

Community News:

A Multi-Cultural Exchange Between the Big Island and St. Paul, Minnesota

What do Na‘alehu Theatre and Connections Public Charter School in Hawai‘i, and The High School for Recording Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota have in



Connections’ students Joel Thatcher (seated in the back) and Kenan-Micah Gebin join a High School of the Recording Arts student in the studio. Both Joel and Kenan are seniors who have been at Connections since grade K. Photo courtesy Connections Public Charter School.

common? Why a desire to learn much more about music making and cultural sharing, of course. Thanks to the Laura Jane Musser Fund, high school students from both schools were able to experience an incredible cultural exchange.

A four-year partnership between the HSFCAs’ Community Arts Program and Na‘alehu Theatre helped to support a Hawaiian Performing Arts arts residency on the Big Island (2008 & 2009, 2011 & 2012). Na‘alehu Theatre created in-school and after-school performing arts programs through its Hawaiian Master Musician Outreach Program. Led by legendary slack-key guitarist Cyril Pahinui, the program is based on the belief that music is a dual investment in Hawaii’s culture and in youth who struggle to reach their potential in conventional school programs. The Master Musician program fit nicely with Connections Public Charter School’s mission to establish and sustain a community ‘ohana that recognizes and nurtures individual talents.

During this period, Connec-

tions implemented a new program, the “Makery”, designed by Dr. Neil Scott from the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa. Started in 2009 with initial funds from the National Science Foundation, the Makery workshop offers the additional skills of instrument-making to participants. Students utilize sophisticated computer controlled fabrication systems that translate ideas into real products. Computer-aided drawing software captures the ideas while computer-aided manufacturing software and hardware fabricate products made of materials such as wood, plastic, metal, bone and shell.

After crafting their own steel guitars in the school’s Makery, the students were inspired to learn to make music. Enter Uncles Dwight Tokumoto and Cyril Pahinui. During the past four years, the Master Musician program has provided weekly steel guitar lessons to 16 students at the Connections Public Charter High School. Along the way they learned math and science, the history of the steel guitar and its music, and language arts. The program is now expanding to ‘ukulele-making with lessons for more than 200 students at Connections Elementary School.

With their demonstrated success, the Na‘alehu Theatre and Connections Public Charter School partnered with The High School for Recording Arts (HSRA) in St. Paul, Minnesota. How did they meet? Connections and HSRA were both a part of the Coalition of Essential Schools Small Schools Project, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Connections and HSRA then prepared and received a Laura Jane Musser Fund



Students Molly Mayer (St. Paul) and Joel Thatcher (Hilo) flashing the Studio Shaka sign. Photo courtesy Connections Public Charter School. Click to watch their [music video Lost In Love](#), made in Hilo

grant. The two partnering organizations believe that music is the perfect medium to bridge the gap between communities and cultures and provide the chance for students to enter into a



Steel guitars made by Connections’ high school students. Photo courtesy HSFCAs Folk & Traditional Arts Program.

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new environment by joining together to make music. The guiding values of the exchange are “Heritage, Resilience, Stewardship, and Responsibility” and the collaboration provides support for groups from Hilo and St. Paul to visit each other. In building these relationships, the students learn about the two communities’ cultural backgrounds and identify how their ancestors embodied these values in their own journeys.

In addition, the project includes working together to write, record, produce, publish and distribute a CD of original music composed around the themes of the resilience learned from heritage and of students’ responsibility (kuleana) and stewardship toward their communities of today and tomorrow. Students and staff at both schools are learning from industry professionals on how to build, start, and operate a studio program, with the ultimate goal that the newly introduced Hilo recording program will be self-sustaining and a permanent part of the Hilo community after the current project is completed.



Uncles Cyril Pahinui and Dwight Tokumoto follow up on the students’ request to learn how to play the steel guitars that they made. Photo courtesy HSFCA Folk & Traditional Arts Program.

The studio program focuses on engaging high school students through the use of the recording arts as a hands-on application of traditional academic subjects such as history, math,

and more. Completion of this innovative program will demonstrate further how music and cultural identity can be an effective method for increasing high school retention and re-engagement.

High Tech Youth Network

In February of this year, Connections hosted a delegation of visitors from New Zealand’s High Tech Youth Network (HTYN) seeking to establish branches of their organization in Hawai’i. The HTYN is supported by the Intel Computer Clubhouse Network, an international community of 100 Computer Clubhouses located in 20 countries worldwide. HTYN seeks to empower young people and communities to become more capable, creative, and confident life long learners by encouraging them to develop a positive identity and belief in their potential, through linking cultural knowledge and values with technology.

On July 31, 2013, Connections opened the first HTYN site in Hawai’i, “Studio SHAKA” – with the “shaka” sign conveying the “Aloha Spirit” for friendship, understanding, compassion, and solidarity among the vari-

ous ethnic cultures. Similarly, HTYN’s core cultural values have resulted in strong relationships of trust, sharing, and friendship throughout New Zealand. HTYN is pioneering new models for learning and the development of shared community values in closely affiliated programs throughout the Pacific region.

These exciting new partnerships are transforming learning at the schools associated with this project. They are promoting understanding, use, and the evaluation of new technologies as well as producing new innovative uses and applications in a variety of contexts for a variety of audiences and purposes. Students are learning to think creatively, critically, and strategically to make effective decisions, solve problems, and achieve goals in their academic, personal and social lives, in and out of school.

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