Hawai’i Teachers Say “Use Local English”

BY SUZIE JACOBS

It’s not a revolution, hardly a groundswell movement, but teachers in Hawai’i have begun to show their students that localisms and even Pidgin words can show up in print.

Local writer Lois-Ann Yamanaka uses the idiom without hesitation: “I neva like when she hit me with the iron hanger.”

Another local writer, Darrell Lum, has been combining standard English with Pidgin for many years, especially for creating the voices of his young narrators:

_He had Beatle boots with taps and anybody with new shoes he stomped on and scuffed um and said, “Baptize!”_
_Like how he baptized everybody after they came back to school with a new haircut. Everytime he sweep his hand around my ears and tell, “Whitewalls!”_

But allowing Pidgin into classroom writing has traditionally been a risky move for teachers in a state that still recalls the shame of being less than fully American. Last summer, the Hawai’i Writing Project (HWP), using a $3,000 Rural Sites mini-grant, took a step toward making that move a little easier. HWP used part of the grant to pay a gifted teacher, Lani Uyeno, to write up classroom ideas for using _Growing Up Local_, a collection of local stories and poems suitable for high school and college students which uses English language of several varieties and levels of formality.

HWP’s next step was to take copies of the book and copies of the classroom ideas to teachers from Hawai’i’s Big Island to solicit their ideas.

_Hawai’i Writing Project used a Rural Sites Network mini-grant to create a teaching guide for Growing Up Local, an anthology celebrating Hawai’i’s local voices._

One classroom example is the “slippa” idea contributed by a middle-school teacher from the rural area of Pahoa. “Slippas” are the slippers or zoris that kids and grown-ups typically wear in Hawai’i’s warm climate. The idea is to have students literally “walk in someone else’s shoes” and write about their experience, an exercise in building empathy that came to mind after reading “Growing Up Barefoot” from the anthology. Have the students line up their slippas along a wall, teacher Sheryl Ogawa suggests. Then have them choose someone else’s slippas, examine them by using the senses, take notes to describe them, try them on, walk around, and make comparisons with their own. “Too small,” says one child. “Owner must drag their feet. Wow. New my slippas. Hardly been used. Lava rock walker.”

This effort shows how project leaders can work together to support a literary movement already underway in the local community. By sanctioning the use of local literature in classrooms, HWP recognizes both emerging and established writers and lends financial support to the small press that publishes them.

If you would like a free copy of _Ideas for Teaching_, send email to suzie@hawaii.edu. To order the anthology _Growing Up Local_, call Bamboo Ridge Press at 808-626-1481 or visit their Web site at www.bambooridge.com.