

Bill Demmert, Native American Language Revitalization, and His Hawai'i Connection

Nāmaka Rawlins, William Pila Wilson, and Keiki Kawai'ae'a

The article traces the relationship of William Demmert, Jr. with Native American language immersion schooling activists beginning in the 1990s, and that continued until his passing on January 19, 2010. The article includes a description of a collaboration between primarily 'Aha Pūnana Leo, including work on the 1994 amendments to the Bilingual Language Act and aspects of the development of a culturally based education research partnership led by Demmert that sought to document the relationship of culturally based education to the academic achievement of Native American students.

He makamaka, he kumu a he me'e nui o nā 'ōiwi

i mau nā wehiwa kupuna ke ka'i o ka na'auao ola.

[A close friend, a teacher and a champion of Native peoples providing direction from the essence of our ancestors for a vibrant education.]

— Larry L. Kimura, first president, 'Aha Pūnana Leo
(cited in Murkowski, 2010, n.p.)

A Hawaiian Connection

William (Bill) Demmert and Native American language immersion schooling activists developed a strong relationship beginning in the 1990s that continued until his passing. Much of this relationship grew out of Bill's work with us in the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, a non-profit organization established to address the loss of the Native Hawaiian language. We shared with Bill a passion for innovative educational programs for Native communities and for developing legislation in support of them, in our case the 20 percent of Hawai'i's population of Native Hawaiian ancestry. When we first met Bill, Native Hawaiians were just beginning to connect with other Native American groups. Bill moved this association with other Native peoples to a new level and played a major role in bringing Native Hawaiians into mainstream national Native American educational organizations, especially the National Indian Education Association.

Both Tlingits, like Bill, and Native Hawaiians, have a history of successful political action in their home territories. Our contributions to that history began in the 1970s, a time of such major change in Native Hawaiian issues that it is referred to as the "Hawaiian Renaissance." The 'Aha Pūnana Leo grassroots organization emerged during that period when Native Hawaiians' efforts to reclaim ancestral birthrights to the *'āina* (land), *wai* (water) and *kai* (sea) were in full force. Protests were occurring over the bombing of Kaho'olawe Island by the United States military, hotel construction in coastal areas traditionally used for Native Hawaiian fishing and the diversion of natural water streams from Native Hawaiian subsistence taro fields to industrial agriculture. There was widespread worry among Natives and non-Natives over the future of Hawai'i and a concerted effort to retain Hawai'i's distinctive character based in its Indigenous identity.

A landmark accomplishment of this period was the successful voyage of the double-hulled canoe Hōkūle'a over 3,000 miles of open ocean to Tahiti using traditional Polynesian navigational methods involving the stars, ocean swells and the flight patterns of birds. This proof that ancient Polynesians traversed distant seas confirmed for many Native Hawaiians that their ancestors, and indeed contemporary Native Hawaiians, were a significant people of the world not to be dismissed and overrun by "progress." Moreover, the cultural rebirth that was taking place with Hawaiian music and hula surged. These cultural features, and many others, depend on the Hawaiian language, the core feature distinctive of the most culturally knowledgeable Hawaiian elders.

Hawaiians became involved in political action on behalf of the survival of the language, and in 1978 Hawai'i's constitution was changed to add Hawaiian as an official language along with English. In addition, Hawaiian language and culture were mandated throughout the state elementary public school system. Hawaiian language classes at the University of Hawai'i system were overflowing and new B.A. degrees in Hawaiian language and Hawaiian Studies were established first at the University of Hawai'i (UH)-Mānoa in 1976 and then at UH-Hilo in 1982.

A Language Survival Connection

With all the positive change of events, the dim reality was that the Hawaiian language, the core of culture, was on its way to extinction. By 1982 a survey of children under age 18 speaking Hawaiian was estimated to be around 50, mostly from the isolated island of Ni'ihau. Also, the average age of native speakers was 70. Similar struggles were happening in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and like the Hawaiian language, the Māori language was also threatened with extinction. In 1982, when news of the new Māori language revitalization strategy called Kōhanga Reo reached Hawai'i, a group of young Hawaiian language teachers formed the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc., determined to use the strategy to revitalize Hawaiian.

Both “kōhanga reo” and “pūnana leo” translate as “language nest” and refer to the bringing together of fluent speakers, initially elders, with young children under age five in a preschool-like center where only the Indigenous language is used. The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo formed in 1983, and opened its first center in 1984. In 1985, the first graduates from Pūnana Leo fluent in Hawaiian entered English mainstream education in kindergarten with no program in place for them. Indeed, use of Hawaiian as a language of education in island public schools had been illegal since 1896 when then current policies against American Indian and Alaska Native languages were imported to Hawai‘i as part of the process of Hawai‘i’s annexation to the U.S.

The first connection between our group and teachers of other Indigenous languages of the United States was a visit by founding ‘Aha Pūnana Leo board member, Kauanoē Kamanā, to the acclaimed bilingual program on the Hualapai reservation bordering the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona. It was 1986 and hopes were high that it would be the year that the state legislature would remove the nearly century-old legal barriers to use of Hawaiian in school.

Program director and principal of Peach Springs School on the Hualapai reservation, Lucille Watahomigie graciously shared with Kauanoē the school’s curriculum and methodology. The situation was considerably different from Hawai‘i. Almost every child entered the school knowing only Hualapai and no English and all parents were highly fluent in Hualapai. While Principal Watahomigie was highly fluent in both Hualapai and English, teachers generally spoke only English. Primarily parent and elder aides handled program instruction in Hualapai.

While the situation was quite different from Hawai‘i, where children entered the Pūnana Leo knowing only English and even parents did not know the language, there were parallels in the goal of all children achieving academic excellence while speaking, reading and writing both Indigenous language along with English. Most exciting for Kauanoē was to see children actually speaking, reading and writing their traditional language in a public elementary school as a legal right.

While Kauanoē was at Peach Springs School, Lucille encouraged her to join with others involved in American Indian bilingual education at their annual conference. A few months later, 1986 a few leaders from within the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo set off to the Native American Languages Issues (NALI) annual institute held in Oklahoma to participate in the discussions around survival of our Native languages. They would join the group again the following year in Saskatoon and make new friends. One of them was the Blackfeet educator and language activist Darrell Kipp. That same year Pūnana Leo families along with many supporters succeeded in persuading the state legislature to change the law that banned Hawaiian in the state department of education public schools. This opened the way to use of the Pūnana Leo model — education through Hawaiian — in public education beginning in 1987. However, in passing the law, Hawai‘i state legislators warned that federal policy was the ultimate source of past bans on

Hawaiian and that without attention to national legislation and policy Hawaiian could be banned again in the schools.

This warning led to a resolution passed in the Hawai'i state legislature in 1987 calling upon Congress to pass a policy statement in favor of Native American language survival. National networking through NALI led in major part by Dr. William (Pila) Wilson ('Aha Pūnana Leo), Ofelia Zepeda (Arizona Tohono O'odham), Edna McLean (Alaskan Inupiaq), Lucille Watahomigie (Arizona Hualapai), and Joan Webkamigad (Michigan Ojibwe) worked with Senator Inouye to sponsor and then pass the Native American Languages Act of 1990. The act established policy to preserve, protect and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use and develop Native American languages. The act also established Native American languages as American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian.

After passage of the NALA 1990, Kauanoe Kamanā, Pila Wilson's wife, was invited to attend a symposium on Indian education to be held at Stanford University and chaired by Dr. William Demmert, Jr. This invitation came through the 'Aha Pūnana Leo's association with Edna MacLean, who urged Bill, a fellow Alaska Native, to invite a representative of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo. Edna had visited with us in 1988 and participated in our statewide family retreat. Kauanoe attended the symposium in January 1991. "Those two ladies ganged up on me," Bill joked whenever he recalled first meeting Kauanoe. He was referring to his friends Rosemary Christensen (Ojibwe) and Kauanoe Kamanā who he says challenged his thinking about Native language.

A Language Policy Connection

Kauanoe then extended the invitation for Bill to visit the 'Aha Pūnana Leo in Hilo. Executive Director Nāmaka Rawlins arranged for Bill to visit and evaluate a federal grant project in her administration in March of 1992. This first visit would mark the beginning of a long friendship with enjoyable banter, serious dialogue and mutual respect. Long discussions took place on the philosophy and vision of the program. The visit included observation at the Pūnana Leo preschool, classes at the Hawaiian studies program at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and the Hawaiian immersion program in the Keaukaha Hawaiian Homestead. At that time, the oldest Pūnana Leo graduates were in the fifth grade, the grade in which English language arts was to begin with a daily one-hour class. In addition, expansion of the program by this time included five Pūnana Leo preschools and five Hawaiian immersion public school programs. Each site was the result of local Pūnana Leo parents and their communities working with the Hawai'i Department of Education to open a kindergarten for the first Pūnana Leo children in their communities and then expanding upward through the grades. There were individual sites of this sort on the five largest islands — Hawai'i, Maui, Moloka'i, O'ahu and Kaua'i.

The report Bill provided to the 'Aha Pūnana Leo as an evaluation from observing the program included his strong support for the use of the Native

language in any evaluation and assessment for the Pūnana Leo children. He was also concerned that testing the elementary children in English in the public school contradicted federal requirements for students taught in a language other than English to be tested in the language of instruction. He provided several recommendations for us. He advised that we needed to increase the use of technology for teachers and students to ensure that our students would be significantly more versatile and to consider a longitudinal study to demonstrate how partnerships with the community, the parents, the school district and the university are built to support and sustain the goal of Hawaiian language revitalization. The longitudinal study objective would eventually become a national research collaboration led by Bill.

Bill's background in policy development played a very important part in bringing awareness and support for Native American languages at the national level. Bill returned to Hawai'i in May 1993 for the Native American Language Issues (NALI) annual institute that was hosted by the 'Aha Pūnana Leo and the Hawaiian language college. He conducted listening sessions on Native American languages for the reauthorization of Title VII Bilingual Education. In the fall of that same year, Nāmaka and Kauanoe would join Bill in Mobile, Alabama at the National Indian Education Association annual convention to continue the discussion on the reauthorization of the education act at a national level. We conducted a forum with Bill leading the group and received support to make changes to improve the bilingual section by including support for Native American languages. Bill and Robert "Bob" Arnold who worked in the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, conducted roundtable discussions at the first Stabilizing Indigenous Language Symposium (SILS) in November 1994 at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. Their group produced recommendations and strategies to support language policy.

Pila had been responsible for developing the initial form of most of the state legislation relative to use of Hawaiian in the schools as well as the 1986 resolution calling upon Congress to enact legislation to protect Native American languages. As our network expanded on a national level, Pila became more and more familiar with the types of legal and funding barriers that needed to be overcome in the various Native communities working on language revitalization.

Bill and Pila became quite a team with Pila providing information on grassroots challenges and possible pathways out of them, and Bill working on language and lobbying for inclusion in federal legislation. They were successful in adding new sections in Title VII of the 1994 Improving America's School Act, Bilingual Education. Part A, Section 7102 (6) referenced NALA and recognized the unique status of Native American languages. Section 7104 established eligible entities that operate schools predominately for Native Americans, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians studying Native American languages. Section 7122 provided for programs for Native Americans and Puerto Ricans and the continued development of Native American languages, with one of the outcomes to be increased English proficiency.

These provisions were important, because Puerto Rico was the only entity under the U.S. flag that was actively using a non-English language as the medium of education for K-12 education. Placing Native American language-medium schools in the same category recognized the right of Native Americans to use their languages officially in the education of their children. With revisions of the law in 2001 as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), these provisions were continued, as were references to NALA, thanks to Bill's skills in lobbying Washington, DC in spite of a general antagonism toward non-English languages at the time. A continuing challenge, however, remained in the crucial Title I of NCLB, which has required schools where the medium of education is a Native American language to conduct official testing through English rather than the Native American language, contrary to the policy for Spanish-medium K-12 education in Puerto Rico.

Our connections expanded with Bill's international associations and his work in the circumpolar North. We met Greenlanders, Norwegian Sámi, and Canadian First Nations peoples. Early in 1996, Pila met with Bill in Bellingham to plan for a case study of the Pūnana Leo program (total immersion programming in the Hawaiian language) and a review of education programs serving Native American students. Bill explained the intent to use the case study method to describe the circumstances surrounding a specific program in the education of Native students. He wanted to see comprehensive descriptions of key leadership, teachers and students, and program operations, and data on how well students were doing academically. By that summer, Nāmaka was on her way to Bellingham, Washington for the first of several meetings of case study participants. Nāmaka would see the case study to completion.

Bill brought together the group, which included Rosemary Christensen and the Circumpolar Steering Committee for which Bill served as chairperson. Bill wanted to provide a cross-cultural dialogue on the education of Native peoples from the Arctic region to the Pacific Ocean. The case study project led to more discussion on language and culture in the education of Native students and the impact on student achievement. Also in 1996, Bill provided information to the Hawai'i State Senate in support of the establishment of the Hawaiian Language College at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. He believed that community partnerships with colleges and universities are needed to strengthen teacher training programs to produce a teaching force linguistically and culturally competent and able to teach in the various content areas of the Hawaiian immersion program.

That legislation passed in 1997. H.R.S. 304A-1301 established the Hawaiian Language College and identified Ke Kula 'O Nāwahikalani'ōpu'u (Nāwahī) as a laboratory school of the college to conduct teacher training and other innovations for student and family learning. Bill returned to Hawai'i in spring 1997 to help us move forward on the case study. Since the Bellingham meeting the year before we identified research questions we wanted to explore. We also needed to develop the process for collecting data, questionnaires and

interviews to complete the case study. We expected that the project would take several years to complete. National and international contacts were made and maintained as we moved Hawaiian language revitalization from grade to grade. In 1999, the first class of seniors graduated from Nāwahī on the island of Hawai'i and Ke Kula 'o Ānuenue on O'ahu.

We were very busy working on a number of issues with Bill over several years. With the graduation of the first class, we saw a need to strengthen NALA to assure the preservation and revitalization of Native American languages by supporting the development of Native American language survival schools. We had first-hand knowledge of the need to coordinate the limited program resources in a focused plan as we moved students and families from one grade to the next. We also saw the success of the program with a 100 percent graduation rate and as the graduates were accepted to colleges in Hawai'i and in other states. We intuitively knew that education based on the Native language and culture did not hinder the student's achievement but in fact added to a richer education experience and one that the community and families found important.

Bill helped by soliciting feedback from his contacts to our proposed amendments and in July 2000 we headed to Washington, DC as the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held its hearing on S.2688, a bill to amend NALA to provide for the support of Native American language survival schools. Joining us in DC to testify in support were Darrell Kipp and two of his students from the Piegan Institute's Cutswood Blackfeet immersion school as well as linguist Dr. Michael Krauss, Dr. Teresa McCarty from the University of Arizona, and Bill's friend from Sealaska Native Corporation, Rosita Worl. S.2688 was reported by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs but was not enacted into law (S.2688, S. Rept. 106-467).

We returned for subsequent hearings. Senator Inouye chaired the hearings to amend the NALA in 2002 (S.91) and again in May 2003 on S.575. Eventually the NALA would be appropriated by the Republican majority and amended as the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006. Bill again played a part in working through his Washington contacts to assure that the Esther Martinez bill appropriately described the number of hours needed to successfully conduct an immersion program.

A National Research Connection

Bill's focus turned to research in early 2000. In March 2001, Bill chaired a colloquium on Native American educational research priorities at Chaminade, Santa Cruz. There were about 25 in the group, including Pila and Nāmaka. The purpose of this colloquium was to have a discussion on the areas of interest for national research that were identified through a series of colloquia chaired by Bill between 1998 and 1999. Of particular interest was the impact of Native language and culture on student academic performance.

At the same time the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, known as No Child Left Behind, was causing a stir at our laboratory school

Nāwahīkalani‘ōpu‘u and other immersion schools in the state. Previously under the State of Hawai‘i, Hawaiian immersion schools had been exempt from state testing until grade 6. NCLB was calling for testing in early elementary and through English. The State of Hawai‘i was aware of the potential for major problems if testing was through English and received permission from the U.S. Department of Education to use translated tests for grade 3. Nāwahī parents boycotted the English examinations in the higher grades and also the translated examination, which was questionable in its validity. Bill figured in our efforts to overcome this challenge of what he referred to as “linguistically and culturally fair testing.”

Nāmaka met with Bill in summer of 2002 to talk about Pūnana Leo research possibilities as well as support for developing our own valid and reliable Hawaiian-medium language arts and mathematics examinations to replace the state examinations being boycotted by parents. She stopped for a day in Seattle on her way to the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education to discuss next steps for the case study and plans for the study of best practices in Indigenous education. Bill thought that we might be able to influence the research community in helping to understand those characteristics of successful Native students and especially the things that can be changed in school settings to enhance their education. He believed the work we were doing in Hawai‘i could help facilitate a better understanding.

As part of the culture-based education research that Bill was doing, he joined us in developing an assessment program to monitor student academic progress at Ke Kula ‘o Nāwahīkalani‘ōpu‘u in Hawaiian. He also convinced us to add a component that assessed English reading as well. He asked Dr. John Towner, a reading expert and colleague at Western Washington, to meet with Nāmaka while John was in Hawai‘i in the winter of 2002. John discussed his work on reading fluency as a reliable indicator of student progress in reading and that it might be possible to develop and pilot in a Native American language. Nāmaka brought the idea to Pila and Kauanoe and they agreed that developing and piloting assessments in Hawaiian with support from experts like John and Bill could inform the expansion of assessments in other areas for other schools using other Native American languages.

Bill made contact with the Navajo immersion program in Window Rock, Arizona — Tsé’hootsoof Diné Bi’ólta’ — with which he had been working, and informed them of what the Native Hawaiians were going to do relative to creating their own tests. Florian Johnson, Jennifer Wilson, and Sherri Miller from the Navajo school were invited to Nāwahī in the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. Bill, John Towner and Ormand Hammond from the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning discussed the development and implementation of Native American language reading assessments. John conducted a workshop for the teachers from both schools on reading fluency. The Hawaiian language passages were developed and piloted in the 2003-2004 school year. In addition, data were collected on reading in English, using the Read Naturally assessment tools. In

October of that same year, 2003, the senior program director of the Center for Research, Evaluation and Assessment at the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL), Kim Yap, sent out a survey questionnaire on the feasibility of conducting experimental research on culture based education. This was the first national survey of its kind to find out whether it was feasible to do a national experimental study of projects like that of the Pūnana Leo which used the Native language and culture as the foundation of education. Bill subsequently called a meeting of a group to the NWREL in Portland to discuss the development of assessments and research model for testing the effectiveness of culturally based education on academic performance.

The enlarged group of Native American language immersion schools was comprised of the Pūnana Leo, Piegan Institute in Montana, Tse'hootsooí Diné Bi'ólta' in Arizona, and Lower Kuskokwim School District in Alaska. Added to the group was Tulalip Elementary School in Washington State, which taught through English using a Native American cultural base along with the National Indian School Board Association. The group also included Roland Tharp of the Center for Research, Education, Development, and Excellence, Kim Yap of NWREL, Ken Pugh of Yale University and the Haskins Institute, David Beaulieu of Arizona State University, Linda Stratton of the Educational Testing Service, John and Bill.

Nāmaka, Florian and John Towner gave an overview of testing assessments developed in Hawaiian and Navajo. The group discussed the feasibility of the study. There were discussions around what data were needed for assessing whether culturally based education (CBE) programs for Native American students resulted in improved academic performance. Included in these discussions were plans to expand development of curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) in Blackfeet and Yup'ik and the development and use of rubrics to help measure the influences of a CBE program. The group also wanted to test and validate the instruments developed in the Native languages and then use the data gathered to examine the effectiveness of CBE programs that use a Native language and/or English as the language of instruction and to provide information on ways to strengthen instruction.

The result under Bill's direction was the development of a set of CBM assessments for reading and mathematics in Hawaiian and other Native American languages. The CBMs were tested and proved a valid and reliable measurement, scientifically demonstrating the academic effectiveness of Native American language and culture-based education.

A Networking Expansion Connection — Local, National and International

As the Hawaiian medium education movement expanded, the Pūnana Leo and its consortium partner Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language at UH-Hilo, along with its laboratory schools, continued developing and expanding its educational model to a system called Maui Ola Education.

Written in 1997, the Kumu Honua Maui Ola philosophy continues to provide the framework and cultural direction for the development of the Maui Ola Education system. The fully integrated education model includes the 11 family-based Pūnana Leo infant-toddler and preschools, four K-12 Hawaiian medium/immersion schools and tertiary education from undergraduate to an advanced graduate degree of the Ka Haka 'Ula College.

One of the issues central to language revitalization and Maui Ola Education development is the preparation and professional development of linguistically and culturally proficient educators. Keiki Kawai'ae'a, the head of the Kahuawaiola Indigenous Teacher Education program for Ka Haka 'Ula, obtained a national professional development grant in 2002 to increase teacher capacity and quality of Hawaiian-medium teachers. Included in the activities of the grant was the development of two Indigenous graduate education courses for the teacher education pathway. These courses would serve as a vehicle for networking Indigenous educators at the national and international levels to foster a greater understanding of the application of Indigenous worldviews, Native well-being and educational theory and praxis relevant to the Indigenous learning experience.

Bill was instrumental in the development and piloting of the first courses through partnerships initially created on a national scale with Western Washington University, Arizona State University-Tempe, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, University of Arizona, and UH-Hilo. Gradually, expansion to international sites was added, including Te Wananga o Awhanuirangi (New Zealand) and Lakehead University (Canada). In this partnership, a professor from within the Indigenous education field is assigned to facilitate the coursework for her/his university and to share expertise through scholarly presentations. In addition, academic resources and literature on related Indigenous topics are selected by each professor and posted online for all to access. Multi-point video (polycom) and audio conferencing with on-line courseware (Blackboard/Moodle) is used to connect students and course faculty together from different universities. The technology supports live interaction for cross-cultural sharing and exchange between students and faculty from each participating university on educational issues and exploration of shared research and teaching interests to promote an understanding of the historical topics and contemporary issues facing Indigenous peoples through education. The courses provide a platform for students to network on similar areas of interest and share historical and cultural perspectives of their Indigenous communities and the issues faced through discourse on relevant topics of Indigenous education urgency.

Bill produced accompanying DVD sets for each course with interviews from Indigenous scholars on topics relevant to the course focus on cultivating Native well being and educational theories for Indigenous communities. In addition, he donated his large personal collection of Indigenous and education resources to Ka Haka 'Ula College to broaden our Indigenous educational repository. The library contains some priceless resources to support research and new educators coming into the field of Indigenous education.

A Fond Connection of Aloha

Nāmaka received the call from Bill in mid-December, 2009. His health was declining. He asked that Nāmaka and Kauanoë visit with him. We arrived in Bellingham on January 5, 2010. Our meetings with Bill over the next few days would be full of laughter and tears. We were given our assignments and carried them out. Bill suggested his replacement on Kauanoë's doctoral committee. He told Nāmaka his wishes for the use of the rubrics that were developed by the research coalition. He signed and gave Nāmaka and Kauanoë his dissertation. He gave the 'Aha Pūnana Leo and the Hawaiian Language College resource books from his personal home library. We sang and prayed with Bill and his wife Nora. We hugged and kissed Bill goodbye and left his bedside with deep sadness.

Bill Demmert was a visionary leader for Indigenous education. He understood the complexities of education and the related issues in developing a Native educational system informed through praxis and supported by research and policy. He was a teacher, advisor and mentor who contributed tirelessly to raising the quality of Native education driven by and grounded in Indigenous community values of language, culture, mores and family. He was well respected by Hawaiians for his insights, foresight, compassion and generosity. We honor his work, life contributions and *aloha* for our Hawaiian language, culture and people. May our *pilina aloha* to a dear friend live on in the enhanced educational achievement of our children, youth and families whose lives he has touched.

Makua Bill Demmert

*Nou ko mākou aloha e ka makua Bill Demmert,
He makamaka, he kumu a he me'e nui o nā 'ōiwi.
Nāu i huli nā kānāwai e pa'a ai ka pono o nā lahui,
I mau nā wehiwa kupuna ke ka'i o ka na'auao ola.
Me mākou 'oe, nā pua, nā lehua pai 'olelo o ka 'āina,
He 'io kīkaha o ka lā mālie i ka la'i o nā Kai 'Ewalu,
A kau mai i ka lā'au he 'ōhi'a kūmakua o ka mauna.
E pūlama me ka ho'omana'o mau 'ia nā pono āu.*

[For you is our *aloha* and highest regard, Bill Demmert,

A close friend, a teacher and a champion of Native peoples.

You worked for laws to secure the wellbeing of our Nations,

Providing direction from the essence of our ancestors for a vibrant education.

You are with us, the progeny, the advocates for the language of our homeland,

For you are a soaring hawk on a tranquil day in the clear sky over these islands,

Coming to settle upon a branch of that venerable ‘ōhi‘a tree of mountains.
Your memory and good deeds shall live on in our hearts.]
— *Larry L. Kimura* (cited in Murkowski, 2010, n.p.)

Nāmaka Rawlins is the Director of Strategic Partnerships for the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, a non-profit Hawaiian language revitalization organization that administers statewide preschools where Hawaiian is used exclusively as the language of instruction (www.ahapunaleo.org) and exemplifies Bill Demmert’s belief that education aligned to the language and culture of the children being served can have a positive influence on the mental, physical and cognitive development of the child. Bill and Nāmaka worked closely together on educational policy and research in Indigenous language issues.

William H. (Pila) Wilson is the Academic Programs Division Chair of the State of Hawai‘i Hawaiian Language College Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani located at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, and a founding board member of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo. Bill and Pila shared a passion for public policy and the development of legislation supportive of Native American language-based education that included the development of a comprehensive preschool through doctorate Indigenous education system based in the Hawaiian language called Maui Ola Education.

Keiki Kawai‘ae‘a is the Director of the Kahuawaiola Indigenous Teacher Education Program of Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani College at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo. Bill was Keiki’s mentor and teacher. His influence and wisdom guides her current doctoral study on cultural learning environments, sharing a vision for culturally based learning while working closely together to develop a graduate pathway for Indigenous teacher education that brings students and educators together across local, national and international borders.

Reference

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