Indigenising the sustainability movement through critical indigenous pedagogy of place

A case study of a youth Farm

Alma M.O. Trinidad

Abstract

Young people of Native Hawaiian background face an array of issues that limit their understanding of their cultural roots and knowledge useful in a sustainability movement that focuses on food security. Despite the sociopolitical climate, Pacific Islander communities are taking an active role in indigenising their sustainability efforts by involving youth. This article highlights a case study of a youth Farm. The Farm utilises Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place (CIPP). CIPP can promote critical understanding of history, cultural values and responsibility. Findings of the study suggest that CIPP can be an effective process and method in indigenising a sustainability movement that involves young people. Research and practice implications are discussed.

Key words: indigenisation, Native Hawaiian epistemology and values, critical pedagogy of place, youth organising, sustainability
The case study focuses on a programme, the Farm, that targets Native Hawaiian youth in a rural community in Hawai‘i. Formed in 2000, the Farm is part of a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-governmental community development organisation. The overarching goal of the parent organisation is to empower the rural community to move towards self-sufficiency, especially around the issue of food security. Its founders characterise the Farm as a social movement to develop a comprehensive plan and sustainable local food system by educating youth, fighting hunger, improving health, nutrition and wellness, and by being part of the expanding organic agricultural industry. To meet its mission, a holistic and interconnected economic development and educational project was formed. The study investigates the function and role of the Farm in indigenising the sustainability movement through the use of Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place (CIPP). The research questions that guide this work include: 1) What are the key functions, roles and processes of the Farm related to CIPP that encourage learning about one’s culture? 2) What outcomes are linked to the use of CIPP?

Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place

CIPP is a facilitative learning tool for encouraging young people to recognise and confront inequalities in their community (Trinidad, in press) and embraces Indigenous identity and ways of knowing and being rooted in place (Johnston-Goodstar, Trinidad & Tecle, 2010). CIPP builds upon the literature of critical pedagogy, the concept of place, and indigenous studies. It focuses on rootedness and spirituality, and makes empowerment ecologically valid and credible to a specific cultural group, its historical experiences and knowledge base (Trinidad, in press). Focusing on Indigenous epistemology, CIPP allows indigenisation to occur by providing a space to retell and reclaim a community’s history, languages and social practices (Trinidad, 2009; Trinidad, in press). The utilisation of CIPP includes place-based activities such as hands-on organic farming, leadership training, photovoice and talking circles.

Method: the case study and data analysis

The Farm was part of a larger national study of youth programmes across the United States in 2004 and 2006. The Farm offered paid internships to twelve youth or young adults, of ages 17 to 25, over a ten-month period and provided them with hands-on, real-life work and business experience. Participants were recruited to the programme primarily through word of mouth or local advertisement in the community. The Farm’s activities also included cultural-based workshops, and leadership and entrepreneurial training for the community.

To address the research questions, the case study includes an analysis of in-depth, open-ended interviews with seventeen participants: eight young adults, four youth staff members, two parents, one board member, one person who was both a parent and a board member, and one community advocate / kupuna (elder). Pseudonyms were assigned to the individuals. Demographic information was provided (see Appendix). Data also included an analysis of newspaper articles and online materials about the Farm.

The interview covered the following topics: 1) the Farm and the types of activities involving youth; 2) parents or community members’ involvement; 3) the neighborhood or community and its role in the Farm; 4) resources of the Farm; and 5) what youth take away from their involvement in the Farm. The interview protocol contained twenty-six major questions with prompts and was administered
by telephone. Five interviews were administered in-person due to the difficulties of recruiting and retaining the study participants. Each interview lasted one hour on average, and was transcribed and coded.

Analysis of the content of the interview transcripts and text materials employed a combination of inductive and deductive techniques to build a working model. Open and axial coding, constant comparison and theoretical sampling procedures from an interpretive method called *grounded theory* were used to construct categories and identify relationships between major categories in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Building upon a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective (Stryker, 1987; Hollander & Howard, 2000) a critical Indigenous *interpretive* stance (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Harvey, 1992) enabled understanding of the participants’ implicit and explicit meanings and experiential views on their contexts. This method was especially useful in developing a working conceptual framework.

Line-by-line analysis of the content identified and compared ideas and allowed the establishment of categorical codes. Initially, a selective review of the literature related to transformative learning, youth participation and Native epistemology established the content analyses. Comparison of implicit and explicit meanings and views among the study participants, taking into account the community’s sociopolitical climate, identified linkages (Hollander & Howard, 2000). Moreover, as analysis proceeded, I recorded impressions and interpretation of the data in memos; my interpretation of the data also included critical self-reflexivity (Kimpson, 2005; Braidotti, 2002, as cited in Herising, 2005).

Data management utilised Microsoft Word and Atlas qualitative data analysis software.

**Results**

The goal of the study is to build a working conceptual model of critical Indigenous pedagogy of place (CIPP) with a focus on indigenisation processes. Findings reveal three conceptual groups that demonstrate the potential of CIPP to: 1) teach about the genealogy of a place, 2) reclaim Native Hawaiian values such as *malama ‘aina* (care for the land) and *‘ohana* (family) and 3) promote a sense of *aloha* (love) for the community (see Figure 1). Findings suggest that through indigenisation, young people are provided with opportunities to engage critically with and learn about their culture and community.

**Teach Genealogy: ‘Being Grounded, Have a Sense of Place’**

The data suggest that activities in the Farm promote a sense of place – of ‘being grounded’ in the Hawaiian culture. This, as Kekula, a *kupuna* (elder) elaborated, was vital to indigenisation:

> Grounded . . . often times youth doesn’t have a sense of where they come from , , , There is no value in the spiritual places that surround them. So when they’re grounded, they hear about the places around them and how and why they are important, why these mountains, the stories about that mountain, the stories about that beach, the name [of this geographic place], ’large mullet’, the indication of climatic conditions were at the time when the first people arrived, they didn’t name this place large mullet because of the mullet. It was the [symbolic and metaphoric] representation of that [specific name of geographic place] stood out the most when they got here that got the name. So it gives them some connection to the past.
Kekula emphasised that ‘being grounded’ has helped steer the direction of the Farm. To reinforce the Hawaiian knowledge of natural resources in the community, *oli* (chants) were used throughout the curriculum. Specifically, *oli* were used on the Farm as part of the daily protocol. *Oli* were chanted at the start and end of the day’s agenda, serving as a way to centre the youth and help them focus on the day’s responsibilities. Youth were taught an *oli* about the geographic place and its spiritual meaning. Discussion occasionally took place on how it applied to today’s issues or in the youths’ lives. This *oli* was also used in formal settings (e.g., conferences or ceremonies) as a way to introduce one’s genealogy and history.

Findings also reveal the utilisation of *mo’olelo* (stories) or legends. These *mo’olelo* were helpful in providing meaning in the sustainability movement. For example, the Farm co-sponsored a conference focusing on food sovereignty. The major hook of the conference was the story of Hāloa (see Appendix for a story summary). This *mo’olelo* served as a foundation to teach about *aloha* (love) for a sibling and people of the land. In line with the traditional *mo’olelo*, local stories of food insecurity as it relates to health were solicited at events. Participants were able not only to link traditional *mo’olelo* and local stories that emerged across communities, but to build upon and utilise local and land-based knowledge. Generally, the *nana i ke kumu* (sources of wisdom) stem from place.
Reclaim Native Hawaiian Values

The data also suggest that participants were able to relearn and reclaim Native Hawaiian values such as *malama 'aina* (care for the land) and *‘ohana* (family). These two values served as the foundation of the Farm.

*Malama ‘aina* (care for the land). The ‘aina (land) is perceived figuratively and metaphorically as that which feeds. In the programme context, the ‘aina was a venue for learning and many of the staff members well-articulated the programme’s intention to *malama ‘aina* (care for the land). As a cultural practice, *malama ‘aina* was meant to ‘sustain’ the well-being of the Hawaiian people. Ian, director of the Farm, vividly pointed out:

> Our land is what sustains us . . . [T]hat particular piece of land really connects us to the things we do.

Parents and community members were also fully aware of the Farm’s purpose to *malama ‘aina*. Kealoha, a parent, explained how this practice primarily preserves the Native Hawaiian culture:

> The programme[s] [purpose] is to take care of the land – to preserve the ‘aina (land). And to teach them [young people] how to take care of their land so we don’t lose the land. If they have enough love of the land, they will take care of it.

As strongly pointed out by Kekula, *malama ‘aina* served as the core of Hawaiian learning and knowing, which led to other land-related knowledge:

> Knowing some of the *oli*, some of the chants, . . . in itself translates values and lessons that provide the foundation for further learning. And it really is a connection and a sense of place, which gives them the foundation that builds upon one’s self esteem, which allows the traditional layers of learning that build upon that . . . It’s the multi-layered method of teaching.

Lehua, a staff member, metaphorically indicated that participants carry the ‘torch of knowledge’ learned by tending the land and applying lessons learned to other components of their lives:

> To see the whole picture and to apply it in their daily walk – take what you learn at the farm and apply it in some way to the way you apply yourself in your image, community, school, with customers, in your job . . . we’ve planted that seed in them.

As seen throughout the content of the interviews, *malama ‘aina* was the Farm’s curriculum, and had a primary goal of preserving the Hawaiian culture and promoting a collective identity.

*Relationship and Knowledge – ‘ohana (family).* Findings indicate that fostering relationships was at the heart of sharing and building knowledge. The relationships with people and the dialogue served as places for learning. Findings suggest a range of relationships (for instance with peers, parents, elders, community members and customers) fostered knowledge-sharing at multiple levels. For example, relationship among peers was paramount in learning how to do specific tasks at the Farm. These
relationships also helped in dealing with health, social or general life issues. Jason, a staff member, described how relationships grew and how these relationships taught ‘tolerance’ through ‘exposure’:

We got one guy who’s pretty sure he’s gay, and you know, everybody’s so comfortable with him; he’s a crack up. It’s like, ‘So what if you’re gay. You’re our friend’. That’s tolerance . . . because we expose them to different people circumstances.

Findings reinforce the concept of an ‘ohana (family)-like environment and its ability to create a place where personal experiences are exchanged, respect is fostered, and meaningful learning opportunities are provided. Lehua explained how this occurred among programme participants:

It’s about learning – they learn family morals. Because they’ve had experience talking in groups and they’ve begun to have understandings. And, in return, they have shared with people who may not even work with the Farm or café. They encourage folks not to drink and drive, or commit suicide, or [advise them] to just make healthier choices. But they’ve had this communication amongst each other and learning through the Farm, and they learn it’s okay to care and to care back. And I really think that that bonds them together even closer. There’s a kinship and bonding.

Ian pointed out how the ‘ohana (family) philosophy provided a safe place for problem-solving:

We want to build it [ohana philosophy] in the programme enough so they [participants] are able interact with each other and start to help each other solve problems. That is the underlying philosophy we have. When kids get together in a healthy environment and a healthy culture, they will start helping each other with their problems like a family does.

The Farm also provided an opportunity for participants to work as a team. Through teamwork, other skills were fostered. Ian explained more about how this was done:

Harvesting is really a team exercise. I could never do the harvesting thing by myself. For anyone of the people involved, it really requires us to gel as a team. I also like the farmers’ market, because we are evaluated by community, the community being the general community – the island . . . It’s a great venue for reviewing and testing, and it’s a great forum for building self-esteem and pride.

He continued to describe the different skills developed through the relationships with an array of people: ‘For the youth, it’s a way to build skills, presentation skills, communication skills, pride and self-esteem.’

Findings also reveal how knowledge is exchanged between generations. Pua, mother of a 13-year-old youth, spoke of how her son has learned a lot from the Farm and has brought that knowledge back to the family:

He comes home and shares what he has learned. He’s . . . teaching us. We [the previous generation] never had that [knowledge of farming]. So it’s kind of good. And with that, we can show what we can do with our kids together.
Kawika, a young adult, proffered the insight that wisdom about the land was generated by involvement not only with family, but with community members such as state legislators. They shared knowledge about the political process related to land use or land rights. Kawika reported how forming a relationship with legislators made an impression, ‘Before [joining the Farm], I was in my homestead doing my own thing. Now I’m talking to some government dude!’ In this instance, relationship was key to knowledge production. Such a simple thing as an exchange between a youth and a community stakeholder adds *mana* (spiritual power). The dialogical process provided greater reinforcement. Kamehana, a young adult, provided another example of his work with adolescents, and how knowledge was shared to help not only himself but others:

> When you start to work with the intermediate and the high school kids, I admit it, I feel good teaching people – younger kids . . . I went down to the intermediate school, and I had to make the corn fields. I was showing the kids how, and I admit, that felt good . . , Some of the other youth programmes that are out there try to help you out. But in this one, you’re helping yourself and you’re helping somebody else out at the same time.

This example is a testament to intergenerational knowledge sharing. Kealoha indicated, ‘They [the staff] teach how everyone can work together. *Hukipau* (pull strongly). Everybody brings their hands to help, and the job is lighter. And you learn from each other. You help each other. You exchange ideas.’

Overall, the findings reveal that the values of ‘*ohana* (family) and *kuleana* (responsibility) to each other were utilised. Relationships were paramount to sharing and creating knowledge. Related to the two Hawaiian values of ‘*aina* and ‘*ohana* was the desire to instil an *aloha* (love) ethic for the community as described in the next section.

**Promote Aloha (Love)**

Findings suggest that the ultimate goal of the Farm is to promote an *aloha* (love) ethic for the community. This *aloha* ethic emerged in various areas of the study. Findings show the Farm made a deliberate effort to provide a place for young people to reflect back to themselves, and acknowledge that they are responsible for taking care of their culture. Many participants, youth and community members alike, commit to *aloha* the community, to live by the standards to *malama*, and thus serve the community. The sense of *aloha* was witnessed by parents and other community members. For example, Pua witnessed the transformation of her 13-year-old son: ‘Helping people [is what he got out of the programme] That is his personality. Trying to make things better in terms of community wise . . . He has a good head on this shoulder.’ She further described how her son has become more willing to speak up for the community at neighborhood meetings. The Farm reinforced the *aloha* ethic. Seen here is the desire to share his knowledge. The same sentiment was echoed by Kealoha:

> What I have seen in him [my son] is the love for the land. When he would talk, he would cry. It’s so deep. It’s so important to him. It’s because, I don’t know if you ever heard of the song, ‘Cry for the land, cry for the people’ . . . by Braddah Is. This is his strength. This is what he relays to the [the younger] children, the future farmers that are coming up. He shares this. His strength is his love, his passion for his culture.
Kealoha also indicated how the Farm fostered the *aloha* ethic in youth and how passion is felt by those involved:

> The people here, they have passion. Oh, do they appreciate. There is joy in their faces when they see the youth get up and speak. [They] have so much pride in what they are talking about. The thing is that they are not doing it for money.

This *aloha* ethic was also discussed by Jason as he spoke of an account of surveying the youth about returning to the community:

> Two years ago, I sat down with the youth and said, ‘If we gave you a full scholarship to go to college if you’d come back and be a taro farmer afterward, would you do it?’ Barely any raised their hands. But then I said, ‘If we restore a stream and make taro patches there where you could come back and bring your friends and family.’ Nearly all the hands went up. We’re realising that although there are [only] a few who will become organic farmers, many will participate in a community endeavour that’s like what they have experienced in the Farm.

Many youth articulated how the *aloha* ethic resonated with them. For example, Kamalu said thoughtfully:

> There’s things I’ve learned about caring in this programme. Going through this whole experience has taken me on a new look at our environment. I can’t stand to see rubbish on the side of the road any more, just knowing what kind of impact it has on the earth itself. I would have to say that all of the youth really care about the earth.

Findings also suggest that the *aloha* ethic may have long-term effects, as seen when Kamalu later articulated his future vision of his contribution to the community: ‘I would love to better the school system and try and get the community together to know each other. Try to get everybody to be family.’

**Discussion and Implications**

The Farm contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainability, indigenisation and knowledge acquisition. Findings from this study provide richness and depth on a working model conceptualising the processes of indigenisation. Examining the role and function of Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place proposes a critical approach to the sustainability movement as it relates to health and wellness. In particular, this study clarifies how a specific youth programme and members of its community utilise CIPP to indigenise activities by: 1) raising awareness of the genealogy of its geographic place, 2) reclaiming Native Hawaiian values such as *malama ‘aina* (care for the land) and *‘ohana* (family) and 3) promoting the *aloha* (love) ethics for the community. This study suggests that indigenising activities for youth can potentially lead to alternative strategies in the sustainability movement by building collective agency, and promoting social justice and social change.

This study has demonstrated how, intentionally, the Native Hawaiian community framed its values and epistemology in their programme. Adults, especially longtime community advocates, played
a major role in framing them. Youth were able to frame, reframe, negotiate and renegotiate the values instilled and the knowledge produced and shared. The Farm incorporated the processes of indigenisation through the utilisation of CIPP, which then promotes a social justice agenda in a sustainability movement. Further research is needed to examine the long-term impact of these processes, and how they are valuable to other Pacific populations.

As part of indigenisation, the Farm incorporated local community ways of knowing as they engaged in identifying the sources of wisdom that restore and heal the land and community. The utilisation of mo'olelo and 'oli provided a landscape for young people to disrupt the Western history of Hawai'i and disentangle the impact of cultural erasure. Counter-narratives such as local stories of ways to promote food sovereignty are interwoven as a way to restore Hawaiian values. Potentially, CIPP can harness values of malama 'aina and 'ohana as they are constantly reframed and redefined by community participants. Although values were articulated differently across participants, due to their positionalities and location in the movement, CIPP provided opportunities for young people to become active agents of change. Collectively, they responded and resisted cultural hegemony from an Indigenous standpoint. More research on how value formation and knowledge acquisition interplay with an array of social disparities is needed. Specifically, attention can be paid to the need to identify other sources of learning through genealogy of a place, what and how other values play out, and how community members continue to negotiate contradictions or tensions.

Indigenisation through CIPP also has the potential to promote empowerment beyond the self, and further encourage young people to live the aloha ethic in their community. This aloha ethic dismantles the uncritical view of aloha (Ohnuma, 2008) by encouraging a way of life that instils accountability and kuleana (responsibility – responsibility to the self, family, community, culture and society - (Hooks, 1994; Trask, 1993; Meyer, 2001; 2003). Instilling the aloha ethic is crucial for young people in rejuvenating and reclaiming the Hawaiian culture. It is aloha as the practice of freedom (Hooks, 1994) and self-determination for Native Hawaiians that provides mana (power) on a spiritual level. What needs to be realised is that the same aloha ethic should be applied to other institutions and among stakeholders that interface with a sustainability movement. This means creating opportunities for community control and voice in the process and providing resources for teaching young people and their families how to live well where they are. This aloha ethic should also reflect practice that is embedded in community epistemology, values and culture. More work in practice and research is needed to examine the impact of the aloha ethic in promoting accountability. Most importantly, it has implications for how issues of diversity, cultural competency, social justice and human rights are framed in community work.

The Farm utilises place to reclaim land, Indigenous epistemology, values and wisdom in which wellness is restored from past injuries. Such youth organising efforts demonstrate how place serves as a marker for embracing the past and forging hope in the future. Place embodies endurance and strength, and instils change. Therefore, place is a critical component to indigenisation. Attachment to place is essential to fostering community epistemology and values. Perceived threat of the survival of a cultural community and place instigates a desire and passion for preserving it. With the growing social disparities, it is necessary to involve young people in critically understanding their culture, and identifying sources of wisdom from place. With that, they are able to identify their roles and responsibilities in a sustainability movement.
Notes
1 Includes youth and young adults aged 13–25 years old.
2 See Trinidad (2009) for more information on the interview guide.
3 See Appendix for a short discussion on the case study’s method.
4 See Appendix for a short discussion on critical self-reflexivity.
5 The spirit of aloha has been commodified in areas such as tourism, business, economics, and education without critically examining its true origin in the Hawaiian culture. For a more thorough discussion, see Ohnuma (2008). It is my intent to challenge and reframe aloha towards accountability and social justice.

Appendix

The Hāloa Story
In Hawaiian cosmology, Wākea is the deity considered maker of both man and nature. To him and his partner, a stillborn child was born. From this child’s burial spot sprang Haloa-naka, the kalo (taro) plant. The second-born of the pair, a child named Hāloa, is the ancestor of all Hawaiian people. See http://elearn.ksbe.edu/p41489305/ and http://elearn.ksbe.edu/p83534510/ for a full version of the legend.

Method
The method used for this study utilises a critical interpretive stance. I acknowledge the tension between symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective and critical tradition. I reconcile this tension by taking a stance of a critical humanist ‘that focus[es] on human experience – that is, with the structure of experience and its daily lived nature – and that acknowledge[s] the political and social role of all inquiry’ (Plummer, 2005, p. 360). In order to push for a critical Indigenous interpretive stance (towards, in this case, Native Hawaiian self-determination), the method of this study hopes to seek out how the meanings and views of the sociopolitical context interplay with one’s human action.

Critical Self Reflexivity
Braidotti (2002) asserts, ‘Self-reflexivity is, moreover, not an individual activity, but an interactive process which relies upon a social network of exchanges’ (p. 11). ‘This continuous and embodied process of internal contraction and external expansion of the researcher’s gaze must move beyond mere considerations and individualised reflection and reflexivity’ (Herising, 2005, p. 133). Thus, in this case study, my critical stance is based on the multiple interactions with Native Hawaiian youth, families and communities in Hawai’i during my practice for the past 10 years as a social worker, community organiser and researcher. Bearing witness to the issues they face, and being an ‘ally’ to assuring that the services address their need, informs my stance.
### Participants

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<th>Role</th>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity (self-identified)</th>
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References


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