Unit: Hawaiian Value System
Topic: Misconceptions

Introduction:

"Kulia i ka lokahi i ke ola!
Strive for Harmony in Life!" - a value system to live by...

Understanding the value system of a people offers a student a great wealth of insight into why any group lives in the manner in which it does. Too often, however, when a student (and often many adults) approach the value system of a group of people different from their own group, there are judgments made and personal biases get in the way of appreciating the group being studied. Human beings so often tend to be ethnocentric, viewing the world only from the "right" from which their perspective originates. In our modern world, which is becoming to a great extent a true "global village" in which we all live together and for our own survival must understand and appreciate each other, the student must be encouraged to take off her "ethnocentric-colored glasses." Indigenous peoples have a lot to offer the modern student about how to protect and live in harmony with "mother earth." This is especially important to students living in the fragile Hawaiian environment.

One of the distortions of the belief system of the Hawaiians that is often accepted by my students (including those that are Hawaiian) is that Hawaiians are lazy and stupid and that they lived an easy life, "kani ka pila," drinking, partying, hanging out at the beach in a veritable paradise which all mourn as being lost today. Some of my students fear Hawaiians (and most Polynesians), believing that they are basically violent. Some of the violence, anger and name-calling that occurs between most ethnic groups stems from a lack of appreciation for the other group and a lack of knowledge of what is considered rude by the other group. Another distortion, often heard when Hawaiians struggle to become politically active, is that they can not get along, (too much "huki huki") and that if one has success, the others will try to pull that person back into place ("basket of crabs" theory).

This view of what it means to be Hawaiian can't be further from the truth! Malo, Kamakau, Pukui, Mitchell and many others (see bibliography) all attest to a society that was cooperative and functioned successfully to sustain itself through hard work. It is true during a harvest and tax time (Makahiki season) that this group of people took time out for their "mental health," declaring that war was
"kapu," honoring and thanking their gods for a bountiful harvest and spending time in play and competition. In the video "Time of Ato," Dr. Mitchell notes that the Hawaiians worked hard and played hard, something the New England missionaries could not understand. This play is not the "partying" with drugs and alcohol that so many young people think is "local" or "Hawaiian" - this is more an escape and dulling of the senses than rest and recreation.

The hard work needed to farm and fish successfully, to feed one's family is evidence to the contrary of the "lazy Hawaiian" - I often challenge my students to live on their own without modern conveniences and see if they could survive! The skill exemplified in the development of "lo'i" and fishponds also attest to the skill and intelligence of the Hawaiian ancestor. To undermine the attitude that the Hawaiian was "stupid" one only needs to look at their navigational ability (and our attempt to re-learn this skill through the voyages of the Hokule'a) in which they sailed to Hawaii and returned to Kahiki (used here to mean "ancestral homeland) and back again to make their new-found home comfortable. One needs to look at their kapa, said to be the finest in Polynesia (Ihara) or their sculpture (Luquins) or their featherwork (Mitchell) or their chants, with their ability to memorize and keep without paper, pen or computer, the history of their people and the heritage of their culture. The list is endless and the more the student is exposed to the culture of the Hawaiian ancestor, the more that attitude of "lazy and stupid" can be dismissed!

What about the fear of the "violent Hawaiian"? This is a little more difficult to dismiss but looking at the values of taking care of family, the treating of visitors with openness and sharing (Pukui and Mossman & Wahilani), noting that villages were not walled fortresses as so many of our modern houses are (Handy). It is true there were wars and violence that came from these wars. There were people killed who were considered enemies. There was infanticide. The question to pose to our students and ourselves is that, was it more than what we deal with everyday through abortion, wars (most recently in Iraq), riots (L.A.), and sometimes the unexplained violence of the streets? Were there homeless in ancient Hawaii or unwanted children? Perhaps some were disposed of due to disgrace but all too often people would be accepted and incorporated into a village and children were freely "hanai" (Kamakau, Puku'i). Students need to be encouraged to look at the roots of modern violence and intimidation amongst all ethnic groups or perhaps better stated, amongst all peoples who have been economically or politically cut off from the mainstream of society - when one is homeless or hungry or alienated it is hard to be happy and free from anger at those perceived to be the cause of this alienation.

The last misconception about what it means to be Hawaiian is the perception that they will never get ahead because they pull each other back. Traditional Hawaii had a means to solve problems ("ho'oponopono") as well a class structure that allowed little discussion. The ruling chief might consult with his advisors but the final decision was his (Kamakau). Perhaps the growing pains of political
action today comes from Americans who are flexing their First Amendment "muscle" and the criticism comes from other Americans that worry that "these Hawaiians" might be successful and become a viable political hand which would right past wrongs and lead these people to modern political action which is good for them. (and ultimately good for all citizens who pay to keep Hawaiians over represented on the negative side of our society i.e. prison, welfare, homeless, etc.)

All of the above ideas, and many more that lead students to appreciate and value the traditions of the Hawaiian people, can be interwoven throughout a course in pre-Cook (for lack of a better word to describe the period before "great change") history of Hawaii. The next section deals with a lesson that can be used as a starting place in which the primary purpose of the lesson is to encourage the student to take off the "ethnocentric glasses" and look at this culture with an open mind. Another goal would be to encourage the student to take values that we can all live by as we attempt to meet the modern challenges of our island society. Lastly, this lesson will give the Hawaiian student a sense of pride and a way to identify and appreciate herself as a modern Hawaiian.

Procedure:
1. Have students read the "Sacred Rac" (exhibit "A," enclosed) and answer quietly the questions at the bottom. After all are finished, have them share their opinion with their neighbor. (or group if you have them sitting as such) Before you begin the class discussion, ask for the class to vote by show of hands whether or not they would like to own a RAC - put number on board.

2. Discuss these people, putting the negative ideas and criticism on the board (my 15 year olds are very critical - easy to suck into this trap!). After a few minutes, when all of your students have had a chance to vent their distaste of such a stupid society, give them one last chance to change their "vote" (few if any do!). Tell them that ASU = USA and the RAC = car (what teenager wouldn't love to own their own car?!) Now that they are looking at themselves without their ethnocentric glasses on, you can proceed to the rest of the lesson.

3. Have them turn over their RAC papers and fill in the column on the left individually and quietly. They can, when finished share with their neighbor. (The teacher should be attentive to any negative remarks made from one student to another, caution and remind them of the RAC.)

4. Students should read Mossman & Wahilani's article, quietly, marking the values that they find the most attractive or those which they could
live by. When they are done, they should complete the right hand column on the back of the RAC story.

5. Have students share their lists in their group, create a group consensus and be ready to report back to the class. I ask them to further discuss which of these values would be useful in living in our modern island society and which are they or their families already living by.

6. Further extensions:
   a. refer back to the "Sacred Rac" anytime students are being critical of anything covered later in class.
   b. give students an opportunity through a project, interview, research, etc. to look at the value system of their culture and bring in their information to share.
   c. separate class by ethnic groups and have them verbalize the negative stereotypes of their ethnic group (the hurtful names, presumptions, etc.), make a list, discuss where these perceptions came from, do research to find the "truth," then when done, break up the class into groups with at least one person from each ethnic group represented to share their perceptions and misconceptions, re: their ethnicity. (after this is done, is nice to share food in an ethnic pot-luck, discouraging snide remarks and encouraging risk in trying something different; students can bring in music to share as well during this time to play in the background.)
   d. show the video series, Hawaiians (of which "Time of Ao" is the first part) and discuss from a perspective of beliefs and values.
   e. in dealing with current issues (through collection of articles in the daily newspaper), have students propose solutions to modern problems using the values described in the Mossman/Wahilani article. These would be especially useful for environmental issues but could be extended to most problems facing our island society.
References:


6. Mitchell, Donald D. Resource Units in Hawaiian Culture. Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools Press, 1969. (note: there is an updated version of which I don't have with better art work and greater detail.)

7. Mossman, Midge & Wahilani, Pikake, "Kulia i ka lokahi ke ola!", 1976 (enclosed as I rec'd this at a Hawaiian language workshop circa; 1978 - do not know if it is in print anywhere)


VIDEO -

Hawaiians. 3 part series shown on ETV, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1987 for the "Year of the Hawaiian."

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