

2016 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

One Woman's Powerful Commitment to Her Native Hawaiian Culture

◆ Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu ◆

Ellison S. Onizuka Memorial Award



Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, also known as Hina, began her transition from male to female when she entered college, and she found pride, dignity and refuge in her Hawaiian culture, embracing the word Mahu – those who embody both the male and female spirit. Mahu are respected as a source of ancient knowledge.

Hina knew that although her family and respective community embraced her transition, there were many young adults still afraid of being shunned as a result of the westernized Christian view of marriage that has created much tension and division in our communities. With this in mind and with her background in education and Hawaiian language, she vowed to continue to dedicate her life to educating others about the Native Hawaiian culture.

As the former cultural director at the Halau Lokahi Public Charter School, Hina was a kumu (teacher), who taught Hawaiian language, hula (dances), oli (chants), and history. Hina also provided guidance on appropriate curriculum and protocols that preserved the Native Hawaiian culture.

Among Hina's greatest accomplishments was the development of a multi-awarded media production called, "A Place in the Middle." With its universal message, "A Place in the Middle" became the most widely used resource on Hawaiian culture at PBS Learning Media. This 25 minute kid friendly film captures the hearts of its viewers with a powerful message that focuses on acceptance, love, and anti-bullying. The film is accompanied by a supporting curriculum teachers can use to educate students about the films cultural implications and nuances.

"In all her lifetime endeavors, Hina has always put the Hawaiian culture at the forefront of her work," says Hawaii State Teachers' Association's Jodi T. M. Kunimitsu. "Whether it be speaking at a rally at the state capitol, educating our youth, or advising development corporations through her role as the O'ahu Island Burial Council Chairperson, Hina has made sure that all cultural protocols are practiced and respected."