



Podcast Transcript: Strategic Resources

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Olani Lilly: Welcome everyone. Aloha. I am so excited to have this podcast number five around strategic resources. Today, we are talking with Kaimana Bercarse. He's a board member of the Board of Education for the State of Hawaii, but also has been doing amazing work around renormalizing Hawaiian languages in Hawaii, as well as working both nationally and internationally as it relates to preservation, maintenance, and then again renormalization of Indigenous languages across the nation, but not even that, really across the world. And so welcome, Kaimana.

Kaimana Bercarse: I'm so happy to be here and to be able to share my knowledge with you all. Thank you so much for asking me to come and share about immersion education both locally and globally.

Olani Lilly: You've been working within Hawai'i and with Olelo Hawaii or Hawaiian language, both preservation, maintenance, and now really a lot of the work around renormalizing Hawaiian language within the state of Hawaii. I also know that you not only work within the realms of Hawai'i but work nationally as well as internationally as it relates to Indigenous languages. Could you share a little bit about that work that you do?

Kaimana Bercarse: If our language is struggling, don't try to fix the children, don't try to fix the language, fix the environment, fix the inputs that surround us. And, you know, with that being said, there isn't just one answer. It's a multitude of answers. Everything is interconnected. So, in a few roles that I've been humbled to get to serve in that are related to the Hawaiian language, I see it as a holistic approach of some of these things that I'm working in, but also that everybody else is working in. They say it takes a village to raise a child, but really, it's the village that lives through each other and then through our language. So, that being said, a few of the roles that I humbly serve in relative to language is, first off, as you had mentioned, the Hawaii State Board of Education. I serve as the Hawai'i Island board member and I'm really humbled to have another language speaker, Kahele, who represents the island of Māori on the Board of Education and has deep roots in the immersion program. I also serve as a board member for Ahahu'i O Lele Hawai'i, which is a Hawaiian non-profit that's been around for 50 years. It started in '73 as a Hui that brought together Hawaiian language teachers to push forward the good work and it's really



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evolved since then. I also work with our Hawaiian language, Hawaiian civic clubs, or Hawaiian civic organizations that was started by Prince Jonah Kuhio, who is most famous for having started the Hawaiian Homes Act in the '20s and that movement. Our specific Hawaiian Civic Club is Kahawii Sibilo O Kealoha Aina, which is not a geographically designated club, but a Hawaiian language designated club. And so that's another way we push forward language. And then I also serve as the chair for the Board of Culture Survival, Cambridge, Massachusetts-based NGO that's been around for 51 years advocating for Indigenous rights as well as languages. And so, all of these kind of intertwine and intermix to support our language. So, education, language, is very grounded in who we are. Hawaiian was the language of commerce, of education, of religion, of politics, of everything. And there's that level of excellence that we've had. So, it's really about reestablishing the relevance of our language today. And there's so much, as we know, not just in the Hawaiian language, but in all Indigenous languages, there's so much nuance. Thousands of years of intergenerational and interconnected knowledge of the multitude of systems that surround us relative to the place you're in that are stored in language. And so by bringing that back, you know, we really bring a strong connection to identity.

Olani Lilly: I just think it's amazing. I mean, kind of talking about your different roles, I think it's an amazing time to have two people on the Hawaii State Board of Education who are so immersed in, and have committed their lives really, to education and Hawaiian language and culture education. Historically, has not always been the case. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about, how and maybe do you bring any of your expertise to inform the policies of the Board of Education?

Kaimana Bercarse: It's the experience of all of the board members, the multitude of experiences, as in any good board. You know, you need a good, diverse set of experiences to bring to the table for the betterment of the whole. And, I think for Kahelei and I, what we bring to the table is a really good fundamental understanding of not just the history of education and language in Hawai'i, but really the nuances and the differences of the Hawaiian Immersion Program and Hawaiian language in general. We see a lot of our international colleagues have such a diverse understanding of the world because of their ability to speak multiple languages. So, you know, it's something that can really benefit Hawaii as a whole, whether you are an indigenous Hawaiian or not, you have a connection and responsibility to this place and this place has so much to offer you.

Olani Lilly: Yeah, yeah, and I think people might sort of think that because you have experience in immersion or Hawaiian language, that that's all that you're bringing to the table as it relates to the Board of Education. But could you share a little bit about how



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maybe your experiences working within Hawaiian language communities and culture and with cultural practitioners has helped to inform the nuances of doing business as the Board of Education?

Kaimana Bercarse: We just finished our six-year strategic plan. And one of the things that is foundational to our plan is the Nā Hōpī Nā Hō, which I realized that you had a wonderful other podcast, Kau'i Sang, from the Office of Hawaiian Education. And really, it's about being able to bring the tenets of Nā Hōpī Nā Hō and make it a core part of the values of our strategic plan. Put it there front and foremost to bring the importance of that hand. You know, it's more than just a curriculum, a check the box. I learned this today, but it's really about how to influence people's world views and understanding and sense of place, sense of commitment to place and value and identity. Hawai'i has become such a multicultural venue. And I remember growing up and hearing Manaleo or native language speakers that we had the chance to speak with. And they weren't all Native Hawaiian. We had Manaleo that were Filipino and Portuguese and Chinese and so on and so forth.

Olani Lilly: Yeah.

Kaimana Bercarse: There's so much value that we can all come around. And, Aho Pena'ō is one of the things that does that. And our experiences have allowed us to with other board members and with the public, prioritize that and share how it's of value to the greater Hawai'i and not just to Hawaiian students or Hawaiian immersion. And that in that sense helps to garner understanding and support for programs.

Olani Lilly: Right, yeah, because those schools really become I guess the lab school. I mean, because they've been doing it for so long that they've become the example, right, that you can sort of point to as being able to show the effect and the impact on student learning and community. Absolutely.

Kaimana Bercarse: Absolutely. I think also, though, that these schools, they not only become the example of what can be, the hope is and the intention is that people aspire to have some of that, whether you're an immersion school or not. That is important for us to have here in Hawai'i. The revitalization and the renormalization of our language, it cannot happen only in the schools. The schools are an integral part. They are the core and the foundation, but it has to happen within the community. And so, I think by the examples and the good work that a lot of these schools have done, whether they're DOE immersion, charter immersion, private or whatnot, in setting an example, but also being very welcoming and being very open to share, I think we're on a really positive track.



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Olani Lilly: Yeah, and I mean, let's talk a little bit about the renormalizing. I mean, because there are many languages that right now are sort of in either the preservation or maintenance, but I know in being in this community that there is a lot of work going around renormalizing. Could you share some of the work that you're doing around renormalizing Hawaiian language within the state?

Kaimana Bercarse: Absolutely, and you know, I think I look at it less of the work that I'm doing, more so the work that I'm engaged in with many, many, many others. We talked a little bit about Nā Hōpūna'ō, which is a contract of the Department of Education. Well, you know, longstanding before then was Kumu Hunu Mauiola and Nahunu Mauiola, which is another very similar and in certain ways a deeper connection to Hawaiian being. So the beauty of it is there's not just one answer, but when you look at it in a multiple set of ways, then you start to get a fuller picture of what it is and what it can be and what it should be. Now, speaking a little bit about the renormalization of Hawaiian language. When we were early on in our careers within Hawaiian language, when we heard somebody speaking Hawaiian somewhere, we knew them. I remember my wife and I taking a trip down to Tahiti. In the Super Farei Nui in Hawai'i, we heard Hawaiian language being spoken. I know that voice. We ran around the corner and we saw who it was. And then you advance a few more, maybe another decade or so. And we see that every once in a while you hear Hawaiian language being spoken, especially by a younger generation, and you don't know who they are. And you're like, okay, well, this is awesome, because the base is getting wider and wider and wider. And then you look at today, I would say that in public when I hear people speak in Hawaiian, more often than not, I don't know them. We're not familiar with them. And that's how much our language has spread. You know, there was a study that was done in the 70s, around 75, that looked at how many Manaleo, how many native speakers were left under the age of 18. And the number that came out was less than 50. And most of them were from the island of Niihau. And that's significant. Our friend, Kanani Kahonaile, who is an awesome Hawaiian language teacher in and of herself and an awesome composer. We were able to help her produce her very first CD, the Nahuatuan Hanoa Award, and be able to document and record CDs of our Niihau kupuna and families. And it was utilizing our language outside of the four walls of the classroom for the greater good and to support the work in the classroom. And then we had built and launched a deep-sea voyage canoe, Hōkōla Kai, as well as some intercoastal canoes, Maiao and Kia'iloa, which the crew and the primary function of these wā'a is to be wā'a, but through our language. And so, you know, these are all steps of renormalizing, and everybody has not only the chance and ability but the kuleana to renormalise. I remember the first time getting Starbucks in Oahu and hearing the barista speak Hawaiian and interact in Hawaiian fully.



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That's renormalization. Yeah. It's really about our community coming together and prioritizing Olelo Hawai'i no matter what level you're at.

Olani Lilly: Yeah. If you are ever traveling through like the Honolulu International Airport or the Hilo International Airport, for those who are listening to this podcast, after you listen to it, you might hear a familiar voice on the overhead speaker, our guest here, Kaimana, you'll hear his voice over. And it's just part of that really renormalizing Hawaiian language in everyday life, whether you're at the airport, whether you're at Starbucks. Like some of our grocery stores have items also named in Hawaiian language. Some businesses are integrating Hawaiian language speakers into their businesses and utilizing it as a business language. We have bank tellers now who can speak Hawaiian and will engage with customers via the Hawaiian language. And so in everyday life, we're seeing more and more. This group, Kanai O'Kano, wanted to actively engage businesses and customers in Hawaiian language. And so, I think they created a pin, right, Kaimana, that said, like, I can Olelo Hawai'i, and then that way you knew you could engage. Is that right?

Kaimana Bercarse: Yep, yep. Olelo Hawaii, oi, was the pin. And, you know it was assembled by Kamehameha Schools, but the group itself is an autonomous group that is supported by Kamehameha Schools, and it's made up of educational and community partner organizations that are interested in furthering Hawaiian culture and language and education. I sit on their Ho'okulumo'olela Hawai'i committee, which is the Renormalizing Hawaiian Language Committee. And that was one of the fun projects we got to do. And of course, all of our other friends were saying, hey, how is it that you create a project that allows you to go to craft fairs? But it really was about renormalizing and engaging. There's a term that we often use called kanakanomics, right? Really, how do we infuse our own language and our own culture into the economies here in Hawaii? And then, how do we create an economic benefit? One of the things that I love, we have a board policy over at the Board of Education, right? And it's 105-8. And one of the things that it talks about is the qualifications of our teachers being fully qualified in both English and Hawaiian and being compensated as such.

Olani Lilly: Nice.

Kaimana Bercarse: So, we need to show that our language here in Hawai'i is more than just a nice to have. It is an advantage. How do we use that language, our Hawaiian language, as well as other Indigenous languages for other Indigenous peoples, as an advantage, as a value, and not just a nice to have? I've spoken with other Indigenous creators, I mean creatives, right, whether on Turtle Island here in Hawaii, throughout the Pacific, around the



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world. And one of the things that, you know, it's become very apparent that if a Native people don't tell their own story, somebody else will.

Olan Lilly: Yeah.

Kaimana Bercarse: It's that connection to their land. It's that connection to their environment. It's a connection to their language, connection to their culture. They know who they are and they can convey that. You know, when you talk to Uncle Sig, there's always a story about each of the prints. Not, oh, I thought it would look nice. No, there's a story and there's a reason. Even in the modern realms, right? I remember a specific shirt that he created that had street names throughout Hilo. It was a map and street names. Now, you would think that's maybe not more of a traditional design, but why wouldn't it be? You get someone, a family that is creating through the traditional language and culture and lens, but using the modern technologies of the day.

Olan Lilly: Yeah.

Kaimana Bercarse: And what I love is, you know, at one time there was a really big push for translating. Now the push is more for transcribing and getting the knowledge out there, building Hawaiian language speakers to pull the knowledge out of all of these texts that was written by our kūpuna. And then to really understand that if you want a fullness of understanding, you need to do it in her language. There's certain writings of our Queen Lili'uokalani that was written in Hawaiian and others that were translated by her into English. And when you look at it, right, and you compare it, it's not exactly the same. People assume that a translation is a direct translation of what was written, but you have to understand the context of the time. Hawaiian was the language of the land, so it was easier to write freely, but then when you're translating to English, you have to understand who's the audience. We weren't the audience. So there's so much more nuance and so much more depth of knowledge that can only be with our Native language. And so, you know, I think that's another reason that it's so important that our communities support language and support our schools. And for our communities that don't have schools, you know, I think, so Hawaiian language schools are a right. And we've seen that in recent, a firm in recent court cases. But the reality of it is, we need to have a critical mass of those that are interested and want to learn in their language in certain geographic areas in order to expand or create new programs.

Olan Lilly: Right.



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Kaimana Bercarse: And we need to do that by rallying our communities, rallying our supporters. There's a desire, but we need to show that there's not only a desire, there's a need and we have that critical mass that can make it happen.

Olaní Lilly: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, circling back to education as being the source in which we create that, I get that, that critical mass of people. So I know within the state, across the board, it's been a challenge after the pandemic as far as recruiting and maintaining teachers. How hard hit has this pandemic been to the Hawaiian language teaching and education community? And what are some of the things that maybe the department or the board is looking at to remedy this challenge?

Kaimana Bercarse: Everyone was hit hard. But what I saw, especially in our schools were very resilient. They created new ways of doing things. But speaking with some of our immersion schools, it was beautiful because a lot of them were already looking towards distance education as a supplement to what they're already doing. So, you know, they're very well poised to pivot. And to be honest, immersion education has always had to pivot.

Olaní Lilly: Yeah. It really has.

Kaimana Bercarse: It's always had to pivot. But, you know, how do they create new opportunities to learn? Our teachers were really pivotal in creating opportunities to keep the family safe, but still keep the students engaged. You know, keep the students working on the computer and then going out and doing experiments and doing work on their own aina in their own families and their own homes and then coming back. Some of the things that I heard from some families was, wow, the lessons that they had in school had us help start a family garden. And now that family garden is helping to support and supplement. So, I think really it's been an amazing time. It's not anything that we would ask for. Nobody wants the pandemic. But by amazing, I mean the resiliency, the adaptivity of our schools, especially our immersion schools, in overcoming and advancing. And so, yes, what the board is doing, we are a policy-making board, and so, we adjust and adapt policies as needed. Because they need to evolve. We do that by understanding the needs of the schools and the students and the community, by being able to convene and have good discourse. The department is doing a lot of amazing things. You know, I know you had that discussion with Kau'i Sang on the OHE front, but in general, you know, they're working really hard to bounce back. Bounce back and then advance. One of the beautiful things about that, there's so much devastation that came out of the pandemic. But one thing that was a huge positive was the access to technology and computer literacy.



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Olani Lilly: Yeah, and I think, you know, as far as resources, both from, you know, the state level, as well as some of our Hawaiian trusts and businesses have really stepped up to fill that gap with technology and those resources, and also connecting teachers. I know they have a repository of like lessons that teachers can access online. And so you know those resources were actually in play before the pandemic but I'm sure the pandemic and the need to sort of do more online education ramped that up even more. And so all of those parties coming together to really meet the need. But I love what you said. You know, I really think that the Hawaiian immersion and the renormalization movement was built around the attitude of like, okay, like, don't tell me no. I'll figure out, right? You tell me no, I'll figure out how.

Kaimana Bercarse: We weren't independent, we were interdependent. We were interdependent amongst each other. But that's why we were a thriving, self-sufficient nation. That was really connected to the land and the sea and the mountains and the air and our environment. And we weren't ruling it. From most Natives that I've encountered, man is part of that ecosystem. It has responsibility and it has connection. And that's how you live harmoniously with your environment and that's how you can be sustainable and thrive. You know, one of the questions that you had sent over that I wanted to just address real quick was the question of what are some misunderstandings that people have about Native language immersion? And one of the biggest misunderstandings is that it's the same as English education, you just got to translate it into Hawaiian.

Olani Lilly: Yeah.

Kaimana Bercarse: You know, English has its own worldview and its own way of thinking and processing and understanding. And Hawaiian has its own unique way, as does any other Indigenous or non-Indigenous language. So it's more than just translation. When we talk about things like assessment and curriculum, it has to be built in the language but through the culture and through the worldview of that people. But then the other flip side of that question about the misunderstanding, I think it's an internal misunderstanding as well. A lot of people say, well, hey, the western education is not for me. And internally sometimes we discount that, but we forget that our kupuna, our ali, set us on that path before Hawai'i became a part of the United States. If you just do a quick search online through Uluko, you'll see calculus books, biology, geography books, textbooks, not just books, textbooks. They were written in our language that had the lessons that were seemingly formatted in a Western sense but were done through our worldview. I'm sure that if we did the reverse, we took some of our Hawaiian worldview created textbooks, translated that to English and then did more of the cultural and native assessment to an



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English-speaking student, they would have just as much difficulty as vice versa. So, you know, it's really, I think those are some of the miscommunications. Part of the problem is just continuing the misconceptions. Now that we understand it a little better, what can we do to support? And what can we do to not be a passenger on the canoe? Think about the voyaging canoes, there are no passengers, everybody has a function. And as a very awesome Hawaiian leader who's gone past from YPO, Uncle Kia used to say, what's your function? We've asked ourselves that.

Olani Lilly: Yes and yes. That was a pretty amazing sort of like idea and sort of like closing. But are there any other like comments that you want to make sure or ideas or whatnot that you want to share as we close this conversation?

Kaimana Bercarse: You know, I liked it right there, but to expound maybe a little bit on that, Hawaiian language has relevance to everyone here in Hawai'i. Everyone in Hawai'i has a responsibility of kuleana. And, you know, kuleana is not just a, you know, a lot of people say, well, you know, we've got rights, but prior to the rights, you get responsibilities, and that's what effectuates the rights. And, you know, no matter who you are, where you come from in Hawai'i, you have responsibility to the host culture and to keep Hawaii the Hawaii that it is.

Olani Lilly: Yeah.

Kaimana Bercarse: And the only way we can do that is by honoring, respecting, and understanding the culture. Just because you're whether or not you're Hawaiian, you know, you have the opportunity to learn the language and to respect the culture. That doesn't give you birthrights that Native Hawaiians have, right, that doesn't do that, but it gives you a better connection to place, a better connection to people.

Olani Lilly: Yeah. Awesome. Awesome. Well, mahalo again Kaimana for joining us and for sharing both your work and your ideas. It just was an amazing time to sit down and talk story with you. So mahalo nui.

Kaimana Bercarse: Mahalo ya oe. Mahalo for this on just to sit down and some stories always good catching up with you.