

Understanding Micronesian Students in Hawai'i

By Thomas Ross

The Multicultural Education for Teachers, Administrators, Learners, and Support Staff (METALS) program at the College of Education, University of Hawai'i, recently sponsored a workshop designed to help Hawai'i educators understand and better communicate with Micronesian students and their families. Following are some highlights from this workshop.

Family. The family is central in Micronesian cultures. Relationships within the family, the clan, and the community are the basis for each person's individuality, and all decisions are made with the guidance of the family.

Class Attendance. Students may stop coming to class for various reasons: they may be required to stay home and help out if someone in the family is ill; they may feel that after missing a class they have shown disrespect and can no longer face the teacher; a brother and sister may avoid being in the same classroom if the class topic is sensitive, such as biology or sex education; or a Micronesian girl may not be allowed to wear the clothing required for a physical education class or a sports activity.

Skills and Self Worth. Micronesian immigrants in Hawai'i are out of their familiar cultural environments and lack opportunities to learn the skills that their cultures deem important, like proper use of formal language or how to interact with people of different social status. If poor results in school lead these students to feel that they are failing at the skills that their new envi-

ronment demands, they may feel even more disconnected and lacking in self-esteem.

Tips for Educators

Presenters offered these tips to help create a successful environment for Micronesian students:

- Take a cultural inventory of the class. Connect with Micronesian students immediately by talking about what they know, their culture, and their country. Make it clear that they bring something valuable to the class.
- Stress reading and writing. The more competent students are in these skills, the more confidence they will have.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences. For example, be aware that when being reprimanded, students may avoid making eye contact in order to show respect and obedience.
- Hire a Micronesian to counsel the students. If this is possible, it can help solve many problems.
- Remember that Micronesian students may be homesick. Show them what you know about Micronesia and encourage them to teach you and the rest of the class about their culture.

More information about METALS is available at www.hawaii.edu/wccc/metals.

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