Taking Plankton to a Deeper Level
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Life is a series of spirals, and teaching is no exception. We experience something, learn what we can, and move on to the next experience. What I deeply appreciate is that we will eventually come back around to our experience in some way, and when we come back around, we have the opportunity to take our learning deeper. If we reflect on our experiences and learning adventures, a spiral that connects and stretches as we grow and learn becomes apparent. As a teacher, I am working to become more aware of this spiral, both for myself and for my students.

I am so very fortunate to teach in a project-based learning program for middle school students, Hui Malama na Mea a Kane at Hawaii Academy of Arts & Sciences on the rainy side of Hawaii Island. I spend my days with a group of very diverse students (in all kinds of ways) and a team of knowledgeable, dedicated instructors. We focus on environmental stewardship, building community and awareness of all the cultures in Hawaii, and fostering a love of learning. We partner with research scientists for many of our projects, and that takes us out into the field regularly to work in the lowland rainforest, study the stars, monitor the ocean, map archeological sites, and much more.

One of our projects has been to learn as much as we can about the microorganisms in our oceans, both in shallow waters and in the very deep ocean. Every year, I teach a unit specifically on plankton, properties of the ocean, and the technology used to study the ocean. And every year, I’m wishing I knew more about the creatures we call plankton. In May, I was excited to participate in the Microscopes for Middle Schools program. I planned to build on my previous learning (through C-MORE’s STARS program and my own research) about plankton and extend my spiral of experiences even more.

The workshop exceeded my high expectations. It was expertly planned, well facilitated, and combined a mixture of presentations, hands on learning, and discussion. I attend many professional development workshops, and I was very pleased and impressed with the quality of this one. Besides the microscope and materials that were provided to my school as a result of my participation in Microscopes for Middle Schools, I came home with a deeper understanding of and renewed curiosity about plankton. I feel that I have the support of the C-MORE team as I develop and implement future projects for my students. I’m looking forward to the spiral growing and stretching higher and higher.