

TĒNĀ: A LEARNING LIFESTYLE

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Tĕnā is a traditional Hawaiian process in which alaka'i or kumu (teachers) guide haumāna (students or learners) through the acquisition of increasingly sophisticated knowledge and skills. It is based on careful observation of readiness, selecting and posing tasks within the capabilities of the haumana as a form of integrated instruction and assessment to support and challenge them to achieve new levels of competence.

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Aloha kākou.

Mahalo i ke Akua nō kēia hui ‘ana o kākou.

Today we are going to walk through a learning lifestyle I have grown up with.* We on Ni‘ihau know this as tēnā. The best way I can present this concept is exactly as I have learned it, through “talk story” and example. It is a way to share knowledge and experiences while growing into my life’s journey. Therefore, let’s begin, let’s talk story.

I know, as sure as the sun rises in the east, that most of us born and raised in Hawai‘i have had our elders send us on errands to retrieve something. Some of you may laugh at the mechanics of this, because odds are you have gone through tēnā without realizing it. Believe me, for those of us lucky enough to be born and raised in Hawai‘i, we have lived tēnā. It is likely that no one told you that it was something important. Nobody stopped to dwell on it. We went about with tēnā ingrained in our daily lives. It was just lived and done with no questions, deeply embedded in our lifestyles. Tēnā, a wholesome way of learning passed down from generations before me, continues with my generation and into the future.

Odds are you have gone through tēnā without realizing it.

Tēnā is a Hawaiian learning style. One is sent on errands to complete simple to multicomplex tasks. After which, one evolves to be the learner, the practitioner, the teacher, and finally the nurturer of generations. And it is highly effective. You can use this concept in your classroom or with your ‘ohana (family). What I would like to do is make sure you are able to take home strategies, some hua (fruit) you can put into action in your own life. I am from Ni‘ihau, fortunate because there are fewer external pressures on us to assimilate. As a result, tēnā is a way of knowledge acquisition that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Now, when I think about how to explain this—to call it out from a lived experience—well, that can be somewhat difficult. In the past, I tried to place tēnā into conventional models of psychology and learning so that others would understand the concept. I got to the point where it was frustrating because it just would not fit as I had been taught. So I figured, well, just “model” tēnā and see how it will be received.

*This article is based on a speech delivered at the 2008 Research Conference on Hawaiian Well-Being in Kāne‘ohe, Hawai‘i.

I believe we all practice tēnā. I am hoping that a lot of Hawaiian eyes will read this, because in a way, tēnā is our Hawaiian way of living life. It is so simple, immediate, and wholesome that you don't believe it is a structured learning style. It wasn't until somebody told me that tēnā was different from their experience that I realized it was unique to Hawai'i, and Ni'ihau for that matter. As I do my work in the community, more and more it has become clear that tēnā is a Hawaiian teaching and learning style. It is how I learned, and it can be applied in many different areas (disciplinary, educational, institutional, assessment, etc.).

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Tēnā is a multistep process that recognizes and responds to different types of learners. The number of steps depends on the complexity of the task and the learner. First, a child, a learner, will attend to a task accompanied by someone else. Once the task is learned, after many trials, the child is then sent to the next level of difficulty. Afterward, an assessment is made as to how well the child completed the task.

STEP 1: ACCOMPANIED

In the first step, the child is given and is accompanied through a simple task, and he or she learns through observing and doing. For example, "E Kilohana, ku'u mo'opuna (Kilohana, my grandchild), go and fetch me some water." The child is sent on an errand. Now of course with some children they might respond by saying, "I no like." Does that sound familiar? "I no like." That is tēnā. The first process of getting children to react to their own environment is to get them to react to what they are being asked to do. When a child refuses, tūtū (grandma) would immediately call on another sibling to complete the task. This process models to the child the importance of the task with underlying competitiveness to do better when called on next.

In this example, the child Kilohana had to know what water is first, and then when tūtū says, "go get me water," he had to say to himself, "Go get water. Okay." Then, he has to decide, "Do I get a bowl, a pitcher, or a bucket? Can I carry enough water to quench grandma's thirst and other 'ohana in the house? Can I bring it back to

tūtū without spilling some in the dark before reaching tūtū? Will it be enough for everyone, where I won't have to make a second trip in the dark to fetch more water from the water tank?" Kids normally don't like the dark.

It is hoped that this task is at a level where the child can differentiate according to the weight of the water he or she is able to handle, and that the child not be afraid of the dark! As a child growing up on Ni'ihau, I was dearly afraid of the dark until I realized the power of light from the moon and the stars. It is usually when it is dark that someone needs to drink water or go to the outhouse.

Sometimes I wonder if, as children, we were always being tested, along with my older cousins, to compete and excel at every task as we grew. Or, were we simply learning skills to survive the everyday expectations of a self-sustainable community steeped in traditions, so that someday we could take the place of our grandparents.

But this is the beginning of a learning process that I call tēnā. It is your ho'omākaukau (preparation). You are being prepped for other chores, for other tasks, difficult ones. So when you are not ma'a (accustomed) to wai (water) or what to carry it in, and you come back to tūtū 'a'ohē wai (without water), and tūtū looks at you and thinks, "Auwē (poor thing), this boy never learn what water is. Where are the mama and the papa of this child?" Kilohana sees that tūtū is disappointed. And tūtū says to herself, "I gotta teach him the same type of chores—give him tasks on the same level, horizontally. I need to teach him the same thing, through a different subject, a different activity, so that he grasps the concept."

STEP 1 Accompanied

Observation	<i>Ho'omākaukau i ka hana e like me ka 'ike a ka maka, lohe o ka pepeiao, hana a ka lima.</i>
Repetition	Ho'opili aku, ho'opili mai.
Extension	Ho'olohe, nānā, a ho'opili i kau i a'o 'ia mai ai.

A learner observes, then attempts a task accompanied, and succeeds after intense repetition in different horizontal tasks. The learner then takes the same task and elaborates on it, for example, expanding it to include preparation.

STEP 2: PARTIALLY ACCOMPANIED

The second step in tēnā is attending to a task partially accompanied. Let's assume Kilohana learned how to fetch water for tūtū. Now we have to offer him new challenges. Say you have a lio (horse). Papa just came home from ranching and you have to take the saddle off and lead the horse to water. Well, that's what we had to do as kids on Ni'ihau. As the old saying goes, "you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot force him to drink." Needless to say, this task is harder. There are multiple levels of thinking and doing involved this time. And you're just outside tūtū's sight; you're on her periphery. In other words, it is where tūtū cannot see real well. Half she can see, the other half she cannot see. So she'll say, "E Kilohana, ka'i i ka lio ma'ō (lead the horse over there) where I can see it. And make sure you put the horse in a grassy area so he can eat." A laila (so then) Kilohana takes the lio to drink water. The boy waits and waits while the horse drinks. If the horse has been used for cattle all day, it is going to drink a lot of water. The child has to understand this and not rush the horse, otherwise it will not recover fully.

Now what were tūtū's instructions again? Take the lio to a grassy area and where tūtū can see it. As kids, we would tie the horse up to the tree trunk and leave it there overnight to feed and rest in order to be ready for work the following morning. Let's say Kilohana locates a good place to tie up the horse but it is out of tūtū's line of sight. Then he is left with a decision. He asks himself, "Do I put the horse here where it's grassy or do I put him where tūtū can see?" This is where the issue of value comes into play. Which is more important, the welfare of the horse or his tūtū's request to place the horse nearby? Both are important. Now, if Kilohana was raised in a lifestyle where his family depends on animals for subsistence and travel, he will tie the horse up in a grassy area—out of sight of tūtū or out of sight of the whole village if need be—to make sure the horse eats. He is not being disobedient, he is making a mature decision based on learned values and best decision—growing into a next level of maturing knowledge.

STEP 2 Partially Accompanied

General instruction	E ki'i i ka pakeke wai a ho'ohainu i ka lio.
Judgment	A laila, e ho'opa'a iā ia ma kahi mau'u loloa e 'ahuwale aku ai.
Extension	Maka'ala 'ia ke keiki, a ho'oku'u ia e hana nona iho.

The learner is partially accompanied. This step is introduced when the child is familiar with his or her environment and the task.

STEP 3: UNACCOMPANIED

On to Step 3: unaccompanied tasks. An example of this kind of task would be sending a person on errands or giving the person tasks with all the 'ike (knowledge) that he or she needs to be able not only to repeat the same types of tasks in one level but to progress into another higher or vertical level entirely. To illustrate tēnā for haumāna (students) at this level, I draw from 'ōlelo no'eau (Hawaiian proverbs and wise sayings). Tūtū folks put those 'ōlelo no'eau there for a reason, and their wisdom is still alive and useful for us today. "Ma ka hana ka 'ike" (Knowledge is gained through work) is a familiar 'ōlelo no'eau; simple but so true.

**“Ma ka hana ka 'ike”
(Knowledge is gained
through work).**

In Step 3, let's send Kilohana on an errand to pick five plants to make lā'au lapa'au (medicine). To do this successfully, Kilohana has to know what the lā'au (plant) looks like, to separate it from the weeds. Kilohana also needs to know what it is used for and how to prepare it. Because small differences matter, Kilohana will need to know what is the best variety of each type of lā'au. All of this 'ike has to be stored in his mind. He needs to repeat it to the point where he can do it on his own. Before Kilohana can be sent on this errand, he must first understand the context of the lā'au and then what is required for this particular occasion. He has to know it intimately—right down to what each part of each plant looks and feels like when it is ready to be used. The 'ike also involves spirituality and prayers. This he does independently, asking only for validation.

Let's imagine someone in Kilohana's 'ohana is giving birth. This is a very important occasion and one that requires the proper medicine. To make this lā'au, you need 5 a'a hala, 5 pulapula ko, and so on. And it has to be a certain kind of Ko Kea. For Hawaiians, inoa (names) are critical elements; the name has to fit the reason of the healing. When Kilohana goes to gather these lā'au he will remember what his alaka'i (teacher) did. He will think, "Okay. I have to pule (pray) when I'm going because you don't know if you're going to find the lā'au or not." And of course pule at every step. Pule when you're on your way, pule when you're gathering, pule for the person receiving the lā'au, and of course for the gatherer as well. Take extreme caution that the lā'au were not sprayed with herbicide; gather with the left hand for female recipients and with the right hand for males. And you have to make sure the plants don't die, because if they do, maybe the same thing may happen to the patient. One gathers only what one will use, no more. One must keep in mind that the plant is a living organism which provides photosynthesis and life-sustaining nutrients and remedies. It gave up its life to heal another. One must remember this always. Your patient will surely heal well.

In this example a woman just gave birth, and she needs the proper medicine. Kilohana knows that she is counting on him to pick up all of those lā'au. He puts up his hand and sees 5 fingers. He has memorized which lā'au by assigning each finger a lā'au name. The amount of each lā'au he also keeps track of by his 5 fingers: 5 maka kowali, 5 a'a hala, 5 mu'o 'ihi, and so forth. All of these lā'au belong to one type of ailment. Hānau (birthing) is a different set of 5. So, too, other ailments requiring 5 sets and 5 days then rest. Restart after 5 days until one is healed. He also knows that when he returns, tūtū is going to go through her checklist with her eye. She'll review the lā'au and say, "'Ae, 'ae, a'ole, 'ae, a'ole" (yes, yes, no, yes, no). There is a certain quality to tūtū's voice when you know you did something wrong.

As children on Ni'ihau, we were given many tasks; they were divided up among us according to ability. But everyone needed to fulfill their part to get the bigger job done. And it was shame if you didn't do your part right, especially if you've been doing the same thing over and over. So if you are the only one who made a mistake out of the whole line of children, auwē! Peer/sibling pressure can be very cruel. So if Kilohana did not complete the task properly, tūtū would repeat again.

On Ni'ihau, we were given many tasks; they were divided up among us according to ability.

This is our lifestyle on Ni‘ihau, and tēnā is the way our people learn. When you hear, “Aunty is going hānau (to give birth),” automatically you know somebody is going to have to go pick the right lā‘au. But you wait to be asked. You don’t maha ‘oi (assume or act rudely). There is a reason why terms like maha ‘oi exist. You don’t maha ‘oi to somebody else’s backyard or to somebody else’s kuleana (responsibility). When we were kids, our kuleana was our own, and you mālama (take care of) your kuleana because you have much to do.

STEP 3 Unaccompanied

Sent on complex tasks without supervision	Tena ‘ia e ki‘i, ho‘iho‘i mai (me ka pololei), hana i ia hana, ho‘okō a e a‘o aku iā ha‘i. E ki‘i i mau la‘au no ka hana ‘apu ‘ana: 1 ‘opu‘u mai‘a, 5 ‘uala, 5 ule ai‘ole a‘a hala, 5 pulapula kōkea, 5 ku‘i ka lo‘ihi. Mai pōina i ka pule i ka wa e hele ai e ki‘i, ka wa e ki‘i ai, ka wa e hana ai, ka wa e ho‘ohainu ai. Pule like me ka mea nona ka la‘au. Ho‘omaha 3 la, a inu hou no 3 manawa. E mālama a polapola maika‘i
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This step is used when the learner need not be assisted on long errands and is familiar with mature decisions. The learner is capable of complex tasks at different levels with some supervision. The learner has gone through rigorous repetition of completed tasks that fulfill an accountable and authentic need. Most important, the learner understands his or her kuleana to contribute to the family’s well-being.

Step 3 is also when the learner is able to switch roles from learner to teacher. In Step 4 he will give the knowledge and skills he has mastered to his siblings and their children. Let’s move on to Step 4.

STEP 4: MENTORING OTHERS

In education, there is a lot talk about standards. Content standards are designed to identify important content and skills for teaching. In standards-based teaching, haumāna learn the content and how to do the skills. But standards fall short in a very crucial way. They do not necessarily emphasize the application of skills throughout one’s life, which ultimately entails passing the content and skills on to the next generation. This is not stressed in the modern, Western way of education. I find it relevant and imperative for students and mākua (parents) to pass

knowledge on to other children missing in the discussion and to next-generation siblings. When these students mature into adulthood, their role will switch as well, continuing a family knowledge base of medicinal cures, fishing methods, farming skills, and a sustainable way of life.

As Hawaiians, we excelled to the point where the only challenge we faced had to do with nature, over which we have no control. So that we knew how to live and work with nature, we gave nature names—ka makani (the winds), ka ua (the rains), ka mahina (the moon phases), and ke kai (the ocean). We gave these natural occurrences specific names so that we can work well with nature to sustain kanaka (people’s) lives through all seasons. We gave names to everything, each with specific characteristics and traits useful to the kānaka.

For example, Na Kiu ‘eiwa, the nine spy winds, foretell of storms to come and indicate that one should prepare for wet and cold weather. It is a time when earth and land cleanses and nourishes itself, and kānaka stay indoors. The Māhealani (full and fruitful) moon signals the time to plant. Wai‘anae, or waters of ‘anae (full-sized mullet), is where huge, mature mullets are hand-delivered by Kukini to the king with their “tails still flapping.” Ke kai o Kaho‘omo‘a (scorching hot) is the name of the ocean channel between Ni‘ihau and Ka‘ula. It is said that one can cook bird eggs on the hot rocks of Ka‘ula. Left on a canoe bow, the scorching sun dries fish easily, and they are ready to be eaten by the fishermen.

We gave nature names to reflect the seasons of production and the seasons for the land to nourish itself. Hawaiians progressed to the point where we could feed a multitude of families—by the thousands—when we planted and harvested according to nature’s calendar, the phases of the moon. It was always about giving this knowledge to the hanauna (generations to come), for the hanauna. So we are very observant of our environment, because that is what feeds us. In our way of education, learning can mean the difference between life and death. At least, that is how I was brought up.

Now, when it comes to personal or sexual behaviors, tūtū would be the one who would go through the intricacies with the wāhine (women). She would tell the little girls why there are separate times and places for wāhine because their genetic makeup differs from that of a man, including their female mana (spiritual power).

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And female mana is different from male mana. I'll give you an example. Ni'ihau kāne (men) never want wāhine to touch their fishing nets. Why? It's considered very bad luck. I remember getting yelled at by my kāne when we were first married. He took me on a horse up to the Kona side of our island. We were looking up at the bright moon. How beautiful! I helped unload the horse and laid out his net bag on the ground so we could ready it the next morning, and he said, "Who said you could touch my net?" There I was feeling romantic under the moon, and there he was very upset that I touched his fishing net. That was it. We packed up and went home. I was so sad; we had come so far on horseback. My legs and thighs were numb from the leather saddle and needed a rest. I thought I married the wrong man—auwē!

As it turns out, however, I have two girls. One is my moon and one is my sun, literally. One is fair and the other is dark. And it is the dark one who speaks English interspersed with Hawaiian every other term and the fair one who speaks mostly Hawaiian in her English vernacular. Now I have grandchildren who look exactly the same way. One like that of the moon, and the other as bright as the sun. How interesting the way things have evolved.

Needless to say, throughout our years, we have been tasked with different learning opportunities, and as a result, we grow. In my 'ohana on Ni'ihau, we train our minds and our hands. Our whole being reacts to what we need to learn to sustain life, because it is always about the next generation. From a very early age, I was taught that what we do now affects hanauna to come.

For example, I was talking to somebody on the phone the other day, and he said, "Ilei, I don't know why you have to talk to them about water when someone's so used to turning on water from the faucet. I don't think they can really understand going

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without water." When I first attended school outside of Ni'ihau, my greatest cultural shock came about from two things. The first was the water in the toilet, and the second was electrical lights. They were continually on. It didn't give my 'uhane (spirit) a rest. It woke my 'uhane up. As long as the lights were on, my spirit wouldn't fall asleep. What was worse was using a lua (toilet) where you got to sit on a bowl of water. On Ni'ihau, water is like gold, because you really only get it when it rains. That's why we call Ni'ihau "Āina o ka leo Pule" (Land of the prayerful voice). We

pule for rain, so that it nurtures the land that cares for its people. We pule for calm oceans, so that mariners are productive in sustaining a community. We pule for our families' safety in their travels here and there.

Like I said before, we Ni'ihauans live very close to nature. In fact, nature is the only real thing we cannot control or challenge. Instead we rely on nature's spirituality, which is a large part of Hawaiian life. Ni'ihauans were always pule (prayerful) people. Pule, pule, pule, pule. It is not far from the traditional Hawaiian way of life on all other islands at times through our history. Hawaiians' eloquent poetry and chants attest to their daily pule and spiritual life.

Growing up, we never had shoes. Nowadays children ask for designer shoes and jeans and everything else. And I would remind them, "You know, in mommy's day we used to wash and hang dry our same clothes to wear to school the next day." Then they would look at me without having any idea of what that is like. This is the same thing as being accustomed to getting water from a faucet. Until you have lived without something, you can't fully appreciate it. So when I first had to use a lua outside Ni'ihau, it took a little while for my 'ōpū (stomach) to feel comfortable enough, because I just could not comprehend sitting on gold. I never like go where there is water—because in my mind water is so precious. And from my point of view it is strange to have a lua in the house. On Ni'ihau, we have outhouses, and when you're pau (finished) you simply move the outhouse. We don't worry about sewage spillage or pollution in the drinking water because the water tank is separate. Much can be learned about sustainability and preserving our environment through Ni'ihau life. The lua is separate from the main house. And because it's over there, you have to give yourself enough time to get there. So when people would tell me where their lua was I would think to myself, "It's in the house? In the same place you sleep and eat?" It felt very strange.

The fourth step of tēnā involves mentoring others. My generation is famous for tēnā. It is how we learned, and the kamali'i (children) who are being raised in that style now, they don't like it so much. But that's okay; in our day we struggled with it too. I ask my mo'opuna to do something for me and I make that tūtū face—you

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know, the one that looks like “Awww, poor thing.” I say, “Baby, please get tūtū some water.” And he says, “I no like! ‘Ale mamate!!” And then I will point to the pitcher. Still he says, “‘ale mamate!” I ask myself, what is the matter with this child? I wonder if it is my tone of voice or directive. Is the pitcher too nui or heavy? I start with, “Okay, don’t get the glass; bumbye you broke ‘em and fall down. Go get the plastic one.” Now he is all excited. But instead of bringing me the cup full with water, he just brings me the plastic cup. He shows it to me first, “This one tūtū’s?” After receiving an affirmation, he happily continues to fill the cup with water. Then, I say, “Remember now, the blue cup is always the cup you get. That’s tūtū’s cup.” So the boy is elated, and at each turn, he proceeds to finish the rest of his tasks.

That’s tēnā. There is a good side to it; there is a challenging side to it.

STEP 4 Mentoring Others

Complete
the circle

Ho’opili i ka hana. Ho’okō i ka hua o ka hana e ho’oilina i na hanauna hou.

Teach those same-level skills to another. Knowledge of content and skills is not enough. It has to be apprenticed. Passing on the knowledge to and through the next generation.

CULTIVATING A LEARNING LIFESTYLE

Passing on knowledge to others is where I put emphasis at this stage of my life. I work at nurturing my children, my grandchildren—those are the ones at home—as well as my students and fellow colleagues. My mother was a teacher on Ni’ihau and my grandmother before her.

I have been a teacher for over 20 years. Graduates return to ask for further explanations of life’s intricacies. There is still respect, not necessarily for the person but for a continuation of ‘ike (knowledge) into their journey of life. However, there are some students who take a one-semester culture class and suddenly become specialists. Instant cultural experts and they were my students; but you know, they never did well enough to become specialists. At this point, one may return and

consult with one's kumu (teacher). There is always kuleana attached to learning; sometimes one needs to know when to step back. If it is not your ahupua'a (land division usually extending from the uplands to the sea), not your 'ili (subdivision of an ahupua'a), not your moku (district), it is not even your mokupuni (island), don't maha 'oi. You need to respect the kuleana enough to leave it be.

There is always
kuleana attached
to learning.

My greatest fear as a kumu is that I have failed in teaching some of my students this protocol. It is always appropriate protocol to noi (ask). Asking is so easy, and very much a part of Hawaiian life. Ask for that knowledge. Ask permission of your kūpuna (elders), Ke Akua (God), the forest, the ocean. That is why we pule. Ask for other authorities to help and support one's efforts. At a certain point, tēnā is teacher and learner simultaneously. One switches between these roles according to one's environment and wisdom acquired. If one is among elders, "hold thy tongue—pa'a kō waha." When with those younger than you are, be the nurturing voice, teacher, educator, parent, 'ohana.

One more thing: Tēnā is not tied to a specific age. In Western thinking, 0 to 3 years is called prenatal or early childhood, 4 or 5 would be preschool age, then kindergarten, and so on. Western education categorizes learners by age. In contrast, tēnā has no age. You can be relatively young and yet be able to perform mature chores.

Take my 13-year-old mo'opuna, for example. He is lost on Kaua'i because he does not have his favorite beaches and familiar fishing grounds. But on Ni'ihau, he can get on a horse. He knows better his role as caretaker of his vehicle (the horse). He excels at fishing because of his passion for it. At some point in his 13 years, he evolved through trial and error. These experiences and accolades helped him grow into the next set of skills and the next level of 'ike. He can do everything that he needs. Get on the horse. Go to the ocean with his net. He knows that you give back the first catch. And always, always, always pule. He loves going fishing. He wants to compete with his friends to see who can bring the most fish or 'opihi (limpets) home. You can see him thinking, "Whose 'opihi bag is going to be more full than mine?" And so he goes out there and does all of that by himself. Hoping that a happy family is reward enough to continue what he is doing. A passion for fishing!

On Ni'ihau, we know our children are smart. We have paired with other similar indigenous peoples in other environments to compare our learning assessments. Along with Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (the regional educational

laboratory serving Hawai‘i and the Pacific), we tested our kamali‘i and compared them with students from the Marshall Island schools. We found that our kids excelled at 5th grade. They were reading 13th-level literature in their language. We now can confirm our keiki (children) can excel in their own environment, in their own native language and familiar surroundings.

I truly believe tēnā plays a pivotal role in Hawaiian learning style, the learning style in which they are raised. Our haumāna can excel beyond content standard norms because tēnā teaches and prepares them for responsibilities as they are ready for them. Tēnā tells us that readiness is ageless; people are mākaukau (prepared) for different responsibilities at different points in their life. And, it’s not the same for everyone.

I would like to call attention to Ke Kula Ni‘ihau O Kekaha Learning Center. It is a Native Hawaiian charter school on Kaua‘i that serves mostly Ni‘ihau children. It was established because there are Ni‘ihau families coming to Kaua‘i, and the community wanted to mālama (maintain) their ‘ōlelo Ni‘ihau (language). So, there was a call to build a school for Ni‘ihau. Under many guides, we have seen the school grow like no other before, and I cannot thank the Ni‘ihau community that lives on Kaua‘i along with the cutting-edge support of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo (private nonprofit organization committed to Hawaiian language and culture development) enough. At Ke Kula Ni‘ihau O Kekaha, students create films—they produce

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documentaries and record performances. The latest video project is the story of Ko‘olau, as told by Pi‘ilani. If you don’t have a copy, get one. I tell you, you will cry. The familiar people, the familiar stories will make you cry. So, it’s very emotional but it’s true.

Hawaiians are known to deal and engage with real-life situations, circumstances, and tangible outcomes, not by a mock observer lecture only. We broaden our knowledge through tēnā with its multilevel learning.

As I end, I want to ask, “Did some of these processes sound familiar?” I hope you will find ways to use these learning strategies with your ‘ohana or students. As I said earlier, many of our children do not like to be tēnā-ed out of their comfort zones. The teacher should know when the learner has had too much of tēnā.

When you provide learning and assessment opportunities to them through chores, they may turn around and look at you, “Why? You no more feet? You no more hands? You no can do ‘em yourself?” When you hear that, don’t worry. It’s normal. I probably said the same things when I was young and was a stubborn “learner.” Now I am tēnā-ed as a teacher.

**At a certain point,
the students will
become the teachers.**

Just know that learning and teaching are a process. At a certain point, the students will become the teachers. At a certain time in their life’s journey, the light goes on. When they have all that they can acquire, they become the mentors, the teachers, the nurturers. They become the kūpuna. A laila, teach them well because at some point you are going to be harvesting the fruit of your labor. ‘Ae, what you do now will affect what happens later. Tēnā, tēna, tēna. Teach your mo’opuna well because some day, we pray, they will turn around and mālama you.

Ke Akua pū (God be with you). Aloha.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jean Ilei Keale Beniamina is from the island of Ni‘ihau and is from a family of educators. Her mother Jean Kele Keale, Kamehameha Schools class of 1952 (the first Niihauan to formally enter KS), was a Department of Education teacher and principal of Ni‘ihau School and the oldest of five children, and her father was the oldest of seven. Ilei, the oldest of three children, has two daughters Kahea and Kalei, and eight grandchildren. In her role as assistant professor at Kaua‘i Community College, Ilei pays close attention to the cultural versatility that is critical to student success: retracing the footsteps of her ancestors that made Hawai‘i the most literate nation on earth at the turn of the century—helping to make today’s educational systems responsive to the needs of students of all ages. Ilei is also a multiple Nā Hōkū Hanohano award winner as a composer and singer and has served as a judge of Hawaiian language music.