

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES IN PACIFIC ISLAND CULTURES: A CONFLICT OF VALUES AROUND EDUCATION?

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PURPOSE:

- To explore the relationships between family values around education and family responsibilities in Pacific Island cultures.





IMPORTANCE

- Increasing numbers of Micronesians living in Hawai`i
- Many Micronesian children in special programs due to low English skills, poor educational foundations
- Lack of understanding between home and school cultures



Context

- Six US-affiliated jurisdictions in the Pacific
 - Federated States of Micronesia (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap) (FSM, COFA)
 - Republic of the Marshall Islands (26 atolls and high islands in two north to south rows including Ebeye and Majuro) (RMI, COFA)
 - Republic of Palau (ROP, COFA)
 - American Samoa (territory)
 - Guam (territory)
 - Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands

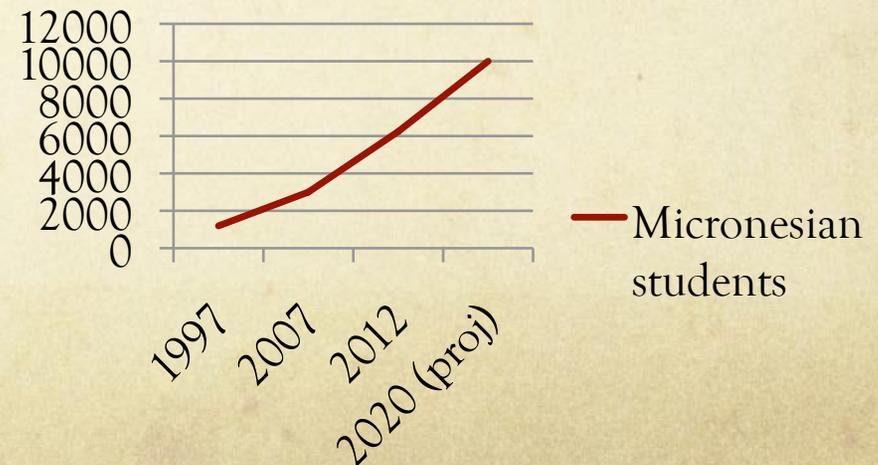
MICRONESIAN CHILDREN IN HAWAI`I

- Numbers of Micronesian children in Hawaii schools is increasing
 - 1,192 Micronesian students in HI schools (1997) (Heine, 2002)
 - ~ 3,000 total in 2007 (personal communication).
 - 6,239 total in 2011-12 SY (per SSIRs).

Estimated 17,000 Micronesians in Hawai`i. 50,000 in US (Hezel, 2012)



Micronesian students



Schools with Greater than 5% & 20% Micronesian Students

- Greater than 5%
 - 32 elementary schools
 - 10 Intermediate schools
 - 2 high schools
 - 5 multi level and charter schools
- Greater than 20%
 - 7 elementary schools
 - 3 Intermediate/middle schools



Micronesians in KP Homes

- Ages 0-20 in Kuhio Park Homes (based on SSIR)
 - 536 total
 - 490 Micronesian
 - 91%

Linapuni Elementary School: 57% Micronesian (184)

Kalihi-Waena Elem School: 14% Micronesian (89)

Fern Elementary School: 25% Micronesian (134)

Dole Intermediate School: 21% (166)

Kalakaua Intermediate School: 11% (110)

Farrington High School: 4% (85)



WHAT ARE FAMILY OBLIGATIONS?

- The extent to which family members feel a sense of duty to assist one another and to take into account the needs and wishes of the family when making decisions (Fuligni & Pederson, 2002)
- Can include domestic work, childcare, sending money home, going home, donating to family events such as funerals, caring for elders, caring for relatives, putting people up in one's home, etc.



- Research has shown that family obligations can affect children's motivation and success in school (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Chhuon, Hudley, & Macias, 2006)
- Family obligations are stronger in newly immigrated families and decrease in new generations (Phinney, Ong & Madden, 2000)

STUDY QUESTIONS



- What are Micronesian family obligations?
 - How do these change with immigration to US?
- What are Micronesian values about education?
- How do these interact?
- How can teachers and administrators better assist families with transition and acclimation to school?

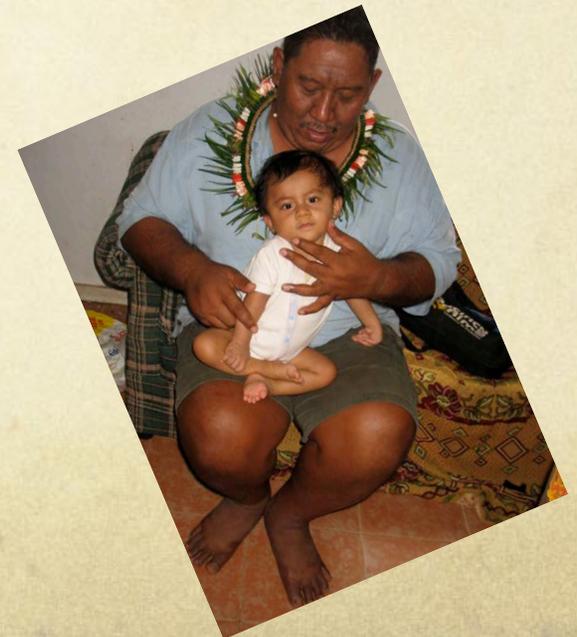
PARTICIPANTS

- Most participants were people I know or encountered in my work in Micronesia or Hawaii. Others were referred to me by Micronesian friends.
- Criteria: (a) over 20 years old, (b) grew up in Micronesia, (c) identify as Micronesian, (d) attended Micronesian schools through high school

DEMOGRAPHICS



- 26 participants
 - Pohnpei (7)
 - Chuuk (5)
 - Palau (5)
 - Kosrae (4)
 - Marshall Islands (3)
 - Yap (2)
- All grew up in Micronesia and considered themselves Micronesian



DEMOGRAPHICS

- Gender: 16 women, 10 men
- Age: range 23 - 55, mean 42
- Marital Status: all married except three youngest
- Education: mean 13.8

years, range 6 - 18

years of education



PROCEDURES

- Set up appointment for interview
- Used a semi-structured format for interview questions
 - open-ended questions
 - used questions as a guide
 - encouraged respondents to elaborate on responses
- Interviews transcribed
- Themes identified
- Focus group



MAJOR THEMES

- Family relationships are the fabric of the culture
- Education is valued in Micronesian culture- but differently than in Western culture



THEME: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE FABRIC OF THE CULTURE

- Personal/social/ethnic identities
- Family relationships
- Adoption in Micronesian cultures
- Family roles



SELF-IDENTITY

- The place of a person in the net of relationships forms his or her identity. This net starts with the family and extends out to the village, island, and larger community.



“In our culture, it’s very important to keep the relationship. Whereas Western culture is very individual, [with] us it’s communal. And that’s because if you don’t have a relationship with other people, your identity is . . . You don’t have an identity. (Shawn/Chuuk)



“The name that I’m carrying, My Yapese name, that’s what connects me to the village and the people from that specific village. I could be thrown out . . . like you deport somebody from a country . . . If I don’t participate in all the activities that [go] on [in] the village. . . . If I don’t do that, the villagers and my relatives will be watching, and . . . They could just come over and say, “Okay, now we’re going to disown you . . . We’re going to take that name away from you.” (Sophie/Yap)

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- Relationships with family members are close, and extend beyond the nuclear family. Adults take responsibility for their siblings' children as well as their own.

“I am responsible for [my sister's children's] education . . . Because I know she didn't [graduate from high school]. I made it. I have to help her kids to be educated so that they can in turn help themselves.” (Shawn/Chuuk)



ADOPTION



- Seventeen out of the 26 participants discussed adoption of themselves, their children or their siblings.
- Human capital is placed where it is needed
 - Grandparents frequently adopt the oldest grandchild
 - Siblings adopt children of single mothers
 - Infertile couples adopt from other family members
 - Some contemporary families are resisting this cultural practice, preferring to raise their own children

FAMILY ROLES



Gender related roles

- Women care for the house, plant the garden, clean, cook, care for children, weave, fish inside reef
- Men fish in and outside the reef, build, collect food from mountain or forest, make canoes, kill pigs, make Um

FAMILY ROLES



- Interactions between sisters and brothers (and by extension between women and all male relatives) are prescribed.
 - Don't use the same utensils
 - Don't wash clothes together
 - Don't go into their personal space (bed, bedroom)
 - Men stand and women lower themselves
 - Never discuss anything personal when in the same room (this is very disrespectful)

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

The reciprocal relationship between people, especially family members, provides a safety net for everyone.



“It’s vice versa. Your child dies and I come and see you and I help you, and me and my sisters come and see you because we’re related. When my sister dies . . . , you will come and help me because we helped you.” (Julie/Palau)

SISTERS AND BROTHERS



- Money and goods are not necessarily paid back in the same way that they are given.

“It doesn’t mean I’m going to pay you back in the same amount I give you. It could mean when you need help, I’ll be there. When you need help building a house, I’ll be there. You need help carrying so and so, I’ll be there. . . . They’re gonna repay you totally differently.” (Wally/Yap)

TAKING CARE OF FAMILY



- Physically caring for the old and the young
- Taking in family members
 - Homelessness in HI (7/8/07 article in Advertiser- Micronesians make up 1% of population and 20% of homeless in shelters- 300% increase 2001-6 from 286 to 736)
- Paying bills for a parent
- Donating for funerals (money and food)

CONTRIBUTING AT HOME



- Children have responsibilities at home, and have to contribute if needed. They want to contribute. Family needs have priority over school.
- Domestic duties- cleaning, child care, making appointments and translating for adults, reading mail.

“Children want to learn, they want to be successful, but they’re also really connected to their culture and if [there is] a family obligation, they’ll leave school to do that, cause it’s just a cultural thing.”



RESPONSIBILITIES OF MIGRANTS

- Donations to family events
 - Some get a respite when they migrate
- Take in family members who travel through or move
- Support family members
- Church donations
- Sending money home



Theme: Western Education is Valued- Differently

- Education is for a specific purpose, it's not needed for everyone
- Shift from a subsistence lifestyle increases education's value
- Western education should not supplant Micronesian education
- Suggestions for educators

EDUCATION IS VALUED FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

- The purpose of Western education is to get money
- People can live without money or education in the village



“Some of the people in the village just value the village life. . .The only reason why the people . . . need to work, western work, is to get money. . . If I . . don’t want to use electricity or anything like that, I could just stay in the village and I wouldn’t need to work. (Alfred- Yap)”



GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

- Rural versus town perspectives
- Western versus Eastern perspective



“My Dad saw [education] as important. At that time, money was being introduced, and of course, money was buying us goods. So, my father saw that as a route, for one of us, who can make it, to go.” (Shawn/Chuuk)

- Access to technology
- Convenience
- Imported foods



WESTERN VS. MICRONESIAN SCHOOLING



- Western Education is different from Micronesian traditional education
 - Form of education is different
 - “You just sit and listen, whoever’s up there is pretty much just telling you what to do. . . Your uncle or your grandfather would be the one talking to you, and you’re listening, and you’re familiar with him. (Alfred- Yap)



- People recognize that the quality of education is much better in the US
 - Decreasing compact funds
 - Decreasing teacher salaries
 - Decreasing morale, and poor attitudes of teachers
 - Poor enforcement of attendance Laws in Pacific
- Delvin, a teacher educator from the Pacific says that the morale of teachers and quality of education have declined in past 15 years
- He also reports that quality of teacher education is much lower in Pacific than US

“[Teachers just] go by the book. What the book say, what is today’s date, what is so and so. But . . . to put their effort to help the other kids, it’s all about the job. . . . So I would say, ninth grade in Marshall Island[s] is equivalent to about fourth grade here.” (Paulie/Marshalls)



DIFFICULTIES TRANSITIONING TO US EDUCATION SYSTEM

- Cultural behaviors of children
 - Need to catch up academically
 - Need for relationships to support comfort in school
- Cultural behavior of parents
 - Need to learn about the US system
 - Need to gain confidence in English language skills



Parents and children are often unfamiliar with American school culture

- Different expectations of children (attendance, homework, speaking up in class, etc.)
- Different expectations of parents (help with homework, come to meetings, support school attendance and study habits at home)
- Children and parents struggle with school requirements due to low English skills, lack of awareness of expectations
- Teachers don't understand why families cannot comply with school expectations- some judge families negatively

BEHAVIORS OF CHILDREN

- Children initially don't speak up in class
- Lack of eye contact
- Children don't participate unless they are comfortable and have a relationship with the teacher
- Lots of absenteeism
- Poor academic preparation in Micronesia
- Change in the social support system



Absenteeism

- Many reasons, specific to children and families
 - Needed at home (childcare, preparation for an event)
 - Tired, stayed up late night before
 - Needed to help parent translate at doctor or other office
 - Child does not feel connected at school- lack of motivation to go
 - Child overslept
 - Lack of transportation (car broke down, missed bus, etc.)

Talk story to find out what the issues are.

BEHAVIORS OF PARENTS

- Lack of knowledge about U.S. system of education
- Working multiple jobs
- Many family responsibilities that take time and money
- Feeling insecure about their English skills
- Lack of confidence/skills in supporting their children's education



“There’s not a lot [of support here], whereas, if they were back home. . . There is support. I can go over there to that house and somebody might know this in that house. And I will be comfortable to go to that house because I grew up, I know that family. Whereas here, you come here, you can’t just go over and knock to your neighbor’s door and say, ‘Can you help me with this?’ (Wally/Yap)”

POSITIVE CHANGES IN HAWAII

- Education is becoming more important
- More established and organized community
- Micronesian community is coming together to support itself (MCN, NOM)
 - Recent ongoing efforts to get COFA migrants included in Medicaid/immigration reform bill
 - Micronesian leaders stressing importance of education
 - Cutbacks in Compact money so government has to cut back. Therefore, people will need college education to get government jobs

POSITIVE CHANGES IN HAWAII

- DOE is hiring people from the islands to support children and families in some schools
- Micronesian community is actively trying to work with teachers and administrators to help them work with students
- DOE and PREL, McREL working together to produce materials to support children and families
 - Education (DVDs about school expectations)
 - Literacy (books and stories in Pacific languages)

Work to be Done

- Include Micronesian cultures and resources in schools
 - Help kids feel included and respected
 - Recognize that conflict and mandates do not work well; harmony is valued
 - Talk story, take the time to understand.
 - Parents feel that teachers are the authority in the school, just not necessarily over them. Earn their respect by respecting them.

Work to be Done

- Encourage mutual respect between schools and families
 - Help families feel included and respected
 - Provide resources for educators about Pacific cultures and languages
 - Provide resources for families about school expectations
 - Greet parents and welcome them each day
 - Encourage parents to spend time in the classroom so they feel welcome

Work to be Done

- Teach teachers how to include families
 - Take an interest in each child
 - Ask what island child/family is from
 - Ask how you can help
 - Provide social resources or referrals
 - Ask family members to do specific tasks to support the class/school, e.g.,
 - collecting 100 cans,
 - spend 1 hour reading to children,
 - teach kids to weave a plate from palm fronds,

Work to be Done

- Teach family members how to support their children in school in specific ways
 - Explain why attendance is important (ask why children are missing school, help brainstorm solutions)
 - Teach parents how to support specific homework assignments, e.g.,
 - Let your child read to you for 20 minutes each day (loan books to them)
 - Help your child to count the number of cars going by in 5 minutes. Do this three times, and have your child write down each number. Ask which is bigger, smaller?
 - Teach parents your classroom and school procedures so they can support them with their children.
 - Encourage parents to support children's native language proficiency- oral and written.

