

**The Transformative Power of Education and Leadership**

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## The Transformative Power of Education and Leadership

The stories of Dr. Stephanie Waterman, Dr. Richard Ice, and Dr. Walter Kahumoku reveal how epistemology, ontology, and etymology intertwine in understanding education and leadership. Epistemologically, each represents a distinct way of knowing. Waterman through Indigenous relational knowledge, Ice through collaboration and experience, and Kahumoku through blending quantitative and Indigenous approaches. Ontologically, their paths show how identity shapes understanding: Waterman's Onondaga roots, Ice's adaptability, and Kahumoku's Hawaiian grounding. Etymologically, they redefine education as a living dialogue between culture, language, and humanity. Together, they show that true education values diverse truths and connects knowledge systems.

Dr. Stephanie J. Waterman's story is deeply inspiring because it reflects both perseverance and a strong sense of identity. Coming from the Onondaga Turtle Clan, she carries her heritage and values into her academic and professional life, which is admirable. Her early exposure to university life at the age of 14 sparked a lifelong passion for education. Despite challenges such as low SAT scores, she demonstrated resilience by entering Syracuse University through the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) and later making significant contributions to the institution. Her ability to collaborate across 11 departments shows how her leadership and commitment to education go beyond personal achievement—they also create opportunities for others.

Her academic journey was not without obstacles, especially being an Indigenous woman in spaces with no Indigenous faculty or mentors. The isolation she experienced

highlights the systemic barriers that Indigenous scholars often face in higher education. Yet, Dr. Waterman turned that sense of isolation into motivation to build representation and a voice for her community. Her use of Indigenous theories and knowledge systems in her research methodology is both powerful and transformative. It challenges Western academic norms by centering Indigenous ways of knowing, which value observation, relationships, and community understanding. Her belief that “you have an audience, so you have to inform them” shows her commitment to using scholarship as a means of advocacy and education.

What stands out most about Dr. Waterman is her holistic approach to both life and research. She emphasizes that ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology must work together—an idea that beautifully integrates heart, mind, and spirit in the pursuit of knowledge. Her recognition that multiple ways of knowing exist, many of which are older than scientific methods, reminds me that education should be inclusive of diverse perspectives and wisdoms. As a mother, sister, auntie, and grandmother, she embodies the intergenerational strength and responsibility central to Indigenous values. Dr. Waterman’s work not only uplifts Native students in higher education but also reshapes how knowledge itself is defined and shared. Her story is a testament to perseverance, cultural pride, and the transformative power of education.

Dr. Richard Ice’s academic and professional journey reflects a deep dedication to leadership, collaboration, and educational transformation. I was particularly inspired by how his path began at a small all-men’s college and later expanded to larger and more diverse environments, such as the University of Iowa. His early experience of cultural

adjustment and exposure to both quantitative and qualitative research methods shows his openness to learning and adapting. Studying abroad in China during a time with limited communication technology demonstrates his courage and curiosity—qualities that likely shaped his approach to global education and leadership later in his career.

What stands out to me most about Dr. Ice is his ability to bring people together, especially across differences. His collaboration with a coauthor from a completely different background in writing a textbook not only highlights his leadership but also his respect for diverse perspectives. This skill became even more important in his later role as provost, where he coordinated between two separate institutions, Saint Benedict and Saint John's. His belief that institutions could maintain their individual identities while working collaboratively toward a shared mission reflects both his vision and his diplomacy. It also demonstrates how true leadership often involves striking a balance between tradition and innovation.

Dr. Ice's reflections on leadership and teaching deeply resonate with me. His idea that "good teachers are usually good administrators" reveals his belief that effective leadership begins with empathy, communication, and a commitment to student growth. I admire his emphasis on staying connected with students and continuously learning qualities that I believe are essential in any field. His long tenure and many accomplishments at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University demonstrate that great leadership is not about authority, but about service, adaptability, and genuine passion for education.

Dr. Walter Kahumoku's journey is truly inspiring, showing how education can transform not only an individual's life but also an entire community. His path from high school teacher to faculty member and then leader in Hawaiian education reflects his deep dedication and perseverance. I admire how he leveraged his academic achievements, especially his PhD, not just as a personal milestone, but to give back to his community. His story reminds me that higher education can be a tool for empowerment and positive change when used with purpose and cultural awareness.

What touched me most was the story about his father and the painful experiences of language suppression in school. It highlights the harsh realities of colonization and how it stripped people of their identity and pride in their native culture. This part of his story prompted me to reflect on how education systems in the past often silenced indigenous voices, but through individuals like Dr. Walter, those same systems are being reshaped to honor and revive cultural heritage. His work in developing Hawaiian P-12 curricula is a beautiful act of reclaiming what was once taken away.

Dr. Walter's reflections on colonization, feminism, and native theories made me realize the importance of inclusive and culturally responsive education. His shift from quantitative to mixed-method research shows his openness to exploring complex realities and blending different ways of knowing. Overall, I find his dedication to Indigenous education and leadership deeply motivating. He demonstrates that true education goes beyond degrees—it's about relationships, responsibility, and advancing the well-being of one's community.

In conclusion, the stories of Dr. Stephanie Waterman, Dr. Richard Ice, and Dr. Walter Kahumoku collectively demonstrate that education and leadership are deeply rooted in identity, culture, and the pursuit of knowledge that uplifts communities. Each of them embodies a unique blend of epistemology, ontology, and etymology—showing that knowing, being, and meaning are inseparable in authentic learning. Through perseverance, collaboration, and cultural awareness, they redefine education as more than academic achievement—it becomes a vehicle for empowerment, inclusion, and transformation. Their lives remind us that true leadership values diversity, honors heritage, and bridges different ways of knowing to create meaningful change within and beyond the classroom.