
Dr. Albert Carr—Science Educator 1930–2000

Leslie Lopez

Albert Carr was a science teacher from Scarsdale, New York who was a professor of science education in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i from 1958 to 1992. His mother had been a teacher in New York City, where "Al," as he was familiarly known, attended Catholic school. An avid reader, Al quickly moved through the secondary grades and, at the age of fifteen, he was accepted to Iona College in New Rochelle, New York. After Iona College, Al studied science education at Teachers College at Columbia University and, at the age of twenty-one, graduated with a master of education degree in science education.

After receiving his degree, Al began teaching science in the New York City Public School System, where he met his wife Norma Gomez. They were both teaching at the same junior high in the East Bronx. A Puerto Rican immigrant herself, Norma taught English to recent Puerto Rican arrivals. Al taught in a classroom in the floor above. Norma recalls that she first met Al as they were both signing in to the morning roll registry located in the front office. Not long afterwards, students started delivering her small tea roses. At first she was unsure who her mystery admirer was, but then she recognized the messenger as a student from Al's classroom, and she figured out it was he who was sending them. They were married on December 26th, 1954.

Because Al had been continuously enrolled in school, he had been exempted from military service. However, upon graduating he enlisted with the selective service and was drafted into the Army in 1954. Al and Norma were stationed at Henry Barracks in Cayey, Puerto Rico from 1954 to 1956 and it was here that their first daughter Lorrie was born. During this period, Al taught English and played the saxophone. He had learned to play the instrument as

a teenager, and he quickly became proficient enough to play in jazz clubs in New York City. For a time, he was a member of Claude Thornhill's practice band, and this experience helped him develop his mastery of the instrument. He continued to practice playing in Puerto Rico and regularly performed saxophone in the officer's club band with jazz pianist Eddie Higgins, who had played in Chicago's most prestigious jazz clubs with jazz musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie and Stan Getz. During the rest of his free time in Puerto Rico, Al enjoyed spending weekends visiting Norma's family.

In 1956, Al returned to New York to complete his graduate studies, and he soon graduated with a PhD in science education from Columbia University. In 1958 the couple arrived in Hawai'i with their two daughters Lorrie and Linda, and Al started his long and dedicated service as a professor of science education in the College of Education.

In those days, faculty housing was located at an old Army barracks on Rock Road. Rock Road ran roughly behind Webster and Spaulding Halls (Kobayashi, 1983) and was named after botanist Dr. Joseph Franz Karl Rock who came to Hawaii in 1907. In 1947, sixty-two wooden barracks had been brought to campus to accommodate the post-World War II increase in student enrollment (Papacostas, 2010), and these buildings eventually served as faculty housing. Norma immediately set to work to improve the living conditions for her family as well as neighboring faculty and their families. She recalled how welcoming and supportive the College of Education was to the Carr family. Norma found it to be a warm and mutually supportive environment, with professors collaborating with each other on their work and socializing with colleagues and their families.

A Golden Age

The years between 1958 and 1966 were important years of change in the College of Education. Richard S. Alm (1962) refers to the period as a “Golden Age” for the University of Hawai‘i, which saw considerable expansion in teacher education and in educational research. The basic departmental structure that is familiar to students and faculty today was established in this period. Also, the Curriculum Research & Development Group was created, along lines recommended by the Stiles Report (Williams, 2000).

The very first issue of *Educational Perspectives* was published in October of 1962. Dr. Albert Carr wrote one of the inaugural essays on the topic of current developments in science education (Carr, 1962). The article provided a brief discussion of the relations between scientists and teachers of science. Dr. Carr advocated a cooperative approach arguing that educators had “a great deal to contribute to...efforts to improve the quality of science education” (1962). In support of these views, he cited a number of projects involving cooperative ventures between scientist and science educators in Hawai‘i. Later, in 1971, Dr. Carr contributed further to *Educational Perspectives* with an article that discussed aspects of his specialization in elementary science education. It was titled “Science in the Elementary School: A Humanistic Approach” (Carr, 1971). Dr. Carr took a progressive stance on the nature of science education and argued that it should be viewed as a skilled activity rather than a content area—as a verb, and not as a noun (4).

To view Dr. Carr’s work in context, it’s important to locate it within the progressive ancestry and political identity of the college. Two important figures were influential in shaping the progressive philosophy of the college at this time: Robert Walter Clopton and Hubert Victor Everly. Clopton was a respected man of ideas whose published work focused on the work of the American philosopher, John Dewey. Everly was a skilled administrator with a deep understanding of the nature of the politics of Hawai‘i. His mentor was his father-in-law, Benjamin Othello Wist who was also one of Everly’s predecessors as dean of the College of Education (1931–51). Together, father-in-law and son-in-law

steered the college for a total of forty-three years. Although Clopton and Everly were very different in temperament and in the roles they played in the college, they were both regarded as “ardent progressives, committed to public education and to education as a preparation for democracy (Potter and Williams, 2000, 12).

Everly, like Wist before him, was known for his commitment to recruiting local teachers and for being a proponent of the role of public education as a socio-economic equalizer. Everly saw Hawai‘i’s “Big Five” corporations as being overly influential on Hawai‘i’s educational organizations and political climate. In his view, the Hawai‘i Teachers College served a purpose in transforming the “social structure and the feudalistic economic system we had in the islands” (University of Hawai‘i Center for Oral History: Public Education, 2010). Everly’s lengthy tenure provided the political grounding and stability that supported faculty growth and development. In order to effectively navigate within this political climate, Everly formed relationships with the teachers unions and the Hawai‘i Department of Education—even walking the line with public school teachers in the 1971 teacher’s strike (Tully, 2006).

For over 40 years, the leadership at the College of Education influenced and supported its progressive identity by actively developing teacher preparation programs that focused on recruiting local teachers and providing “distance education” programs with outer islands and American Samoa. Al Carr flourished as an educator within this progressive and humanistic milieu. And along with other professors like Tony Picard and Frank Brown, Al was among the first faculty to bring UH teacher “distance education” preparation programs to American Samoa, well before the age of the Internet.

During his tenure at the College of Education, Al directed over twenty National Science Foundation grants in Hawai‘i, three Teacher Institutes in Mānoa and Micronesia, and four Pacific Area Science Dissemination Conferences. He created an incredible amount of teaching materials, published articles and monographs, and wrote several children’s books. He collaborated with both science teachers and



other institutions on textbooks, science curriculum guidebooks, science kits, and elementary science curriculum for teachers. His daughter Lorrie fondly remembers his numerous appearances as a guest science speaker in Hawai'i's public schools, including, on more than one occasion, his own grandchildren's classrooms. Elementary science teachers who were his students remember his outreach work to this day and his lessons on such topics as mealworms and marine biology.

Al consulted in science education in Japan, Micronesia, and American Samoa. In 1964–65, he served as a visiting Associate Professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He was the senior author-in-residence for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in Chicago in 1968. While on sabbatical, he also spent a year in residence at IBM Educational Systems.

Among the many science programs that he developed for students, the popular Student Science Seminar enabled O'ahu's public school students to

meet weekly with top scientists. He also served as the coordinator of the Science Curriculum Improvement Study at the University Laboratory School. His children's books included *Black Is a Word* (a book about racial diversity), *Islands of the Deep Sea* (Hawai'i-themed earth science curriculum); *I Wonder Why Readers: Soft As a Bunny, Look and See*; and *The Black Box* (a fable about scientific inquiry).

Al developed a special collaborative relationship with American Samoa, making more than fifty working trips there between 1970 and 1992. In the 1970s, his family accompanied him on working trips to places like Palau, Guam, Kwajalein and Majuro, Truk and Yap, Ponape, and Saipan. During one extended teaching trip to American Samoa, his son David attended high school there. Al worked and collaborated on multiple curriculum resources designed specifically for Samoa—resources that emphasized the development of language skills, classification skills, and observation skills for children.

Al made an effort to develop meaningful relationships with colleagues and students. He continues to be remembered fondly by those who knew him. One former student, Clifford Sanchez credits Al with being instrumental in helping him graduate. Clifford recalls: “Dr. Carr was always open to me, and all of his students. I would often visit him and talk to him about the history of Hawai’i and the university. A scholar and a gentleman, he was a positive role model who genuinely cared for me throughout my tenure as a student.” Colleagues describe him as gentle and kind, with a great sense of humor who navigated the years of his tenure in the college with grace.

Several of his colleagues have recalled how he provided a calm presence and brought stability to the college through the relationships he nurtured. One professor, Joe Zilliox, stated that it was his “lifelong goal to be like Al Carr” in his work and manners. Zilliox relates a story that illustrates Al’s easy-going, modest approach to his work. It appears that when he spent his year with IBM he continued to carry his papers, as was his habit, in a Long’s Drugs plastic bag. Colleagues and family suggested that a briefcase might be more in keeping with corporate life—a suggestion to which he reluctantly assented. But he soon reverted to his customary practices when he was back home.

Al was regarded by all who knew him as a humble and sociable person. His work and the relationships that he developed with his colleagues mattered very dearly to him. Al helped to create a sense of community at the College of Education in many ways. The Carr family hosted many social events at their home, often with Al presiding as chef. Then there were the annual Aina Haina Academy Awards Banquets where people gathered to root for their favorite movies and actors. There were also weekly social gatherings of COE colleagues and their families at Queen’s Surf, with larger celebrations at the beach over the holidays. Family was at the heart of everything Al did. Al’s son Kevin Carr writes,

As educators and parents our mom and dad are tops. They made the education of their

children fun. Our dad tried to take our choices and show us ways we could optimize those decisions. He tried to know our interests and build on them, rather than dictate what we needed to know. He included his family in his journeys (we all got to experience parts of his Micronesian voyages, for example), and always made an effort to seek out and provide enriching experiences.

Al’s wife, Dr. Norma Carr, has received multiple awards and accolades for her work on the history and migration of Puerto Ricans to Hawai’i, and she is deeply respected for it. She is a regular member of the Women’s Campus Club and, along with her colleagues, founded the Hawai’i Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. She has served as a board member on the United Puerto Rican Association of Hawai’i (UPRAH), and she initiated the observance of the Three Kings celebration at the Puerto Rican Hall on School Street.

Al’s sons Kevin and David were both born in Hawai’i. They are also talented musicians who are known for their contributions to the Hawai’i music scene in the ‘70s and ‘80s. Both completed licensure programs in secondary education at the College of Education. David and Kevin, as well as Kevin’s wife, Betty Burdick, are all teachers in Hawai’i. Al’s daughter, Dr. Linda Carr is a practicing clinical psychologist on O’ahu, and his daughter Lorrie Carr Ohashi works in real estate. His grandchildren Kai and Sara are recent graduates of the University of Hawai’i.

We remember Dr. Albert Carr for his scholarship and collegiality, and for the many contributions he made to the College of Education community, and to education in Hawai’i, American Samoa, and the Pacific.

REFERENCES

- Alm, R. S. (1962). "Not so wild a dream." *Educational Perspectives*, 1 (3), 3.
- Carr, A. B. (1962). "Science education." *Educational Perspectives*, 1 (3), 16–17, 21.
- Carr, A. B. (1971). "Science in the elementary school: A humanistic approach." *Educational Perspectives*, 10 (1), 3–8.
- Kobayashi, V. (1983). Beginning a rainbow, The college of Hawaii 1907–1917. In Kobayashi, V. Ed., *Building a Rainbow: A history of the buildings and grounds of the University of Hawaii's Manoa campus* (pp. 3–10). Honolulu: Hui O Students University of Hawaii at Manoa.
Retrieved from: <http://evols.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10524/654>
- Papacostas, C. S. (2010, July). The story of Pope Road. *Wiliki o Hawaii Newsletter*. Retrieved from <http://www.ascehawaii.org/heritage2010.htm>
- Potter, R. E; Stueber, R. K.; & In, A. W. S. (2000). "The College of Education in the sixties." *Educational Perspectives*, 33 (2), 3–11.
- Potter, R. E. and Williams, R. (2000). "Two progressives: Profiles of Robert Walter Clopton and Hubert Victor Everly." *Educational Perspectives*, 33 (2), 30–31.
- Tully, J. (2006, September). Two influential deans shaped teacher education in Hawaii. *The Magazine of the University of Hawaii System*. Retrieved January 24, 2012, from http://www.hawaii.edu/malamalama/2006/09/f9_everly.html
- University of Hawai'i Center for Oral History: Public Education. (2010, August). Public education in Hawai'i: Oral histories. *University of Hawai'i at Manoa, College of Social Sciences, Center for Oral History*. Retrieved February 8, 2012, from <http://www.oralhistory.hawaii.edu/pages/government/edu.html>
- Williams, R. (2000). "The Stiles Report and what it recommended." *Educational Perspectives*, 33 (2), 30–31.

The author would like to sincerely thank the Carr family for their time and contribution to this tribute to his years of service to education in Hawai'i.
