cultural learning center. Eric himself described his role as an “interim coordinator”:

[My role] since we had helped to initially put the program together... is to act as a kind of interim coordinator, to coordinate the partners and help develop the ideas of how the program should be.... My initial role was that of bringing the partners in and talking about how that happens.

3 Most participants wanted their real names to be used. Unless noted, all names are their actual names.
Ka’aala was also involved in program development through their planning of annual retreats for the HSP teachers and community members to discuss program goals, outcomes, and future directions. In 2001, a weekly planning meeting was initiated. Teachers and members of four of the community organizations met to discuss program development and partnership activities.

**Supervision and organization of service-learning.** Many of the community partners provided sites and personnel for students’ service-learning. The local health center was a site for students to learn about different health professions. In collaboration with the U.S. Army, students worked on conservation activities with Anuhea, a botanist who supervised students interested in native plant reforestation. Anuhea noted that part of her role has been to provide information about how she arrived at her current occupation:

Some of the kids who are really excited about the field of conservation have asked us, “Well, what do you have to do in order to get a job like this? Where did you go to school? Did you go to college?”

In addition to providing information about career pathways, the community members also taught students skills of their profession. The archaeologists, for example, provided instruction to HSP students and teachers on how to complete mapping, conduct digs, and present archaeological findings.

**Teacher and curriculum development.** From 2001–2004, our university research center provided professional development for the HSP teachers. We formed a study group for the teachers to learn about principles of best practice for culturally diverse students. Ka’ala and the social welfare agency also provided more short-term professional development opportunities for teachers to attend workshops on Hawaiian culture. They also developed HSP curriculum. Ka’ala staff members worked with teachers to develop classroom units that integrated Hawaiian culture and students’ service-learning activities.

**Cultural consultation.** Community members from Ka’ala and two other organizations served as cultural consultants by leading efforts to integrate Hawaiian values and knowledge into program activities. During the planning meetings, representatives from these three groups often brought up cultural issues. Lilette, the Ka’ala executive director, described how this role was reinforced at a meeting with other community partners:

Our concern at that time was that there didn’t seem to be enough obvious integration of Hawaiian culture—aspects that we felt would make the program a Hawaiian Studies Program. The academic rigor is there…. However, it didn’t necessarily leave us with a feeling that there was enough Hawaiian-ness.

Lilette and others decided to plan a series of retreats to promote program teachers, students, and families learning more about Hawaiian culture.

The social welfare agency also provided cultural consultation, largely through the efforts of Lyle, the social worker assigned to the HSP. Lyle provided this consultation more at an individual level. He had a lot of direct contact with students, serving as a chaperone for field trips,

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4A pseudonym.
visiting classrooms, and driving students to their field sites. Lyle talked about his personal relationship with students and the large amount of time he spent with them outside of school. In his conversations with students, Lyle often emphasized aspects of Hawaiian culture, particularly respect for others, for the environment, and for one’s ancestors.

**Political support.** Another role that community partners played in the HSP was that of political supporter. Partners provided political support both within and outside the school. Within the school, they were instrumental in lobbying the principal’s support for the program. Linda, one of the founding teachers, talked about how community members helped to start the program:

> Teachers can go to principals or registrars and say, “I have a really good idea for a course.” They’ll tell you, “Put it in writing and if it’s possible, we’ll get to it.” But it’s a lot different when you sit down at a table with people from the community that are well-known and respected and say, “We are really supporting this.” And that first meeting with [the then-principal], we had [members from Ka’ala and the social service agency]. And it’s like, oh, it’s not just two teachers. There’s a bit more leverage.

That first principal became a strong advocate of the program. However, after she left the school, her predecessor was not as overtly supportive of the program. At different times, the partners had to lobby the new principal for her continued support. At one point, she was about to transfer one of the HSP teachers to teach in another subject area, which would have ended the program. A group of community members met with the principal to emphasize the importance of the program and to negotiate how to maintain it. The principal said that the teacher did not have enough students enrolled in her classes to warrant keeping her in the program. To allow the program to continue, there needed to be another part-time teacher available who could serve more students. The social welfare agency agreed to pay for the part-time teacher, and the program continued.

**How Community Collaborations Emerged**

Ka’ala was the first community group involved in the HSP and helped to initiate the program. Ka’ala’s interest in starting the program stemmed from their mission to promote community development. Eric explained how the HSP fulfilled this mission:

> It’s [the] idea [that] education really is larger than…some educators perceive it…. The way education has been happening historically is that you educate people to fill a gap somewhere, where there’s a work force. And that’s not enough. For us, education has no walls. It’s really about the world we live in, and the place we live in…. You train somebody to work at a hotel. You train somebody to work as an engineer for a system. You train somebody to fit into these little boxes. For us, the children need to know where they’re from and [about] their connection to their community.

Representatives from all but two of the seven organizations interviewed said that their institutions first became involved with the HSP through contact with Eric from Ka’ala. Many of them knew him through other collaborative community work. When approached about becoming involved, community members considered how participation would meet their organization’s missions and needs. For example, Gail, who was the manager of the social welfare agency when the HSP began, talked about how the program met their objective to benefit orphan and destitute
Hawaiian children. Gail said that the social service agency first attempted to meet this goal by providing case management, but later shifted to an emphasis on community building:

Some of our initial efforts were economic development.... But we realized it has to be closer.... There has to be more direct impact.... We’ve known for some time that Hawaiian children are not making it in our [public school] system, and that is the system that impacts most of our children.... So when we learned of Hawaiian Studies through Eric...we thought this should be a wonderful opportunity to look at how we can be part of changing the system that impacts...most of our children.

The only community members who did not mention Eric as their group’s initial contact with the HSP was Anuhea, the Army biologist, and Sparky, the manager of the community access cable station. Both of these community members became involved through contact with program teachers. As Sparky explained, his station’s goals included both training more community members to produce video and covering more community events. While videotaping a community activity at a nature preserve, Sparky met Linda, one of the Hawaiian Studies teachers, and her students. Some of the HSP students were videotaping their peers to document service-learning at that site. Sparky commented:

The Hawaiian Studies students came in to do their [service-learning], and...that’s how it started.... We were shooting the program.... The idea came up. It would be better for them to do it.... We were looking at how we could partner up. The facilities they had working [at the school] were over-used and under equipped. So we offered a different component where the students could come here and use some of the equipment that they couldn’t get at the school. So this became kind of their place. On Thursday, they took over.

As discussed previously, many community members became involved in the HSP because of an alignment with their organization’s mission. Other reasons for becoming involved included (a) recruitment of participants for existing programs, (b) engagement of a volunteer workforce, (c) recruitment of students to a profession, and (d) public relations.

Recruitment for existing programs. Two groups saw their involvement as a means by which they could recruit participants for existing youth projects. For example, the program director for an environmental protection agency said that her initial interest stemmed from the possibility that the HSP students would be part of their high school conservation program. Similarly, when Eric from Ka’ala approached members of the health center, they realized that HSP students could become participants for a program they had developed to promote health occupations among high school youth.

A voluntary work force. For some organizations, involvement in the HSP fulfilled a need for a larger work force. Students spent 1 day a week participating in service-learning. Many of the community organizations were interested in these projects, but did not have adequate personnel for them. For example, after conducting chemical and visual assessments of the Wa`ianae stream system, HSP students testified to the Board of Water Supply5 that the diversion of stream water for household water use was detrimental to the environment. The Board agreed to return more water to the streams but wanted data on the effects. The HSP students volunteered to conduct the tests in exchange for needed supplies. In the native plant restoration and reforestation

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5This is the governmental agency that controls water use.
component of the HSP, students often assisted agencies in removing alien plant species, replacing them with indigenous ones, and collecting data on how the plants fared. As Bruce, a botanist from Kaʻala, pointed out:

All of these organizations are in desperate need of volunteers. There’s a tremendous amount of work that has to be done. There’s almost 300 endangered species in Hawai‘i now, plant species. And these organizations are kind of saddled with the job of trying to keep all of these alive. So they are always looking for volunteers . . . [HSP] students do work well. They are hard workers. They stay focused.

Recruitment of students to a profession. Members from two organizations mentioned that they were motivated to become involved with the HSP because they viewed their participation as a means of recruiting youth to their profession. This was the case for members of the health center, whose goals included developing health professionals from within the community. Aki, an independent professional archaeologist, also talked about this being a reason why he continued to supervise students each week for their archaeology fieldwork. Although he was initially paid through a grant, when funding ran out, he continued to work voluntarily.

I just feel that public education is a real vital part of historic preservation. You know, unless we start early enough, people aren’t going to care about it. Plus, . . . I always thought that indigenous peoples should be interpreting their own culture. And right now, unfortunately, . . . most of the archaeologists in the State are outsiders. So you know, even [if] one or two students come out wanting to pursue [archaeology], as a profession, I think it’s good.

Good public relations. Two agencies mentioned that their involvement in the HSP promoted a more positive public image of their group and their activities. This was particularly true for the Army, whose use of Mākua Valley for military practices creates a great deal of tension in the community. On different occasions, there were community demonstrations against the Army’s use of the valley and their restriction of public access. As Anthea, an Army biologist, explained, the Army viewed her involvement in the HSP as a means by which they could show the public that they were invested in community affairs.

That’s always been my feeling from everybody in the Army, . . . “Please continue the outreach program you have with [the HSP] because it’s one of the things the Army can boast about in terms of their relationship with the community.” So I’ve always had support from my bosses and from our public affairs office . . . . They’ve had press people come out to show that the Army Natural Resources Program is working with [the HSP] so I think it’s really good publicity.

To a lesser extent, Kaʻala also viewed their involvement in the HSP as a way in which they could shape the broader public’s perception of their activities. Eric explained that sometimes the general public did not immediately buy into Kaʻala’s goal of promoting Hawaiian culture and values:

We needed to have . . . more long-term involvement in the restoration of our cultural sites . . . and making that bridge from indigenous knowledge to information that the kids can use in their daily lives . . . . ‘Cause one of the criticisms of Hawaiian cultural projects is, “Oh that’s nice, but what real, practical value has it in today’s world?” And we think it has a lot of value, but we needed to show the bridging, beginning with the cultural values [and] the foundations of development of self.
Sustaining Involvement

The length of time that community members and agencies were involved in the HSP varied. For some, it was a one-year commitment; others participated across numerous years. Our own involvement spanned several years, although the amount of time we spent varied considerably. Some years we were both at the school every week. Other years, we were more peripherally involved, only attending the annual retreats. There were a number of ways that our own and other community members’ involvement was sustained. This included (a) open communication among partners and teachers, (b) the development of a common set of values, and (c) the flexibility of many community members’ schedules.

Communication. Communication, both between community members and the HSP teachers and between the community partners themselves, was an important influence in sustaining community involvement. Most community members communicated directly with one particular teacher regarding issues related to their joint activities. This teacher was often the one who was most closely involved in the community organization’s collaborations, as was the case with the teacher who accompanied students for the service-learning involving that agency. In other cases, the teachers divided the organizations among themselves so that the workload was shared. Communication between the teachers and the community members occurred by phone, e-mail, or during weekly fieldwork. Although one community member mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to contact the teachers during school hours, all of the members who talked about communication with the teachers said that it was effective and positive.

There were two types of meetings attended by community members and the HSP teachers: the annual meetings of all community partners and the more frequent meetings of a more “core” group of organizations. The annual meetings were organized and facilitated by Ka‘ala and typically held during a school intersession, often right before school began. Community members were asked to summarize their roles in the program and to provide feedback on their involvement. These meetings were also used as opportunities to review the program’s mission and to collaborate on long-term planning. The majority of the organizations that were involved in the program sent a representative to these meetings, although some community members did not stay for the meeting’s duration. Three of the community partners said that they did not know the other community members very well because, although they saw them at meetings, there was little time to get to know other people and their agencies.

The more frequent meetings between the smaller, more core group of partners was another way that at least members from these organizations and the teachers could communicate about progress and concerns. Those who came to these weekly meetings appeared to feel that it was a good way to interact about the day-to-day logistics of the program, although one partner said that there was little time at the meetings to talk about the big picture. The teachers generally viewed the meetings as convenient and helpful to their work.

Some of the community members whose agencies were represented at the weekly meetings suggested that it might be effective to designate a partnership coordinator for the program, whose primary responsibility was to facilitate communication between all partners. These community members pointed out that although Eric from Ka‘ala had played this role earlier in the program’s history, there was no one person currently responsible for communication among community partners. As Eric concurred during this discussion, “One thing about partnerships
is that it's a lot of work. It's frustrating. There is a high level of responsibility.'" Some at this meeting suggested that it might be better to develop two part-time coordinators, one to work with the community partners and another for the teachers. Community members from Ka'ala and the health center said that they would review their budgets and personnel to see if it might be possible to change existing staff members' job descriptions to include these responsibilities. However, these positions were never established.

Developing a common set of values. That community members came together at the various meetings was important, at least partly, because it was a forum for the development of common values among multiple partners. Lilette, the Ka'ala executive director, said that her organization realized early in the program's development that they needed to recruit more partners, "Ka'ala comes with the idea, [but] we can't do this on our own. We're only one voice, and we don't represent everyone. We need other perspectives, other voices, and other help.'" Recruiting different organizations brought about a diversity of viewpoints, but the larger group also needed to establish a shared vision upon which the program could be based. Lyle, the social worker at the social welfare agency who was assigned to work with the HSP, described how this shared perspective was nurtured from the beginning:

The first thing we did was, the school, the administration, teaching staff, and community people just gathered. . . . We talked about education in a very general way, and we looked at what worked and what didn't work. What's effective, what's ineffective? And then with the program, because it has a cultural component, we looked at what were the values that drove us to want to do this project. So the first thing any community would need to do is look at its values, its philosophies.

Flexible schedules. Sustaining community involvement in the HSP also required that community members were able to find time to work with teachers and students. This was particularly true for community members who were involved in the service-learning that occurred during weekday mornings. All of the community members who worked directly with students were able to establish these activities as part of their existing jobs. They were either highly independent within their organizations or self-employed. For example, two of the archaeologists were self-employed. The other two were State employees who were able to justify their work with students as part of their duties. The program also needed to be flexible enough to accommodate community members when they needed to attend to other business scheduled during the service-learning activities.

Challenges to School-Community Collaboration

Like any collaboration between diverse individuals or organizations, there were a number of challenges to community involvement in the HSP. When this study was conducted, intense community involvement was not very typical within the school system. Community members felt that the system often did not support the HSP. Teachers and community members also identified that teacher burnout and occasional interpersonal conflicts as other challenges.

Lack of support from the school system. The teachers and community members felt that the HSP was sustained largely through their efforts and were concerned with what they perceived to be a lack of support from others in the school system. Although the principal
who originally helped start the HSP was very supportive of the program, the person who took
her place told an external evaluator that she was not enthusiastic about the program and was con-
cerned that there was little evidence of strong academic outcomes. The community members
stressed the importance of administrative support for program sustainability. As Eric from
Ka‘ala noted,

We’re struggling right now [with] how to keep it alive. Just sustain the work, sustain the people,
sustain the program . . . . We’ve seen programs, 25 years of work, and in a space of months almost
brought down, crashing down, because of an administrator . . . . who has an agenda and can totally
destroy it. So it happens, it can happen to Hawaiian Studies, and can very easily . . . . it has nothing
to do with logic. It has to do with their own personal agendas.

Similarly, the leader of one of the other organizations suggested that a lack of support from
administrators in the school system was a threat to continuance of the program and its commu-
nity involvement. She viewed the HSP as vulnerable and sustained by a few individuals rather
than by the commitment of a system:

They have to see the value of this program . . . . and make it so that it’s part of what the school
does . . . . So if a teacher leaves, it won’t fall apart. So if one of the partners cannot be there anymore,
it won’t fall apart. It has to be where the [school system] can accept is as a program that’s legitimate
within the [school system].

Teacher burnout. As teachers and the community members acknowledged, the program
required many more hours of work for teachers than was typical for educators at the high school.
Extra time was spent communicating with community partners, investigating possible commu-
nity organizations that might get involved, developing curriculum that integrated community
issues, and meeting with students about their service-learning. As one of the teachers, Linda,
described,

It’s harder. It takes more time. I was always looking for 2:30 before, now I’m looking for 5:30
[laughing] . . . . I would have never imagined when I first started teaching I would spend this much
time outside school doing school stuff because that just wasn’t the way I was . . . . We’re giving up a
lot of our spare time, but it doesn’t feel like this huge burden. Well, most of the time it doesn’t.

The HSP educators and the community members noted that running a program with a strong
community component, in addition to instructing other classes that were not related to the
program, was often overwhelming for teachers. Bruce, the botanist from Ka‘ala, observed that
the HSP teachers were often “so stretched out.” He had previously taught at a community
college where release time for program development and implementation was provided and
considered reasonable. Bruce thought that such a system in the public schools could also be
instituted and would help to sustain teachers’ involvement. The teachers and community
members all agreed that the amount of time required of teachers contributed to a high teacher
turnover. The program typically involved three to four teachers each year. In three years, eight
teachers had left the program. One teacher said he left because he was tired of working so hard
without the support of school administrators.

Interpersonal conflicts. Finally, a challenge to school-community collaboration in the HSP
was periodic interpersonal conflicts. In the program’s seven-year history, two teachers left the
program because of conflicts with another teacher. Another teacher left the program to teach elsewhere, and her departure was precipitated by a conflict with a community partner. Conflicts also occurred between community members. We, ourselves, were involved in a conflict with members from two other agencies who felt that the first author was trying to dominate the community partner activities by “taking over” the meetings as the self-appointed facilitator. These tensions were somewhat resolved when the first author conceded facilitation of the meetings, although there was some awkwardness during the transition to a new facilitator. These kinds of conflicts seemed natural, given the number and diversity of people who were involved in the program. In their focus group discussion, the teachers noted that working so closely with other teachers and so many community members created a kind of intensity that had both advantages and disadvantages.

**DISCUSSION**

This study examined the development of community involvement in a place-based high school program for at-risk Hawaiian youth. The HSP founders sought to reform education by integrating community-based and school activities because they felt that many Hawaiian students were disengaged from formal education. This study contributes to the literature on community involvement in secondary education and for at-risk youth. High school educators typically lag behind elementary school counterparts in their efforts to integrate community involvement in their schools (Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Little research has documented what works and inhibits community involvement in secondary education. In this section, we highlight implications of our findings for the development of other place-based educational programs with intensive community involvement. In particular, we discuss issues related to (a) sharing ownership and responsibility, (b) sustaining school-community collaborations through communication, and (c) understanding the socio-political context of accountability.

**Shared Ownership and Responsibility**

Smith (2002) suggested that one of the characteristics of place-based education is that school and community are integrated, rather than separate. Results from this study suggested that the HSP integrated community knowledge and broadened ownership of schooling. Community members voiced strong commitment to and shared ownership of the program. They were not peripheral partners, but were integral to the program’s development and success. The teachers acknowledged community partners’ importance, recognizing that they were influential in getting the program started and more than once “saved” the program through lobbying efforts.

Leadership for the program was shared across the teachers and community members, also indicating strong collaboration between these groups. A previous study of 31 school–community collaborations indicated that shared leadership was related to better working relationships and other indicators of collaborative success (Shaver et al., 1996). Community organizations often view schools as the most difficult partners with whom they work, citing school personnel’s reluctance to relinquish control or to view others as educators (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994). In the HSP, teachers recognized community partners as often having more expertise than they did.
Communication to Sustain School–Community Collaborations

Smith (2002) also suggested that place-based educators search for community resources and negotiate ways that such opportunities can be integrated with program activities. In the HSP, the teachers and community members shared the responsibility for brokering community resources. This required successful and on-going communication between educators and community members.

Communication in the HSP was facilitated through numerous meetings, both about on-going logistics and more long-term evaluation and planning. In larger programs, it may be helpful to recruit a coordinator so that these organizational duties do not add to the responsibilities of already overburdened teachers. As was the case for the HSP, a coordinator might be recruited from one of the community organizations. Community members might also be able to garner financial support to hire someone for this position.

School–community collaborations are not without challenges. A lack of support from the broader school system can jeopardize programs or contribute to teachers’ stress. McCarty (2002) pointed out that bureaucratic difficulties and a general apathy on the part of larger federal agencies about a school’s goals sometimes results in delayed funding, high teacher turnover, and turmoil. Collaboration with community organizations often requires extra time and energy that can lead to teacher burnout and higher attrition. This may be related to teachers working with a larger network of people than is typical of schools. Increased contacts may lead to increased interpersonal conflicts, which should be anticipated and addressed, as they can affect program implementation. Those who initiate educational programs involving community agencies may want to also institute measures to alleviate teachers’ workload, such as negotiating release time from other duties.

Our study suggests that communication is essential to sustaining long-term partnerships. Frequent and effective interactions between community members and educators are a way to build common values among a varied group of people. Effective communication can also meet the partners’ organizational and personal needs, which, in turn, promotes sustainability. The community members in this study indicated that they continued their involvement because important needs were met. Frequent meetings may have provided partners with an avenue to voice concerns and provide input on what was beneficial to them personally and to their groups.

Communication was also important because a number of the partners came from not-for-profit organizations. These agencies often depend on grants and volunteers, and thus may be less stable than government organizations and other more established institutions. Not-for-profit organizations may suddenly lose funding or personnel that previously allowed them to collaborate with schools. They may also experience change in leadership or focus that alters participation in programs. Effective communication may mediate transitions that occur. For example, after a few years, the social welfare agency that had provided much of the funding for transportation in the HSP modified its focus from community building to direct client services. When this happened, the other community partners met to brainstorm ways to fulfill this program need.

The Socio-Political Context of Accountability

Another challenge to developing place-based educational programs with high levels of community involvement is the political climate around school accountability. When the HSP began, the educational policy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) had not yet been implemented.
The onset of NCLB motivated school personnel to focus on increasing standardized test scores. Approximately two years after data for this study were collected, the school adopted a national school reform model that made it more difficult to allow time for weekly service-learning. Program teachers and community members were able to adjust to this, and the off-campus service-learning continued. However, for a few years thereafter, the program struggled and the number of teachers, students, and community members decreased.

Some advocates of place-based education have argued that accountability systems like NCLB may be at odds with a place-based approach (e.g., Gruenewald, 2003b). Unlike typical NCLB-inspired school reform models, the goals of place-based educational programs like the HSP are generally not focused on increasing standardized test scores, but rather on making education more relevant and engaging. Whereas many accountability systems focus on general learner outcomes that can be assessed by standardized tests, place-based education highlights the characteristics, problems, and solutions of particular communities (Smith, 2002). What students learn through such curriculum may not be best assessed by standardized tests (McCarty, 2002).

On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that place-based education, and community-involvement more generally, can support student achievement and other positive outcomes (Jennings, Swidler, & Koliba, 2005; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Jennings and colleagues (2005) argued that place-based education is not inherently in conflict with standards-based reform efforts. They studied the perceptions of Vermont policymakers’ and practitioners’ perspectives on state standards and place-based curriculum. A coalition of place-based advocates and environmental community groups had successfully lobbied for the inclusion of two place-based standards in Vermont’s statewide educational framework. Although the practitioners were generally unaware of the place-based standards in their state’s framework, they also did not find standards-based reform and place-based education to be at odds with one another. To the contrary, practitioners felt that the two efforts were complementary and generative. For example, some noted that state standards could assist educators in developing more substantive place-based lessons that focused on broader concepts rather than the more concrete activities themselves. The majority of the participants felt that the standards were supportive of their existing use of place-based curriculum.

Recommendations for Educators

Our study has implications for educators who are interested in developing place-based education. We recommend that teachers consider where their schools are located to identify surrounding resources and needs. This involves finding community collaborators, perhaps those from nonprofit organizations. Teachers can ask community members and students to brainstorm with them about what makes their community special and to develop questions about this place. By engaging in conversations about what is taught in school, teachers and community members can consider how the interests and needs of community organizations can be built into the school curriculum. Working together, this group can develop interdisciplinary themes that incorporate local activities. They may also generate ways that students can be involved in the community, through service-learning, field trips, and in other ways that students can interact with community members. To solicit feedback, educators may share these ideas with students and other school and community members.

As Smith (2002) pointed out, place-based education is a collaborative endeavor between school and community members. It has the potential to increase student engagement, which is
an important component of the learning process. Everyone who is involved—educators, students, and community members alike—takes an active role in building a curriculum that is relevant to the place around them.

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