



Navigating Change Takes Students on Ocean Journey

by Lori Arizumi | Posted on May 8, 2009



Students on a native planting and restoration field trip. Navigating Change was inspired seven years ago by Nainoa Thompson of the Polynesian Voyaging Society, on a voyage to the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands aboard Hokule'a. These islands and atolls represent the most ancient segment of the Hawaiian archipelago. In June of 2006 this sacred and beautiful place was designated the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and became one of the largest protected marine areas. It is a safe haven for a thriving and balanced ecosystem of

land and sea creatures, many of which are endemic to the Hawaiian island.

This balanced ecosystem serves as a reminder and a baseline of the way terrestrial ecosystems of Hawai'i once were.

"By understanding how our ecosystems can thrive in a relatively unaltered state we can find new directions, and mitigate some of the harmful practices we've adopted on this planet," said Matt Limtiaco, program coordinator for Navigating Change. "In other words, by adopting sustainable practices and engaging in restoration we can all navigate change."

The voyage of Hokule'a and the term Navigating Change inspired the creation of a teacher's guide that would serve to honor and incorporate the importance of the incredible natural and cultural significance of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Through satellite teleconferences, Hokule'a was brought into the classroom, and allowed students to experience along the way the importance of practicing values such as laulima (working together), kuleana (taking responsibility), and malama (caring).

Navigating Change Focus

"The goal of Navigating Change is to motivate, encourage, and inspire people to become part of the solution to poor environmental conditions in their own backyards. We want people to take responsibility for the stewardship and sustainability of our islands and our ocean," says Limtiaco. "Our youth in Hawaii need to be aware of these problems so that together as a community we can support the solutions for the world they will inherit. If we're able to embrace our challenges as opportunities to be closer to our earth and each other, future generations may remember us fondly as the restoration generation."

In the school year of 2008-2009, Navigating Change focused on restoration of Maunalua Bay, through a program that brought teachers and students together with partnership agencies such as Malama Maunalua, The Nature Conservancy, Division of Forestry and Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB). Issues surrounding Maunalua were defined for students to focus on, including invasive algae, water quality monitoring, historical background, and wetland plant restoration.

Over 300 students from schools in the community of Maunalua Bay were hosted on enrichment field trips and activities designed to help students, teachers, and parents malama their own backyard. "Each school year the Navigating Change program will support the existing restoration efforts in different ahupua'a," said Limtiaco.

Through the Navigating Change program, students from the fourth and fifth grade have visited the Bishop Museum, the Honolulu Maritime Museum, the Waikiki Aquarium, Hanauma Bay, and Moku o Loe (Coconut Island) to work side by side with scientists from HIMB. Students were also visited in their classes by experts in marine biology, traditional knowledge, and the history of Maunalua Bay.

Students utilized these new skills and knowledge to engage in hands-on restoration efforts in Maunalua Bay. Water quality was measured at the mouth of Kuliouou Stream, and invasive algae was removed (by volunteers) from the shallows in Paiko Lagoon for students to identify. Students also helped remove invasive plants and restore over 100 native plants at Paiko Lagoon Wildlife Sanctuary. That number has tripled due to the hard work of Malama Maunalua and Ati Jeffers-Fabro of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife, who helps oversee the restoration efforts at the sanctuary.

"There is no way we could have done this project without the help of a largely volunteer force," said Limtiaco. "I think it's a testament to the community's love for this place."

Students were encouraged to apply what they learned by undertaking projects to malama the environment. Field trips to a Hawaiian fishpond and to a nearshore environment impacted by runoff from the land provided opportunities for students to investigate human interactions with the aina and conduct community service.

Limtiaco says with all the energy going into saving the bay he has a lot of hope for its future, especially thanks to the younger generations.

"Get kids out of the classroom and into an area where they can see some of the problems that are facing the bay," Limtiaco said. "We're actually engaging not only our kids, but our parents, grandparents and neighbors through what these kids are being inspired by," Limtiaco said.

In Celebration

This year-long program was designed to enrich classroom learning, create partnerships between environmental organizations, and inspire families to engage in ongoing movements to bring Maunalua Bay back to a healthy state.

The celebratory event will be held at Maunalua Bay Beach Park on May 9, from 9 AM to 1 PM, and will feature music, food, informative booths, displays by students, and guest speakers from Polynesian Voyaging Society. Parking will be available at participating schools and continuous shuttles will be operating. Live music from Maunalua and food from Cha Cha Cha Salsaria will be available for purchase.