Hui Malama Ocean Stewardship in the Field

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This year-long project worked side-by-side with another year-long project, "Hui Malama Ocean Stewardship in the Classroom." The two projects activated the learning that middle school students do in the classroom by getting them out to the ocean and into contact with scientists in our community. The students who participated in the Stewardship in the Field activities went to the ocean weekly to sample water quality, collect water samples, speak to experts in the community, complete a journal entry, and bring their field work back to the students in the classroom. They worked with the students in the classroom to analyze the data and examine the water samples for plankton.

We were very successful in getting the kids out to the ocean on Fridays, even when the weather was pretty nasty. The students were committed to the project, and they came to recognize the importance of being consistent in making observations and collecting samples. They often stayed after regular school hours on those days to continue looking at the water samples under the microscope. They formed their own study group during the fourth quarter to identify the little critters they found in their samples (see attached worksheet). We also connected with several experts in our community, from university professors to local fishermen to parents who work in the marine sciences.

We did have to modify our original plan in one major way: coordinating contact with some scientists in the community. We found that the highly restrictive schedules of public school students and community experts with jobs made it quite challenging to get people together. Also, despite the willingness of adults in the community to work with school students, the reality of planning far in advance, modifying activities to better fit younger people, and balancing all the other responsibilities they already have proved to be difficult. We all kept working at it, though, and after rescheduling several times, we set the groundwork for getting our collaboration started. We ended up only taking one excursion out on a sea vessel instead of two, and we ended up getting to go on a UH-Hilo research vessel instead of a double-hull canoe. The students were thrilled and inspired by their 4 hour ocean voyage, and many have expressed interest in studying to become Marine Biologists. All of us are looking forward to more adventures in the future, now that we've broken the ice.

As we reflect on the excellent experiences we had during this project, we realize we love working with scientists in our community, and that the kids get so much out of coming in contact with them. We feel we are more prepared as teachers to incorporate the experts in our community into our projects and classrooms. This type of interaction takes the learning that happens in the classroom and puts it into perspective for the students. They get to see why they are actually spending time on the things we learn about at school, and they become more aware of how their studies will actually prepare them for the things they want to do once they are out of school. Classroom teachers can talk about that forever, but this type of experience makes it real.

Combining learning from books with experiences in the field aboard the UH-Hilo research vessel.