NĀNĀ I KE KUMU: RETURNING TO OUR ANCESTRAL WISDOM

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Dedication

This is dedicated to
Chester Kahape‘a
who believed in his mo'opuna
Acknowledgement

Mahalo to all of my kumu, teachers, who have influenced my life.

First and foremost, to my parents who were my first teachers and taught me the love of reading through many trips to the library and ending each day with a book. To my brother, Naiwi, a great encourager throughout my educational life, I thank him for all his support.

Mahalo nui loa, to Dr. Kaomea for her continued support for many years, thank you for always reminding me there was an end in sight.

Thank you to my first grade teacher, Mrs. Phillips, who taught me how to read and provided a positive example of a Hawaiian teacher to help to inspire me to become a teacher.

To my grandparents, for their unconditional love and for believing in my educational journey far before the journey ever started.
Abstract

Nānā i ke kumu refers to the Hawaiian practice of returning to traditional knowledge and resources to understand the underlying cultural roots of everyday words and actions used in contemporary Hawaiian settings. In this strengths-based research project, videotaped lessons in four classrooms at a Native Hawaiian-serving school were viewed and analyzed in an attempt to uncover the Hawaiian cultural roots of the classrooms’ current teaching and learning practices. After viewing each of the videotapes, a focus group of five Hawaiian cultural experts commented on the Hawaiian teaching and learning practices that were evident in each of the lessons. The cultural experts then followed with suggestions for possible ways to enhance the Hawaiian cultural components of each of the existing lessons. It is my hope that the results of this study can inform future decisions made in regards to Native Hawaiian culturally based literacy education, both at this school and beyond.

Keywords: culturally responsive education, Native Hawaiian education, ancestral wisdom
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Chapter One
Setting the Kahua (Foundation)

Introduction

As Native Hawaiians look to reclaim and renew our educational sovereignty, we must sift through all that has been already defined for us. ¹ Often motivated by what they deem as the best of intentions, non-Hawaiians have historically defined and created educational programs for Hawaiians through governmental policy (Dotts & Sikkema, 1994).

In 2004, the United States government reauthorized the Native Hawaiian Education Act. The document projects a state of urgency, an educational deficit. Section G reads, “Native Hawaiians continue to be disproportionately represented in many negative social and physical statistics indicative of special needs” (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Demographic statistics paint a similar, dismal picture of Hawaiians in various socio-economic categories. According to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs Data Book, Hawaiians have the highest drug usage, murder rate, and homeless population in Hawaiʻi (Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2006). According to such reports and statistics Hawaiians are overrepresented in many of societies’ misfortunate circumstances.

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¹ For purposes of this paper, Native Hawaiian is defined using the following definition put forth by the United States Government: “an individual who is one of the indigenous, native people of Hawaiʻi and who is a direct lineal descendant of the aboriginal, indigenous, native people who resided in the islands that now comprise the State of Hawaii on or before January 1, 1893” (Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2009).
Policy makers and administrators working with predominately Native Hawaiian public schools use this societal discourse as the backdrop to their policy-making. Leaders impose literacy programs and curricula with the best intentions to unravel this disproportion. For instance, the Native Hawaiian Education Act authorizes local councils to approve grants that focus on the following criteria:

Activities that enhance beginning reading and literacy in either the Hawaiian or English language among Native Hawaiian students in kindergarten through third grade and assistance in addressing the distinct features of combined English and Hawaiian literacy for Hawaiian speakers in fifth and sixth grade. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004)

The belief that literacy can “save” the demise of a group of people is not a new concept. It is a practice that can be traced to the introduction of print literacy to Hawai‘i in the early 1800s. Hiram Bingham, an early missionary, declared that the intention of print literacy was to provide a way in which Hawaiians could be exposed to “useful” knowledge (Chapin, 1996). This narrative continued in the 1840s, when the first Minister of Public Education, Reverend Richard Armstrong, used the medium of newspaper and educational policy to ensure that all Hawaiians became literate in English text so that they could function in the world (Chapin, 1996).

As a Native Hawaiian educator of Native Hawaiian children, both in public and private schools, I have seen literacy taught with positive presuppositions. I have been at schools that have taught Direct Instruction and Success for All
literacy programs, which were created and grounded in the back-to-basics movement put forth by No Child Left Behind policymakers. Philosophically, I have not agreed with such methods, for I value a balanced literacy approach (Au, Carroll, & Scheu, 2001). ²

Currently, I have come to terms with the fact that any systematic reading program will teach children how to decode. Yet, I have often questioned if these programs address the needs of Hawaiian children on a cultural level and have pondered what a more culturally responsive literacy program might look like.

Seemingly in answer to my musings, in 2000, the Hawaiian-serving educational institution at which I am employed began a journey to redefine itself as a Hawaiian culturally based school in an attempt to counteract years of a Westernized educational system. The school’s website for its recently built Cultural Heritage Center defines a culturally based school using two Hawaiian terms: nohona and ʻike Hawaiʻi. ³ ʻIke Hawaiʻi is defined as “Hawaiian knowledge, information, and understanding regarding aspects of Hawaiian culture such as spirituality, language, history, literature [and] arts” (Kaʻiwakīloumoku, 2011). Nohona is defined as “a fundamental focus on people interacting and

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² A balanced literacy approach provides suggestions for practice with multicultural students. The approach values decoding, writing, student ownership, and comprehension. It is founded on the workshop model put forth by Donald Graves and other constructivist educators.

³ In suggested APA format, foreign words should be italicized. For the purpose of this paper, Hawaiian is not considered a foreign language as Hawai‘i state legislation has deemed Hawaiian, along with English, to be an official language of the state. Therefore, Hawaiian words in this document are not italicized.
experiencing the world around them in Hawaiian ways – a Hawaiian worldview” (Ka’iwakīloumoku, 2011).

As the website suggests, a culturally relevant educational program for Hawaiian children must include both ‘ike Hawai‘i (or Hawaiian content knowledge) and nohona (or Hawaiian pedagogical practices). For ultimately, nohona is the important iwi kuamo‘o, or backbone, that carries the ‘ike and the two concepts cannot be separated.

As the Cultural Heritage Center concludes: “The success of nohona Hawai‘i requires far more than just ‘ike Hawai‘i. It requires ‘ike (knowledge) from many different systems and sources, all of which help to advance the condition of people of Hawaiian ancestry” (Ka’iwakīloumoku, 2011). This statement reaffirms that Hawaiians have always delighted in Hawaiian knowledge and took readily to other types of knowledge as well.

I am reminded of the story that I learned as a little girl where King Kalākaua lit up ʻIolani Palace with electricity and the palace became the first royal residence with lights in the world (“King Kalākaua’s Movements,” 1881). Such tales of Hawaiians incorporating foreign concepts into everyday life are quite common; for, as a ʻōlelo noʻeau, or wise Hawaiian saying goes, “ʻAʻohe pau ka ʻike i ka hālau hoʻokahi,” (One can learn from many sources)(Puku‘i, 1983, p. 24).

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4 ʻŌlelo noʻeau, or Hawaiian wise sayings are proverbs passed down from generation to generation through an oral tradition. These sayings reveal the thinking and cultural values of Hawaiians. Author Mary Kawena Puku‘i compiled the oral proverbs into a reference book entitled ʻŌlelo Noʻeau.
Hawaiians have a rich history of learning from many sources to create a worldview. Unfortunately, in the past, the Hawaiian worldview was often overpowered and silenced by Western knowledge and practices in Hawai‘i public and private schools (Benham & Heck, 1998). The Hawaiian educational institution where I work shares a similar history (Eyre, 2004).

In the last ten years, driven by the implementation of its revised Strategic Plan, this Hawaiian-serving school has strived to define and redefine its curriculum and instruction to align more closely with Hawaiian practices and knowledge. Goal three of the school’s Strategic Plan (2000) reads, “[The school] will cultivate, nurture, perpetuate, and practice ʻIke Hawai‘i (which includes Hawaiian culture, values, history, language, oral traditions, literature, wahi pana)” (p. 20). The school has made efforts to achieve this goal by changing Hawaiian language graduation requirements, building a Hawaiian cultural center, and introducing a document titled, “Working Exit Outcomes” centered on Hawaiian knowledge and values.

All of these efforts have been employed to rewrite and redefine an educational institution, which, until recently, has largely focused on preparing students for success in the Western educational system (Eyre, 2004); and all of these initiatives and policies are important steps to rebuilding a school and educational system that values nohona and ʻike.

However, as we embark on this major effort to essentially “rebuild” our school, I am reminded of the age-old wisdom of a famous ʻōlelo noʻeau: “O ke kahua mamua, mahope ke kūkulu,” (The foundation first, afterwards the
building) (Puku‘i M. 1983, p. 268). This ‘ōlelo noʻeau cautions us to establish a strong base before proceeding with any major undertaking.

With this ‘ōlelo noʻeau in mind, this study digs through the rubble of centuries of Westernized educational practices to find the kahua (foundation) or a strong Hawaiian base upon which we can rebuild a truly Hawaiian school. This study is premised upon the strengths-based supposition that there are elements of Hawaiian ‘ike and nohona that are already present in our school’s current educational practices that are uniquely Hawaiian and that can provide a firm kahua for future culture based education efforts.

**Research Questions**

Focusing on the application of nohona and ‘ike in elementary language arts classrooms, this dissertation is guided by the following research questions:

- What examples of nohona and ‘ike currently exist in our elementary school’s language arts lessons?
- How can we build upon these existing positive examples as our school continues to strive for a more culturally relevant approach to literacy instruction?

**Methodology**

Often times, in an effort to create more culturally responsive educational programs, administrators and teachers define the cultural elements that are not present in a teacher’s or school’s current instruction. In alignment with Kana‘iaupuni’s (2005) call for Native Hawaiian educational research that is based on strengths rather than deficits, this study aims to highlight the sometimes-subtle elements of traditional Hawaiian educational practice that may already be
present in teachers’ current instruction. Kana‘iaupuni (2005) believes that strengths-based research is much more than just glossing over problems. Instead, it is a way to empower participants to take action. Kana‘iaupuni (2005) explains that the mo‘olelo, or stories, that emerge from strengths-based research provide us with models of strength and empowerment from which we can progress further.

Indigenous researchers such as Linda Tuahiwa Smith (1999) echo this strength-based approach through a methodology called Celebrating Survival. Smith writes,

Celebrating Survival is a particular sort of approach. While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity. (p. 145)

Kana‘iaupuni and Smith’s work highlights the importance of approaching research through a perspective where the core methodology focuses on positive aspects instead of deficient elements. Such methodologies celebrate the power and resiliency of cultures that continue to thrive in spite of outside influences.

Furthermore, this study is premised upon the idea that many Hawaiian teachers are working from a place of ancestral memory and, perhaps unknowingly, have elements already present in their instruction that are rooted in traditional Hawaiian practices. As Kanahele (2011) writes, “We, as Native Hawaiians must continue to unveil the knowledge of our ancestors” (p. xv).
Through this work, I hope to unveil or uncover the ancestral knowledge already present in teachers’ literacy classrooms.

According to Pukuʻi, Haertig, and Lee (1972), “Hawaiian cultural roots are often used unconsciously. They may determine how we train our children, how we interact with others or conduct ourselves in different situations” (p. v). Many times, as Hawaiians, we conduct ourselves in ways that could be considered very Hawaiian. Yet, we do not recognize our actions because it is part of who we are and we are working from ancestral memory—generations of practice that have been passed down to us by observing and interacting with our family members.

Focusing on the instructional practices of four Native Hawaiian literacy teachers at a private Hawaiian elementary school, this study aims to recognize, highlight, and acknowledge the Hawaiian roots of their current instructional practices and to make these implicit Hawaiian educational practices explicit by referencing Native Hawaiian literature and cultural experts.

**Insider and Outsider Judgments**

As an employee of the school where the study was conducted, I must reveal this role and acknowledge that some may think that I may therefore provide a biased analysis. However, I would argue a much different perspective, as I believe that there are considerable benefits to being an “insider” in research. Through a discussion of a popular Hawaiian wise saying, or metaphor, I hope to show the important value of an insider’s participation in Hawaiian research methodology.

The ʻōlelo noʻeau, or wise saying, reads, “ʻAi no ke kōlea a momona hoʻi i Kahiki,” (The plover eats until fat, then returns to the land from which it came
This ʻōlelo noʻeau emphasizes behaviors Hawaiians value by highlighting the misbehavior of the ʻōlelo no ʻeau. In this saying, the ʻōlelo no ʻeau comes to Hawaiʻi, eats food and then leaves. The ʻōlelo no ʻeau brings nothing to Hawaiʻi but takes all it can eat when it leaves. Moreover, the ʻōlelo no ʻeau shows no commitment or relationship to this place. Its enduring commitment is to the place from which it came—the Pacific Northwest. To Hawaiians, the ʻōlelo no ʻeau is a metaphor for someone who makes personal gain by using Hawaiʻi’s resources but makes no contribution to this place in return.

As this ʻōlelo noʻeau suggests, for many years, Native Hawaiians, and other indigenous people, have been researched by outside groups with no reciprocal benefit. Outside researchers have used their “impartial” Western methods and criteria to devalue Hawaiian epistemologies and culture. As Kanaʻiaupuni (2005) writes, “the construction of knowledge—and particularly how it is used to advantage some groups while openly or latently justifying the inferiority of others—is insidious in some ways” (p. 33). In Hawaiʻi, this “impartial” and “insidious” research and observations started with the first Western contact and still continues today. For instance, observations and categorizations of Hawaiians were present in the first travel journals of Captain Cook (Rickman, 1781). Linda Smith (1999) believes that such “travelers’” accounts of adventure are familiar presently in research on indigenous people and put the writer in a position of superiority. As the past travelers wrote and shared their adventures, the people in their homelands were in awe of the travelers’ courageousness and the tales “fed the imaginations of the people back home” (Smith, 1999, p. 82).
This process of peeking into another’s world at a safe distance has been, and continues to be, a popular research method for studying indigenous people. Western scientists believe that this type of distanced research actually provides a more objective account because there is no bias or relationship with the participants. However, history reveals that research conducted “at a safe distance” has often caused more harm than good because researchers can make false conclusions when relying strictly on Western measures (Kana‘iaupuni, 2005).

Years of this type of “impartial,” outsider research have created a sense of mistrust within the Hawaiian community (Kawakami, Aton, Cram, Lai, Porim, 2007). As Kawakami et al. (2007) writes, “We have lived under the gaze of newcomers who have evaluated us within their own belief systems, only to find that we are not only different but also deficient compared to their cultural norms” (p. 329).

Thus, through this research, my role as an employee of the school allows me to have a closer relationship with the participants and provides a deeper alignment with indigenous methodologies. Through this strengths-based study, I aim to document the rich cultural knowledge and educational practices that are already present within the school. In doing so, I hope to offer positive models that teachers and administrations can build upon as we work towards further nurturing our school’s ‘ike and nohona.

As evident in the ‘ōlelo no’eau, “Aloha aku, aloha mai,” (When love is given, a respected action is for love to be given back), the important belief, which underlies this saying, is the idea of reciprocity. The giver and receiver should
benefit mutually. Thus, it is my hope that this research will benefit the teachers and Hawaiian cultural experts who have so kindly participated in this research along with their larger educational communities.

**Setting and Study Participants**

This study took place over the course of the 2012-2013 school year at a private school serving Native Hawaiian students. The school is comprised of approximately 700 elementary students who are of Hawaiian ancestry. The children come from rural, suburban, and urban areas around the island of O'ahu. Four classrooms were involved in this study, providing a sampling of instruction across multiple grade levels. Two kindergarten classrooms and a second grade classroom, each comprised of 20 students, were involved in this study. The fourth classroom was a fifth grade class, which included 24 students.

**Teacher Participants**

Each of the classroom teachers is Native Hawaiian with a range of 10-30 years of teaching experience. They come from various islands and diverse backgrounds.

**Mrs. Ahsing:**

Mrs. Ahsing is a kindergarten teacher who has taught at this private school for four years. Yet, she has taught for approximately 19 years in various schools across Hawai‘i. She comes from a large family who moved to Honolulu from the island

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5 Teachers, students, and cultural experts who participated in this study were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.
of Ni‘ihau. She was raised in a Hawaiian Homestead community in urban Honolulu.

**Mrs. Kea:**

Mrs. Kea is also a kindergarten teacher. She has taught kindergarten for approximately 15 years, five of which have been at this school. She grew up in a rural Hawaiian community on Maui.

**Mrs. Akaka:**

Mrs. Akaka is a second grade teacher who has taught for over 20 years. She was raised in a Hawaiian family in California on the West Coast of the United States. In recent years, she has refined her social studies curriculum to be more grounded in a Native Hawaiian perspective. Mrs. Akaka, consequently, has a heightened consciousness of her Hawaiian pedagogy.

**Mrs. Smith:**

Mrs. Smith is a fifth grade teacher at the school. She has taught for 10 years and has spent the last seven years indigenizing her social studies curriculum. Each year, her fifth graders write and perform a play that presents historical events from both Native Hawaiian and Western perspectives.

**Cultural Experts**

Also participating in this study are five Hawaiian cultural experts. Each cultural expert was chosen to participate because of his or her deep knowledge of Hawaiian education, language, cultural practices, and history.
Liane:
Liane is a Hawaiian Studies professor at a local university. Her research and instruction focus on the impact that historical and political events have had on Hawaiian cultural values and practices.

Kuʻulei:
Kuʻulei is a middle school teacher in a Hawaiian immersion public school.

Malia:
Malia is a Hawaiian language curriculum specialist at a local university. She is a fluent Hawaiian language speaker and a kumu hula or a scholar of hula.

Hanalei:
Hanalei is a Hawaiian language instructor, a kumu hula, and a curriculum developer of units in Hawaiian culture and history.

Keala:
Keala is a Hawaiian language professor at a local university.

All of the teachers and cultural experts have been chosen as part of this study because of their dedication to the perpetuation of Hawaiian cultural knowledge and language.

Method
The method that was used in this study is based on Tobin, Wu and Davidson’s (1989) Preschool in Three Cultures method (see also Tobin, Hsueh & Karasawa, 2009). Using a modified version of this method, I: (1) videotaped three literacy lessons in four different elementary classrooms, resulting in 12 hours of
footage; (2) edited the videotapes down to 15 to 20 minutes (selecting scenes that I believed had the potential to stimulate discussion regarding Hawaiian pedagogical practices); (3) showed each edited videotape to the teacher in whose classroom I filmed; and (4) showed the four edited videotapes to a focus group (consisting of five Hawaiian cultural experts) and videotaped the resulting focus group discussion. The result was a video-cued multi-vocal conversation, with four Hawaiian classroom teachers and five Hawaiian cultural experts discussing the same set of classroom videos.

In this method, 15 to 20 minutes of video clips were chosen to align with the work of Kim Marshall (2009), an advisor and coach to principals nationally. In his work, Marshall writes,

The second an observer walks into a classroom, there is a flood of new information on student climate, the physical characteristics of the room, and what student and teachers are saying, and the visitor's learning curve is steep. After five or ten minutes, the amount of new information levels off and gradually declines for the remainder of the period. (p. 66)

According to Marshall, the typicality of a classroom is seen in the first fifteen minutes. Marshall also mentions that the first five minutes of a classroom observation is spent adjusting to the climate of the classroom. To help with these adjustments, each focus group viewing was introduced to the cultural experts by providing a context for the lesson and the demographics of the classroom. The cultural experts were also provided a written transcript of the video clip to review before and during the viewing and to reference during the discussion.
During the initial, one-on-one viewing of the edited videotape with each classroom teacher, I solicited the teachers’ initial responses to the video. The video clips were selected and edited to portray a typical lesson within the class. The video portrayed clips of teacher instruction, student-to-student interactions, and classroom discussions. The teachers were asked to first confirm that the clip depicted a typical day within their classroom. The teachers were then asked to respond to the video clip with their initial thoughts. During the interview session with each teacher, I asked the following four questions:

- What are your initial thoughts about your lesson?
- In what ways, does this lesson depict what you value as a teacher?
- How does this lesson portray what you value as a Hawaiian?
- Do you have any other thoughts that you would like to share?

During the cultural experts’ focus group viewing, I asked the group to first comment on their initial thoughts on each lesson. I then continued the discussion with the following questions:

- What, if any, aspects of the lesson strike you as being explicitly or implicitly “Hawaiian”?
- What, if any, ideas do you have about how we could make the lesson more “Hawaiian”?
- Do you have any other thoughts (or questions) about the lesson?

As Tobin et al. (1989) suggests, “In [this] method, the videotapes are not the data, rather they are cues, stimuli, topics for discussion, interview tools” (p. 7). The conversations that emerged from the viewing of the videotapes were
the actual “data.” In this case, the teacher interviews provided an initial, insider perspective on the lessons, while the cultural expert focus group discussions provided an additional “insider-outsider” perspective; for, although the cultural experts are insiders to Hawaiian cultural knowledge, they are outsiders to these particular classroom communities.

**Data Analysis**

I transcribed the videotapes of the focus-group discussions and analyzed the transcription for recurring themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While looking for themes, I compared the classroom instruction, the teachers’ responses, and the cultural experts’ comments.

Using elements of the grounded theory approach (Patton, 2002), I coded themes and established concepts from recurring codes. During the coding, I reviewed each line and circled similar phrases or words. Some initial codes are revealed in the following table:
Table I

Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaona (metaphor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiage instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction through song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian naming practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To give a voice/opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aʻo aku, Aʻo mai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through inductive analysis, I looked for recurring patterns in the teacher interviews, classroom instruction, and the cultural expert focus group. The concepts, which arose from the categories, were crosschecked with primary and secondary sources of Hawaiian literature. I began the crosschecking of themes by
first referencing foundational texts from the largely accepted cannon of Hawaiian knowledge. For example, *Nānā I Ke Kumu*, written by Pukui, is a comprehensive resource and guidebook on Hawaiian cultural practices, beliefs systems, and Hawaiian ways of knowing. Puku’i’s work is often referred to as an important part of the existing Hawaiian cannon. After finding these themes in these texts, I looked for the themes in other works, which may not be part of the widely accepted cannon. I felt that this was an important step to insure that these themes were prevalent throughout Hawaiian literature. The importance of valuing many different sources of Hawaiian knowledge is introduced in the work of Nogelmeier (2010), who writes:

> In order to fully appreciate the girdling effect the promotion of a narrow cannon has upon contemporary knowledge about Hawai’i, it is appropriate to survey the actual extent of material available from the period and to consider how the cannon texts fit into that larger, currently indistinct, picture. (p. 57)

This additional step of cross-referencing Hawaiian literature added a cultural component to the analysis, which can best be described as nānā i ke kumu (or looking to the source). Using nānā i ke kumu, or references to Hawaiian sources, I drew connections between the emerging themes and traditional literature on Hawaiian cultural and pedagogical practices. In *Nānā i Ke Kumu* (Puku‘i, Haertig, & Lee, 1972), the authors give insight into this type of historical comparison. They write, “It is our hope that the cultural knowledge embodied in these works will provide a bridge to an understanding of our ancestors viewed from our present complex system of thinking” (p. v). This statement suggest that
nānā i ke kumu is not just looking back to ancestral knowledge but also understanding contemporary decisions through the lens of our ancestors.

Once the general categories were established, I shared the emerging categories with the classroom teachers and cultural experts for their validation and/or critique. This approach of sharing the process of data analysis with the participants is part of a Maori research methodology known as whanau. Smith (1999) writes, “In terms of research, [whanau] is one of several Maori concepts which have become part of a methodology, a way of organizing a research group, a way of incorporating ethical procedures, which report back to the community, a way of ‘giving voice’ to the different sections of the Maori community” (p. 187). I let the participants review my emerging findings and add their own thoughts and understandings to the interpretation of the data. Following Kawakami’s work (Kawakami et al., 2007), by inviting the participants to add their input to the data analysis, I let the people within the community help define, interpret, and find value in the data.

**Typicality**

This strengths-based study is intended to highlight and document the existing Hawaiian pedagogical practices at one Hawaiian elementary school at one particular point in time. It would be presumptions to think that one study will (re)define what should be done at all schools with Hawaiian children. The Hawaiian heritage and culture is rich and varied, with unique differences according to place and time. For example, kalo (taro) farming in Honolulu may be fundamentally similar to kalo farming in a neighboring city, yet the place in which one's lo'i (taro patch) is located and the time during which one farms will
ultimately influence one’s specific farming techniques. It is my hope that this study will inspire other Hawaiian educational entities to identify, acknowledge, appreciate, and ultimately build upon the cultural strengths that already exist in their particular educational communities.
Chapter 2  
Aloha Aku, Aloha Mai  
Give Love, Receive Love

Introduction

After spending many days in Mrs. Kea’s class, I entered the room one morning as the children prepared for their day. One child was checking out books from the classroom library; another child was sharpening his pencil. It seemed like just a normal day in any classroom. As I roamed around the room, I was verbally greeted by students, “Hi, Ms. Wurdeman,” “Aloha e Ms. Wurdeman.” Maya, a girl whom I had initially thought of as more on the quiet side, gave me a hug and asked, “It’s Day Five, are you going to eat lunch with us?”

My eyes focused on two girls across the room. Kalia and Emma were sitting on a small round table reading together. Kalia was reading aloud the book Too Much Birthday by Stan Berenstain while Emma sat and looked at the pictures. As Kalia reached a series of words that she struggled to read, Emma sat with her eyes fixed on the book listening to Kalia’s every word. I felt a little hand tap my stomach. I looked down to see Kona smiling up at me. “Ms. Wurdeman, Mrs. Kea brought us a special snack today. We get to eat it before recess.”

In the five minutes that I spent in this classroom that morning, a tremendous amount of movement and activity was happening. The energy level seemed palpable. Each child was engaged in varying and different tasks. Yet, each student was working towards a common goal of preparing for school. At a first glance, a visitor may be overwhelmed by twenty five-year-olds moving about independently in the classroom. After spending more than a visitor’s moment,
however, I realized that the energy level is attributed to something far greater than just fulfilling classroom tasks. The classroom culture is held together by a much greater truth: one of aloha.

**Defining Aloha**

Before I continue to journey into the daily life of this classroom, I will pause to explain the simple yet complex meaning of aloha while dispelling any misrepresentations of the word. In doing so, I hope to provide a general understanding of the concept before analyzing Mrs. Kea’s classroom culture.

In the Hawaiian Dictionary, Pukuʻi and Elbert (1971) offer various definitions of the word aloha. The first definitions listed are love, affection, and compassion. As one reads further through the list of definitions, the authors write, “The following definitions are introduced after European times: Aloha ahiahihi, good evening. Aloha kakahiaka, good morning” (p. 19).

From Pukuʻi and Elbert’s list, one infers that different definitions were in place prior to Western contact and new ones were created after Western contact. Consequently, the meaning of aloha was changed from an act of love, compassion, and affection to a method of greeting or salutation. Malcolm Chun (2011) further explains this historical change as he writes,

It is quite possible that foreigners, especially the American missionaries who settled in the islands in the 1820s and needed to learn Hawaiian to communicate, influenced Hawaiians to change the way they expressed greetings. In a speech given by Kīnaʻu Kahoʻānokū (Elizabeth
Ka‘ahumanu) dated December 20, 1825, we discover aloha being used by chiefs in the greetings where it was substituted for welina. (p. 28) Presently, aloha is often used in a similar way, as a pleasant salutation. In fact, a quick Google search of “aloha” reveals multiple search engines that define the word as a way to say hello and goodbye. Scholars such as Chun suggest that the way in which aloha is used in present times is far different from the intention behind the same word used by our Hawaiian kūpuna or ancestors. In the traditional sense of the word, aloha is not a salutation but, instead, is a state of being (Meyer, 2003). It is the way in which people interact within a given context and thus cannot be reduced to a single greeting.

Chun (2011) reiterates this notion as he writes about Queen Lili‘uokalani’s interaction with an American visitor. He analyzed a taped interview with Helena Allen, a person within the Queen’s court. Allen tells a story of the Queen being greeted with an “Alooooha” by an American visitor. Allen explained that the Queen responded to the visitor with a curt response of “I greet you with aloha.” Soon thereafter, Queen Lili‘uokalani explained to a child to never use “Alooooha” as a greeting. It is not “our” word she said, it is a word for the foreigners. Chun writes, “The Queen through . . . Allen, says that her greeting is with aloha. This would indicate to me that aloha is something that qualifies the greeting” (p. 15). Aloha, true aloha, can only be expressed through the actions of showing love and compassion, not by simply saying the word. Chun further writes,

I think the message we are getting through . . . Helena Allen’s words, from all these examples, and especially from Lili‘uokalani’s reactions, is that aloha is special because it upholds, reaffirms and binds relationships.
Aloha should not be taken lightly. It should not be used casually or frivolously. (p. 45)

In 2003, Meyer echoed that the heart of aloha is found in the actions and relationships of humans. She writes,

They all lead to one end, and that is that we get along better, we help each other more, we have the energy to do what is right. This is what cultivating aloha means, and by doing this, we are all developing the core of what our human potential can be. (p. 14)

Aloha is a state of being. It is the relationship or interaction that happens between people who exhibit a sense of fondness or love for one another. Unfortunately, this state of being is often misrepresented and marketed as the “Aloha Spirit” to lure visitors to our islands (Trask, 1999; Kaomea, 2000). The commodified tourism version of aloha, which portrays Hawaiians as generous and open hearted, doesn’t get to the true essence of aloha as aloha is not one-sided. The true meaning of aloha lies in the relationship, an interaction which is multi-directional. Aloha is not a commodity that one can buy a ticket to, rather it is a genuine feeling between people to which both parties wish a greater good for the other partner.

Puku‘i and Elbert (1984) suggest that there were traditional greetings associated with the word aloha. They explain that aloha ‘oe means, “may you be loved and greeted” (p. 19). Aloha ‘oe, often used to say goodbye, is said with the intention to wish a wonderful future for the recipient. The speaker sends the words with hope that wherever the recipient’s destination, may this new place receive him/her with love. Other phrases such as aloha kāua or aloha kākou
secure a relationship between two or more people with a wish for reciprocity. Puku‘i and Elbert explain that these phrases mean, “may there be friendship and love between us” (p. 19).

The greatest example of aloha occurred during the darkest part of Hawaiian history. During the days leading up to and after the illegal overthrow of her government, historical accounts report that Queen Lili‘uokalani asked her people to be patient and refrain from reacting with physical force because she believed that the government of the United States, that great nation for whom she had much aloha, would correct or rectify the hewa or wrong committed by their representatives. When Queen Lili‘uokalani’s act of aloha was not reciprocated by the United States, she wrote in her biography,

The usurpation was unrighteous, and cost us much humiliation and distress. But we did not resist it by force. It had not entered into our hearts to believe that these friends and allies from the United States, even with all their foreign affinities, would ever go so far as to absolutely overthrow our form of government, seize our nation by the throat, and pass it over to an alien power. (Lili‘uokalani, 1991, p. 368)

The Queen couldn’t imagine the aloha that she felt towards the United States would not be reciprocated during this difficult time. As she says, “It had not entered into our hearts”; it was inconceivable.

Through these examples, one can recognize that aloha is a state of being, it should always be reciprocated when given, and it is the bond felt within a close relationship. In the next section, I will show examples of aloha in Mrs. Kea’s classroom and demonstrate a familial-type relationship based on the mutual
feeling of aloha between class members. After analyzing the familial-like relationship between students, I will look at ways in which aloha equalizes the power relationship between teacher and student. Finally, I will suggest ways in which aloha creates a sense of kuleana or responsibility for the greater good of those within the classroom community.

**Aloha in Mrs. Kea’s Classroom**

Mrs. Kea sits on the carpet in a circle with her students. Her shoes are off her feet and placed to the side of her. In the middle of the circle are two containers, one with monarch butterfly caterpillars and the other with cabbage caterpillars. The children had captured the caterpillars in the garden fronting their classroom. Some caterpillars have already started to form a chrysalis on the top of the container. Mrs. Kea is in the middle of the circle speaking to the class.

**Mrs. Kea:** Mrs. Kea was kind of worried about opening the cover. Why do you think?

**Noah:** It will die.

**Mrs. Kea:** Yes, I was worried [the chrysalis] wouldn’t survive [if we disturbed it]. But part of me was thinking that in nature it must get rained on and it can survive.

(*Mrs. Kea begins to open the top.*)

**Jack:** Oh wait a minute; there is a caterpillar there.

**Mrs. Kea:** Where?

(*The child points to the top of the container.*)

**Mrs. Kea:** Thanks for telling me. (*She looks and examines the cover.*) See I don’t want to disturb that one.
(As Mrs. Kea speaks a little girl rests her head on Mrs. Kea’s lap.)

When the focus group of Hawaiian cultural experts viewed this clip, Malia, a Hawaiian language specialist at the University of Hawai’i, commented on the relationship between Mrs. Kea and her students.

**Malia:** There is definitely aloha between the kumu and her students. The way they speak to her. The way they speak to each other . . . and physically, she is ok with them touching her and being close. When they were [working in] pairs, they seemed to be comfortable with one another. I am imagining that that type of modeling of aloha is rubbing off on the students and they are practicing it with each other.

Kuʻulei and the other cultural experts shared a laugh as Kuʻulei made reference to a young girl who was touching and playing with the teacher’s hair throughout the discussion. Kuʻulei noted that the teacher didn’t seem “at all . . . phased by” the girls’ actions.

In this initial response, the respondents speak of the mutual affection between teacher and students. They make reference to a little girl who first holds the teacher’s arm and, by the end of the lesson, is lying on the teacher’s lap. The other children in the classroom do not point it out or try to emulate the behavior. Mrs. Kea never asks the child to sit up. The class members’ lack of reaction suggests that this behavior is commonplace in the classroom.

Pukuʻi (1972) explains the importance of physical touch when working with Hawaiian children. She writes,
Anytime I get a chance, I hold and cuddle a very young child while I read to him from a storybook. The physical contact, the cuddling, and attention are associated with the fun of looking at a storybook and hearing what all these words and pictures are about. The connections between pleasure and books are made. (p. 69)

Puku‘i suggests that these types of close relationships and pleasurable associations should to be emulated in other learning experiences as well.

In Puku‘i’s book of ‘ōlelo no‘eau, there is a saying that speaks of the important and loving relationship between a teacher and student. “I mohala no ka lehua i ke ke‘ekahi ‘ia e ka ua” is literally translated as “The lehua blossom unfolds when the rains tread on it.” When understood beyond the literal meaning, this ‘ōlelo no‘eau suggests that teachers should speak gently to their students so that they may flourish in the nurturing environment, and that children respond better to gentle rather than harsh words (Puku‘i, 1983).

When I interviewed Mrs. Kea, she explained that as a child she grew up in a Hawaiian rural community. She attended a public school where she was one of a small number of Hawaiian students. She felt like a misfit among students who came from very different cultural and socio-economic environments. It was not until seventh grade that she met a teacher of Hawaiian ancestry and began to love school.

**Mrs. Kea:** She was the first and only teacher who touched my heart in the public school system. Every day, I teach and remember the way she made me feel. That’s how I want my students to feel, acknowledged, important, and loved.
In her early school experiences Mrs. Kea was missing the love that she felt at home. She looked for a mother figure in other teachers but it wasn’t until seventh grade that she found the feeling of familiar family love. The relationship had a lasting impression and further explains the deep connection between Mrs. Kea and the young girl who sat next to her throughout the lesson.

As the Hawaiian cultural experts point out, this closeness was also evident in the proximity of the teacher to the other students. For instance, Hanalei, a kumu hula and Hawaiian language teacher, commented positively on the physical closeness of the learning community:

**Hanalei:** I noted in the opening clip they were seated in a pō’ai (circle) . . . kīkala to kīkala (hip to hip) or wāwae to wāwae (foot to foot) . . . To me that was makaʻi (good) [and] culturally appropriate.

Similarly, Liane, a Hawaiian studies professor comments,

**Liane:** I was so happy that they were together [sitting on the rug] and not on the desks. We always hear that the keiki learn at the feet of their kupuna. That is mimicking that action.

The ‘ōlelo no’eau, “Pipili no ka pilali i ke kumu kukui,” (The pipili gum sticks to the tree) speaks of the closeness that children have to their loved ones. It is through this love that the children yearn to stay physically close (Pukuʻi, 1983). Mrs. Kea engenders that feeling of closeness through proximity with the entire class as she sits alongside them throughout the lesson.

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6 Pipili is a gum-like, milky substance found on trees. In this case, reference is made to the gum-like substance of the kukui or candlenut tree.
In my personal interview with Mrs. Kea, she mentioned the importance of her students feeling “acknowledged” and “important.” I believe that the idea of students being important connotes a blurred line between power positions. For example, if a child feels as important as the teacher, it suggests that there is a relatively equal relationship between both parties.

The Hawaiian cultural experts likewise made note of the blurring of boundaries between teacher and students in Mrs. Kea’s classroom and commented that they had experienced similar relationships with their own teachers, in which both parties were simultaneously teachers and learners.

**Malia:** Something that I always appreciate with my kumu is that they admit when they don’t know everything. You don’t have all the answers and you don’t pretend to have all the answers—trying to come up with something to seem like [you are] all knowing. [Like Mrs. Kea in the video clip] said, “That is a good question, maybe I should do more learning.”

From the beginning of the lesson, Mrs. Kea established herself as a co-learner along with her students. She explained to the children that she wasn’t quite sure what she should do about opening the container lid of the caterpillar home. She said that in nature the caterpillars and chrysalises have to deal with various weather elements, such as wind and rain, and, therefore, she is uncertain as to whether or not she needs to be particularly cautious when opening the lid.

Mrs. Kea’s commentary demonstrates a feeling of not knowing all the answers. The children take the cue from her lead and offer some suggestions. As
she begins to open the lid, a boy stops her to point out a caterpillar that may be endangered if she opens the top. She thanks the boy for telling her, and he sits back down with a smile, apparently happy to have helped. In instances such as these, Mrs. Kea plays the role of a co-learner in the classroom and subtly acknowledges that the students also have knowledge to share and important contributions to make to their community of learning.

When discussing this aspect of the teacher-student relationship in Mrs. Kea’s classroom, the Hawaiian cultural experts mentioned the concept of a‘o. In the Hawaiian language, the word for teaching and learning is one and the same. Chun (2011) explains that the notion of a‘o speaks to the importance of a reciprocal relationship in learning, or a‘o aku, a‘o mai (one gives knowledge and receives knowledge). In this reciprocal agreement to teach and learn, both parties have a responsibility to uphold their side of the experience. In essence, the result of the relationship further nurtures the continued development of the community in which the relationship resides (Chun, 2011).

One of the Hawaiian culture experts, Liane, explained the importance of this type of relationship, which she noticed in Mrs. Kea’s classroom:

**Liane:** Establishing [this] relationship between haumāna and kumu, that is huge. It is not something that can . . . just be brushed over. It establishes at this young age how it should start and hopefully continue. It is so part of our culture, that relationship.

When viewing Mrs. Kea’s classroom lessons, the cultural experts recognized this a‘o aku, a‘o mai reciprocal relationship between co-learners not only
between teacher and student but also between students. For instance, during a scene that featured students engaging in partner reading, a boy is reading a book and comes to the word Rumpelstiltskin. He begins to struggle and responds, “I’ll just skip it.” The boy next to him shows the child a reading strategy card for decoding and says, “Let’s figure it out.” The first boy gives up again and the other boy says, “No we have to figure it out.” Next to this pair, two other boys are reading a story by taking turns on each page. As one student struggles with a sentence his partner acknowledges, “Wow, that is a long sentence.” This response seems to give the struggling reader the stamina to keep moving forward as he attempts to figure out the unknown words.

Ku‘ulei, a Hawaiian immersion teacher, refers to this clip during the cultural expert focus group discussion.

Kuʻulei: Working together in groups to problem solve is very Hawai‘i (Hawaiian). The members have the attitude of, “I don’t know but we are going to figure it out.”

As Kuʻulei affirms, working together for the betterment of the group is a common Hawaiian practice and is essential to the success of the Hawaiian community.

ʻOhana and Kuleana

This sense of working together for the greater good, while ensuring that all members are successful, is at the heart of the Hawaiian concept of ʻohana as well as at the heart of Mrs. Kea’s classroom. The Hawaiian concept of ʻohana, or family, extends beyond blood relationships. An ʻohana is connected by aloha and the idea that each member has a responsibility or kuleana to ensure the success of other members. An individual is only successful if the entire group is
successful. It is the way in which families love and respect one another for the well-being of the entire family. Like a traditional Hawaiian family, Mrs. Kea’s learning ‘ohana seems to be founded upon the Hawaiian proverb “Aloha kekahi i kekahi, pēla ihola ka nohona ‘ohana” (To love one another, such is family life) (Tibbets, Kahakalau, and Johnson, 2007, p. 150).

One cultural expert spoke of the importance of this type of supportive ‘ohana relationship and the impact the experience will have on future learning.

**Liane:** Sometimes we take for granted [the relationship between teachers and students]. It is huge. They’re keiki and very young. This modeling is done . . . in such an embracing way that it will have lasting effects on their wanting to continue learning. If they can be introduced to learning in this kind of environment then I can only imagine them wanting to continue to learn.

Mrs. Kea spoke of her own experience of a similar relationship with a college counselor, which likewise motivated her to persevere and continue to learn.

**Mrs. Kea:**

I was the first one in my family to go to college. When I came to UH my dad said he would give me $50 a month. I walked into the bookstore and one book was at least $100. I realized I would have to work because just buying the books wiped out my savings. I began receiving financial assistance my sophomore year in college and my counselor was Mr.
Naone. I would see him once a semester to check in. He would ask me how many credits I was taking and about work.

One year I was really tired of going to school, of everything. I was tired down to my bones! I would come back to the dorms after going to class all day and working 2 jobs and everyone would be partying and having fun in the dorms. I was sad and I was envious. I began to think of just giving up . . . even though I had straight A's. I was tired of trying to survive and pay for everything.

I walked into my counselor’s office one day with my sheet of paper that listed my classes and number of credits, which were 15. He asked me about my jobs. I told him I was working 2. He looked at me for a little while then he said, "Wow, you ok or what?"

I wasn't ok. I was tired. But, just his acknowledgment of how hard I was working and checking to see if I was ok . . . made me ok. I realized that there are probably lots of Hawaiian kids out there like me. They just need to be acknowledged. They need to be asked if they are ok. They need to know that hard work does pay off. They need to know that someone believes in them.

My goal every day is to acknowledge my students. I look them in the eye, I talk, I listen, I respond; I touch [hold
hands, hug, pat their heads]. I treat the kids the way I want my own children to be treated.

In this exchange, Mrs. Kea’s own experiences in college cemented her belief that her responsibility of creating a different life for her students is an essential commitment that she takes seriously and carries out with great care.

**Conclusion**

As kumu hula Olana Ai once spoke, “Aloha is the intelligence with which we meet life.” In Mrs. Kea’s class, this intelligence is clearly evident in the daily life within the classroom. The value of aloha was cultivated in Mrs. Kea’s past experience and she continues to cultivate this environment for her students, so that they may have a bright future. She connects to her Hawaiian identity through the interactions that she has with her students. In the next chapter, Mrs. Akaka’s class connects to their Hawaiian identity through inquiry projects on their names and family genealogies.
Chapter 3
Ola Ka Inoa
Hawaiian Naming Practices

Introduction

There is a quiet demeanor to Mrs. Akaka. When one walks into her second grade classroom, there is a peacefulness that greets every visitor. On this day, I entered the class and saw children working in groups on a research project. The children’s desks were clustered into fours. I moved from table to table to watch the children engulped in their projects. Each group chose a Hawaiian island to research. At one table, a little girl took the position of po‘o, or leader. The group chose the island of Moloka‘i to research. When the group realized that the girl’s family was from Moloka‘i, they looked to her for guidance, and she became the authority of their learning. Within this sense of peacefulness, there seemed to be great pride in who the children are, what they know, where they come from, and how they contribute to this learning community.

In this chapter, I will look at the ways in which Mrs. Akaka’s classroom lessons connect these young Hawaiian students to their families and their kūpuna or ancestors. More specifically, I will demonstrate how a classroom lesson that highlights the Hawaiian cultural practice of ola inoa, or naming, connects these students to ancestral knowledge, which in turn allows them to identify who they are today.

Value of Hawaiian Oration

What’s in a Name?

First, to understand the significance of naming in Hawaiian culture, one must appreciate the power that words possess in the Hawaiian language. Prior to
the introduction of print literacy, Hawaiians passed on knowledge from generation to generation through an oral tradition (Nogelmeier, 2009). Words played a tremendous role in this tradition. For example, in (American) English, when someone wants to speak of air blowing through the trees, the word “wind” is used. When using the word, English speakers know what the term refers to but there is no connection to the origin and roots of the word. There is also a general consensus that the word wind is used in various contexts across the nation.

In Hawaiian, winds carry specific names that depend on the context, the weather conditions, or the place in which the wind occurs. The wind of Wai’anae, O‘ahu is called Kaiāulu, while the wind of Kapālama, O‘ahu is called Kaʻōlauniu. Kaiāulu refers to a gentle, pleasant trade wind, whereas Kaʻōlauniu literally translates into coconut piercing, referring to a wind that picks up great speed as it moves down the Koʻolau Mountains (Pukuʻi, 1984). Each district has its own name for the wind, as the wind feels different because of the place in which it is situated. The specificity of these wind names is evidence of the importance of words to Hawaiians. Words and the naming of objects are intentional. Each word carries great significance in describing a function, capturing a historical event, or describing the context in which something is situated. Earl Kawaʻa (Kōhala Center, 2011), a cultural practitioner knowledgeable in ola inoa, remarks, “Something happens and we give it a name, it is not an accident, it is purposeful.”

According to Hawaiian tradition, names are generated in different ways (Kaʻiwakiloumoku, 2011). Names can come to someone through a dream. Names are passed on through generations. A sign occurs, which prompts the giving of a name. Names are also given to commemorate an event; these names are
categorized as Inoa Hoʻomanaʻo. Inoa Hoʻomanaʻo can change throughout an individual’s lifetime because of significant circumstances in their life. For example, Queen Emma was named Kaleleokalani, which means to flee to Heaven, after the death of her son. When her husband later died as well, she was renamed as Kaleleōnālani. The change from kalani to nālani makes the “flee to Heaven” plural, emphasizing the loss of both her family members. Pukuʻi (1972) explains, “In a society without a written language, history was a matter of human memory and human voice. Long oli (chants) told of great events and heroic sagas. But for the “verbal shorthand” reminder, the nimble tongue Hawaiians used the inoa hoʻomanaʻo” (p. 96).

The inoa hoʻomanaʻo was a short way to carry on knowledge of important events through naming practices. Hawaiians believe that names and the meaning behind names carry power. For example, when Kaʻahumanu was baptized as a Christian, she took the name Elizabeth. Biographer, Silverman (1987) wrote, [Kaʻahumanu] would have made the selection with great care, knowing that one’s inoa was in itself a force. She had grown up in the belief that a person’s name was her own special property, yet at the same time that it had a life of its own, an intangible, sometimes mystical, power to shape events. (p. 97)

The name Elizabeth securely connected Kaʻahumanu to the history of the British Monarchy and the Christian influence in Hawaiʻi.

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7 In Hawaiian, the particle ka refers to a singular noun, whereas "nā" refers to the plural form.
The Power of Words

Names are powerful because words are powerful. A familiar ʻōlelo noʻeau (Pukuʻi, 1983) or wise saying reads, “I ka ʻōlelo no ka ola I ka ʻōlelo no ka make” (In the word is life, in the word is death) (p. 129). Hawaiians believe that words can bring life to a situation or also can bring upon death. One must be careful when choosing the appropriate word because physical harm could occur (Pukuʻi, 1949). Pukuʻi writes (1949), “Poets were skilled in the use of words. Carelessness in the choice of words might result in death for the composer or the person for whom it was composed” (p. 247).

The power of words was evident in the days following the illegal occupation of Hawaiʻi. Queen Liliʻuokalani feared the outbreak of physical resistance and used words to stop any bloodshed. In her autobiography Queen Liliʻuokalani (1990) writes, “The people listened to my voice, and obeyed my will with a submission that kept the community free from disorder far more than any law or restraint of that which has called itself a government” (p. 255). In this statement, she makes it quite evident that her voice, her words alone, was far more powerful than any laws or organized government.

Hawaiian Oration

The use of oration with just the right words was a traditional Hawaiian art form and a way to carry historical knowledge, information about names, and one’s genealogy from one generation to the next. The phrase kākā ʻōlelo is used to capture the essence of oration and storytelling. Malcolm Chun (2010), defines the kākā ʻōlelo in the following statement, “Kākā ʻōlelo is the traditional title for an orator, and it is derived from the words kākā meaning ‘strike, smite, dash, beat,
chop’ [...] and ‘ōlelo ‘speak’ (Pukuʻi and Elbert 1986: 117, 284). Kākā ‘ōlelo literally means to fence [with] words, which sounds more like what lawyers do in courtrooms” (p. 248). Kākā ‘ōlelo or orators were highly respected individuals in the chief’s circle (Chun, 2011). The kākā ‘ōlelo knew important moʻolelo, histories and genealogies—so much so that they were often called upon during battle to provide historical insights that might resolve a conflict (Kamakau, 1961).

**Hawaiian Moʻolelo as a Repository of Knowledge**

The word moʻolelo (story) comes from the two words moʻo and ‘ōlelo; which means the continuation and succession of talk (Pukuʻi, 1971). According to Smith (1999), the act of storytelling goes far deeper than relating a story. To Hawaiians, storytelling was about passing down cultural truths and values from one generation to the next.

There are many ‘ōlelo noʻeau that emphasize the importance of ancestral stories and the safekeeping of this repository of knowledge. One such ‘ōlelo noʻeau also highlights the importance and value of knowledge as an entity to foster and expand. It reads, “He lawaiʻa no ke kao papaʻu he pōkole kea ho; he lawaiʻa no ke kai hohonua he loa ke aho” (Pukuʻi, 1983, p. 80) the literal translation is “a fisherman who fishes with a short line has nothing,” which suggests that a person who has knowledge that is shallow has nothing (Pukuʻi, 1983, p. 80).

Meyer (2003) reiterates the value of ancestral knowledge as an important Hawaiian epistemology. In her book *Hoʻoulū*, Meyer suggests that for most Hawaiians knowledge was a matter of utility and survival. Although there were cases where knowledge was aesthetic, learning needed to have a purpose. She
writes, “Utility with regard to knowledge made everything learned something of value. Knowledge for knowledge’s sake was a foreign belief, a waste of time (Sahlins, 1995; Handy and Puku’i, 1972, p. 113)” (p. 126). Since knowledge served a purpose, the acquisition of the knowledge was highly revered and the transfer of this knowledge to future generations was critical.

**Hawaiian Genealogy**

Hawaiian genealogies were traditionally chanted through oration as a form of passing down knowledge and connecting family members to the names of their ancestors. Mele kū‘auhau and mo‘okūauhau were genealogical chants that provided accounts of one’s lineage (Nogelmeier, 2001). In addition to preserving family genealogies, mo‘okūauhau can explain the creation of the earth, the relationship of the akua or gods, and the relationship of man to the earth and akua (Kanahele, 2011). Consequently, knowing the names of one’s ancestors and making connections to these names provides Hawaiians a birthright to everything that their names may entail. Kanahele writes of a connection between a family’s mo‘okūauhau and names of gods and all that the relationship entitles. She writes,

> First it gives the families who claim relationship to the Pele fire clan the right to inherit all of these akua or ‘aumākua in the fire clan genealogy. The genealogical connection affords them this birthright of claim to these ‘aumākua and vise versa. Secondly, for a Hawaiian to realize her akua or ‘aumākua, she must be able to look at genealogical names and decide on the original source of her family name. (p. 25)
Reciting one’s moʻokūauhau connects a person to his or her ancestors, to members in the community, and to the body of knowledge that comes with these connections. In the next section, I will examine the ways in which Mrs. Akaka provides opportunities for her Hawaiian students to make these connections through genealogical orations that reflect the traditional Hawaiian value of carrying forth ancestral knowledge into the future.

Mrs. Akaka’s Classroom

Inoa (Name) Lesson

On one of my first visits to Mrs. Akaka’s classroom, I entered to find her talking to the class about their inoa or name project. She began the lesson by telling the children about the origin of her name,

Mrs. Akaka:

You all did an investigation asking your parents and family members the meaning of your name. So very special. I shared with you how I was given my Hawaiian name. I treasure that. It was from my grandmother. They were expecting. They wanted a girl. They had two grandsons and that is all that they had. They wanted a granddaughter. They were so excited. They wanted something from the heaven. And out came me. And they gave me that special name.

In this lesson, Mrs. Akaka relates the importance of her name to her students. She uses words such as treasure or special to show the weight and depth of the meaning of her name. Pukuʻi (1972) explains the value of names in the following excerpt,
In the early days of Hawaii, personal possessions were few, but highly valued. Poi pounders, woven mats, a man’s malo or loin cloth, the stone adze of a canoe maker, the bone hooks of a fisherman, the spear of a warrior—all these were prized. But even more precious was each man’s most important possession, his name. (p. 94)

Mrs. Akaka reiterates this sense of a cherished possession as she explains the deep connection she had to her grandparents through the giving of her name. She then turns her attention to a student and invites him to speak of his middle name, framing the story with the same sense of value and importance.

Mrs. Akaka: ['Ehukai,] I hope you don’t mind. I love this picture. This is ‘Ehukai’s illustration. How many of you had a chance to illustrate either the meaning of [your] name or how you got your name? ‘Ehukai, when you brought in your family tree, this really matches. Do you want to explain to them the meaning of your [middle] name? Why you have this name? Because it is very, very special.

‘Ehukai: Because my grandmother thought I would like going inside the water.

Mrs. Akaka: And what is your name?

‘Ehukai: ‘Ehukai

Mrs. Akaka: There is a really interesting thing about it. You said everyone in your family...

‘Ehukai: Has that middle name
Mrs. Akaka: Has that same middle name. Because...

ʻEhukai: It is something that we all do.

Mrs. Akaka: Did everyone see his family tree?

She points to a poster of a wave drawn by ʻEhukai with pictures of his family.

Students: Yes

Mrs. Akaka: What did you notice about his family tree?

Student 2: He took a picture of all of his sisters and brothers.

Mrs. Akaka: What it did ʻEhukai, it brought so much life to your story. Seeing your family. It just brought your name to life. Wow, it is so true.

According to Puku'i (1972), a name could have great influence on the bearer of the name. Names could secure someone’s destiny. ʻEhukai comes from grandparents and parents who surf and spend most of their days in the water. Thus, ʻEhukai was given the name in reference to the ocean, which is reflected in his poster of a giant wave that outlines his family tree. This naming secured and reaffirmed his family’s love of surfing in ʻEhukai. When Mrs. Akaka asked why all his family members had this name, he responded by connecting their name to surfing, “It is something that we all do.”

Following the Hawaiian cultural experts’ viewing of this clip, Liane commented on the importance of this exchange between ʻEhukai and Mrs. Akaka.

Liane: In the first clip, the teacher created an opportunity [for ʻEhukai] to tell his story. She is creating [an
opportunity for] that dynamic to happen. Maybe [he] doesn’t realize it. But she is creating a space for the importance of his name. It aligns closely with the [Hawaiian value of] getting to know your name and understanding your name. Maybe they do not understand the depth of it at this time. But she is creating the space for them to move into that place.

In this statement, Liane explains that Mrs. Akaka is creating a space for the children to learn something very important to the Hawaiian people. She also suggests that Mrs. Akaka is creating a space within the classroom where students can make connections to their families and their identities can be validated.

Ho’omanawanui (2008) suggests that when these spaces are not created for connections between indigenous children’s home and school cultures the consequences can be devastating. She writes, “Differences in home and school perspectives can be confusing and damaging for indigenous children in school environments that refuse to validate the indigenous based multiple literacies learned at home” (p. 212).

Similarly, in my personal interview with Mrs. Akaka, she explained that when she was growing up in California, she felt a division between her home and school lives. It is because of this division in her own school experience, that she wanted something different for her students. She explained that when she was young, she was made to feel invisible.

**Mrs. Akaka:** Family is always important. For me, it wasn’t important learning about your family and names at
school. I love that they are bringing [this] into the classroom. I think it is important to bridge the family and school. When I went to school, the most important thing was to become a fly on the wall. You didn’t ever show who you were. You were a student. I remember my neighbor growing up was from the Dominican Republic. When you would go into her house there was beautiful food, and smell from the food, and family. Then you go to school, it stopped. You got this hidden message that when you get to school you hide all of that. I value who [my students] are and that they bring this to school. I just want them to value their family. Their stories. They don’t hide who they are . . . They can stand up and say who they are.

The cultural experts likewise commented on the importance of encouraging students to use their Hawaiian name in school, and in assignments such as this, in order to connect the students to their families. Liane explained that when she attended this same school 30 years ago, students rarely used their Hawaiian names.

**Liane:** In our experience, everyone went by their English name but when they graduated they took their Hawaiian name.
**Kuʻulei:** It is sad that they had to wait until after they left this school to feel like they were Hawaiian, to use their Hawaiian name.

**Liane:** [Students should] do it now when [they] are here. If they focus on the Hawaiian name, [and] know the stories, then they can find pride in who they are.

The cultural experts explained that in their experience, like Mrs. Akaka’s own experience, they had to compartmentalize their Hawaiian identities and leave that knowledge at home when attending school. As many studies show, this cultural incongruence can actually hinder students’ success. Students feel more connected in school when their home knowledge is connected to the school curriculum (Au & Jordan, 1981; Yamauchi, Wyatt, & Taum, 2005).

**Sharing Moʻolelo**

Mrs. Akaka’s lesson in knowing one’s name and its meaning was the first step in a series of lessons aimed at helping her students make these home-school connections. In a subsequent lesson, Mrs. Akaka emphasizes that the moʻolelo (story) behind one’s name is just as important as the name itself and that students should learn these and other family moʻolelo so that this historical knowledge can be passed down from generation to generation. In the following excerpt from our personal interview, Mrs. Akaka explains this idea of waihona, or a repository of knowledge.

**Mrs. Akaka:** I tell the parents at Open House that they need to tell their stories to their kids. Then I really want the kids
to document the stories both in written form and orally. I value when their parents are passing on stories. I want the kids to pass on the stories to someone else.

In the focus group discussion following the viewing of Mrs. Akaka’s lessons, the Hawaiian cultural experts likewise commented on the importance of students learning a story from their kūpuna or grandparents and passing the story on to someone else. For instance, Malia affirmed, “Names have moʻolelo. The storytelling and names are so important.”

In the following lesson, Mrs. Akaka had the children go home and learn about the story of their name from their parents or grandparents. In the dialogue exchange depicted below, students partnered up to share the stories that they had learned at home.

**Emily:** My mom and dad wanted [my name] to be special and unique. My name was thought up before my mom was pregnant. My parents wanted me to grow up and become the best of each of them. So they gave me a piece of each of their names.

**Manaʻolana:** What they should name me? They took surveys but couldn’t decide. The night my mommy went to the hospital to give birth to me, the doctor found out I had an umbilical cord wrapped around my neck. After the information my mom and dad took the baby name book and they look[ed] and looked in the book for a
possible name. They named me a name that means hope.

In both of the examples that the girls shared, the children received their names in very traditional Hawaiian ways. Emily received her name as an inoa kūpuna, or a named handed down from one family member to another. Her name was a combination of her parents’ names. Mana‘olana received her name through inoa ho‘omana‘o. As mentioned previously, like Queen Emma, Mana‘olana’s name commemorated a significant event in her life (Puku‘i, 1972).

Mrs. Akaka’s lessons in documenting historical stories and events emulates and perpetuates the important work of Hawaiian historians such Mary Kawena Puku‘i. Puku‘i’s reverence of ancestral knowledge was evident in 1961 as she traveled through the islands to record the stories of Hawaiians. McGregor (2007) writes of the events in the following excerpt from her book Nā Kua‘āina:

Pukui traveled from island to island interviewing kua‘āina [Hawaiians living in remote, rural communities] . . . in order to document and thereby perpetuate their unique and profound knowledge for future generations . . . The kua‘āina shared knowledge with Pukui that had been passed on from one generation to the next about the lands where their ancestors lived, worked, and sustained a spiritual connection to the life forces of the universe. (p. 5)

Puku‘i made a tremendous effort to record the knowledge of the kūpuna, or elders, because she realized precious knowledge needed to be documented for future generations.
Pālani Vaughan, a Hawaiian author and songwriter, also discusses the important connection from past through present, kūpuna (grandparents) to moʻopuna (grandchildren), as he writes,

The little ones give to the elders their laughter and joy for new life. And the kūpuna pass on the knowledge and lore of the old Hawaiian tradition. The moʻopuna, [literally] waters of succession, follow the flow of the kūpuna, waters of propagation. (p. 67)

This idea of succession and propagation is quite evident in Mrs. Akaka’s lessons, as she makes deep, treasured connections between her students and their families.

**The Power of Oration**

In my interview with Mrs. Akaka, she spoke of a little boy who was typically very shy and the tremendous impact that these lessons in family genealogy and oration had upon his confidence. In the video-clip, the boy is standing in front of the class reciting his genealogy and family names. At the end of his presentation, another child points to one of the photos and asks who that particular individual was in his family. The boy presenter clarifies the misunderstanding and tells the child who asked the question, “You should know that. I said that already.” Mrs. Akaka speaks of this interchange in the following,

**Mrs. Akaka:** This child is very shy, but he is so confident in this clip. He is the guy with all the knowledge. He has taken on the persona and pride [of an orator] when he looked at the audience and said you are supposed to know this, I said this already. He is very shy but this
knowledge has made him the authority. He takes on a certain pride.

Meyer (2003) explains the importance of a relationship of continuity among family members and how these relationships traditionally grounded Hawaiian children and instilled them with confidence and pride. She writes, Relationship, feeling one’s family presence, knowing their names—all became a part of how a child learned. As they matured Hawaiian children internalized this kind of relationship. It guided them and connected them to life. (p. 108)

This sense of pride in one’s family relationships is evident when the presumably shy boy remarks, “You should know that already.” In essence, as he shares his connection to his family, he expects his audience members, his classmates, also to understand this strong connection.

Moreover, as Mrs. Akaka suggests, the boy’s sense of authority that accompanies his oration is typical of the art form of kākāʻōlelo. Kākāʻōlelo were highly revered for their oratorical skills and their vast knowledge of histories, moʻolelo and genealogies (Chun, 2011). As Mrs. Akaka explains, when orating his family genealogy, this “shy” student has all the knowledge. He accentuates the importance of his speech and his delivery of the knowledge, when he tells his classmate, “I already said that.” In essence, he is telling the classmate, “As a listener, when I say something you need to listen.” Ultimately, this young man is reaffirming that significant knowledge is given orally and needs to be respected.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at how Mrs. Akaka’s classroom lessons in the Hawaiian cultural practice of ola inoa, or naming, connect her young Hawaiian students to their families and their kūpuna and engenders a sense of pride in their Hawaiian identities. I also portrayed the important ways in which this ancestral body of knowledge and connections to this knowledge were delivered through a uniquely Hawaiian literary form of kākā ʻōlelo. In the next chapter, I will return to a second kindergarten class where the classroom teacher is helping her students make connections to another Hawaiian literary form. As the chapter concludes, I will connect the same concept to lessons delivered in a fifth grade class.
Chapter 4

He Aliʻi Ka ʻĀina; He Kauwā Ke Kanaka.
The Land is Chief; The Man is Its Servant.

Introduction

Recently, I made a visit to Mrs. Ahsing’s kindergarten classroom, only to find that it was empty. I peered out the window and noticed the children sitting in various places in the back playground area with clipboards, pencils, and paper. Some children were lying under a tree; others children were sitting on the rock wall with their legs resting along the top of the wall. When I opened the back door I was struck by the stillness and silence of the five year olds. The only movement was created by the wind blowing gently through the trees. A little girl name Kea was sitting on the grass, looking up at the sky. I moved closer to her and saw what she was writing on her paper. She drew a picture of clouds with snow falling down from the sky. Under the picture, she wrote, “Clouds, snow falling down, down, down from the sky.” I walked towards a boy sitting next to Kea and asked quietly, “What are you doing today?” He responded in a whispery voice, “We are writing about trees and stuff.”

As I looked at the entire class, I was awestruck by the stillness of their bodies: a stillness not often seen in little ones. It was as if they were relishing the natural environment around them. While enjoying the moment, I was reminded of the Hawaiian saying “Ku i ke ao”—to be one with the world around you. On this day, the stillness of the environment was reflected in these young children. They were one with their environment. It was a gentle reminder of the deep connection that our people have to our environment, our world, and our ‘āina or
land. I was also reminded of a common ‘ōlelo noʻeau, which speaks to the deep relationship between land and Hawaiians: “He aliʻi ka ʻāina, he kauwā ke kanaka,” (The land is chief; the people are its servants) (p. 62).

Instead of focusing on a single classroom, this chapter will explore the relationship between Hawaiians and the ʻāina within the context of class instruction in both a kindergarten and a fifth-grade classroom. By juxtaposing two classrooms at opposite ends of the elementary school spectrum, I will explore how Hawaiian cultural concepts that are introduced in the early grades at this elementary are returned to, refined, and further developed in the later grades. More specifically, I will explore how the foundational Hawaiian concept of mālama ʻāina, or taking care of the land, is first introduced in kindergarten language arts lessons and is then returned to and further developed in the fifth grade.

**Defining the Essence of Mālama Ka ʻĀina**

To appreciate the deep connection that Hawaiians have to our ʻāina or land, one must understand the foundational story of Hāloa. According to the Hāloa moʻolelo, Papa (Earth Mother) and Wākea (Sky Father) through various unions gave birth to the Hawaiian Islands. Later, Wākea and Hoʻohōkūkalani (Star Mother) gave birth to Hāloanakalaukapalili, the first-born. Hāloanakalaukapalili was stillborn and with sadness his parents buried him in the ground. From this burial spot, Hāloanakalaukapalili grew into a kalo, or taro plant, which became the staple food for the Hawaiian people. The second born
child of Wākea and Hoʻohōkūkalani, whom they also named Hāloa, was the first human and the ancestor of the Hawaiian race.

Consequently, the kalo, the land, and the Hawaiian people are all related. The kalo and the land are the older siblings and the Hawaiian people are the younger siblings; and as siblings we all have responsibilities to each other. It is the kuleana (responsibility) of the older siblings to feed the younger siblings, and it is the kuleana of the younger siblings to take care of the older siblings. Ritte and Freese (2006) write of the significance of this relationship to Hawaiian cultural values. In an article titled “Hāloa,” they explain, “This kinship ties Hawaiians directly to nature and places upon us a spiritual obligation to mālama (take care of and protect) . . . all living things in Hawai‘i” (p. 1).

In this Hawaiian genealogical story, one can see the connection between kānaka (people), ‘āina (land), and the food that sustains us. As explained, the connection between kānaka and land is a deeply spiritual one. It is a familial relationship in which both parties must care for one another. Moreover, since no party would ever own another family member, land ownership was a foreign concept to early Hawaiians. Handy (1971) writes,

The system of land holding and use in ancient Hawaii was in European terms, feudalistic. The supreme chief, mōʻi of an island “held” the land; but even for him the concept was not one of “owning” it, but of being trustee under Kane and Lono, the nature gods who caused the land to be fruitful. (p. 41)
The relationship between kānaka and land was not one of ownership but, instead, can best be described as a relationship of lōkahi. Pukui (1983) defines lōkahi as being in unity or agreement. In terms of land relationships, lōkahi is a fundamental concept because it reiterates that there is a sense of balance between people and the land. Both must live in constant harmony—and not overpower one another.

In Voices of Wisdom, Harden (1999) gives an example of how taro farmers, such as the Kaauamo family, must live in harmony with the land:

The Kaauamos live according to lōkahi—unity, harmony—a particularly important credo when growing taro because the same stream water is used by the whole community. Fresh water has to circulate continually in the fields because standing water heats up and spoils the taro. (p. 20)

Quoting Mary Kaauamo, Harden continues,

“You have to cooperate no matter what,” Auntie Mary says. “Lōkahi—get together. Everybody has to get together. See like me, I clean my own lo‘i. The next neighbor clean and everyone clean their own. So if the main ditch up the mountain hasn’t got much water, all the growers who own taro patches, everyone cooperates and go up and clean.” (p. 20)

In both Harden and Handy’s work, one can see that the relationship between kānaka and land was foundational in traditional Hawaiian culture. It was the people’s responsibility to take care of the land as if it were a family member and to insure that its natural resources were not over-consumed.
Land relationships are connected spiritually, physically, and politically, making the relationship deep and binding (Kana‘iaupuni, 2005).

This relationship, and the significance of this relationship, is most evident when there is an event that brings disharmony to this lōkahi. For instance, following the illegal annexation of the indigenous government in 1893, Native Hawaiians lost control over their national lands and ocean resources (McGregor, 2007). With the beginning of plantation capitalism and the pineapple industry, Hawaiians’ lōkahi relationship with the land was altered. In this new plantation economy, man’s job was to insure that the crops reaped a monetary reward. The lōkahi relationship moved from kānaka stewarding the natural resources to one in which man was a resource to capitalize upon and reap profits from the land.

For example, with the creation of the plantation irrigation system, plantation owners began to redirect water from various sources on the islands to the newly formed plantations. McGregor (2007) writes,

The impact of these irrigation systems upon rural Hawaiian taro farmers reverberated throughout the twentieth century. Cut off from the free flow of stream waters into their lo‘i kalo or taro pond fields, many kua‘āina gave up taro farming and moved into the city to find new livelihoods. Some of these families stopped paying taxes on their rural lands when they moved into the city and as a result eventually lost ownership of their ancestral lands through adverse possession. (p. 43)

Thus, began Hawaiians’ dispossession and disconnection from our ancestral land base. In many subsequent historical events over the last century, one can witness
the continual denigration of the lōkahi relationship between kānaka and land, which continues on to this day.

The essential question, then, for contemporary educators who are committed to environmental sustainability and Hawaiian education is, “How do we begin to revive this traditional Hawaiian value of mālama ʻāina, and how do we begin to (re)teach this value to Hawaiian children today?”

In the following sections, I will journey back to Mrs. Ahsing’s kindergarten class as well as another fifth grade class to examine how teachers at this school are beginning to incorporate mālama ʻāina into their classroom literacy lessons.

**Kindergarten Lessons in Mālama ʻĀina**

In a video clip that was shared with the focus group of Hawaiian cultural experts, Mrs. Ahsing is reading *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (1964) to her kindergarten class. In the story, a boy grows up with a tree. When the boy is young, he loves the tree. He swings from its branches and sleeps in its shade, and the tree is happy. As the boy grows older and is too old to play, he returns to the tree less frequently. On his rare visits, the boy asks the tree for various things, including money, a house, and a boat. The tree offers part of itself for each purpose. He suggests that the boy gather its apples to sell for money, and cut its branches to build a house. The grown boy continues to take different parts of the tree to satisfy his wants. Near the end of the story, the now middle-aged man cuts the trunk of the tree leaving only a stump. He uses the trunk to make a boat. In the final pages, the “boy” has grown into an old man who wants only “a quiet
place to sit and rest," which the stump provides. The story ends with the sentence "And the tree was happy."

After reading the first few pages of the story, Mrs. Ahsing stops the reading to ask the children if they have a favorite tree. She calls on various children who share their stories. Following is the interchange between the Mrs. Ahsing and her students:

**Mrs. Ahsing:** *(Reading from the story)* The boy would come. And he would gather her leaves . . .

How many of you have trees in your backyard? Or in grandma or grandpa’s yard? What do you do? Do you do anything? When I was little I had a big mango tree in my yard. We used to climb up. We even made a tree house. We used to have such fun in there. Logan?

**Logan:** At my grandma’s house there is a tree in the front yard.

**Mrs. Ahsing:** Do you do anything?

**Logan:** I water it sometimes.

**Mia:** Every time after school I climb up and get some mangoes.

**Wailea:** We have a tree in our backyard and me and my brother likes to play with the tree. When the leaves fall down we try to catch it.

**Mike:** I help daddy. I get the rake and pull the guavas down.
Mrs. Ahsing: You help him clean up the leaves and guavas that fall.

Mia: One day me and my brother were playing hide and go seek. My dad was watching us. We have a tree in our backyard. My brother was wearing camouflage shirt and camouflage Crocs. And he kind of camouflage into the tree. But I still found him.

I was first struck by Mrs. Ahsing’s storytelling because of the similar storytelling methods used in Mrs. Akaka’s class. While Mrs. Akaka used storytelling to emphasize the importance of ola ʻinoa in her family upbringing, Mrs. Ahsing uses storytelling to highlight the value of mālama ʻāina in her childhood.

During my interview with Mrs. Ahsing, which followed the lesson, she explained her reasoning for asking the children about their experiences with trees and nature in their yards at home. She spoke,

Mrs. Ahsing: I spend time really making connections to the story.

I want them to bring experiences they have in nature, and already know about, to the story to think deeper about the story.

Each student who shared revealed a story that suggested the importance and love that he or she had for a particular natural environment. While some students shared stories of playing and climbing in the trees in their yards, others shared stories of taking care of the trees by watering them and raking their leaves.

Through this teacher–student interaction, a quiet affirmation is made of the value of the natural world to the students and the significance of sharing these stories verbally.
As Mrs. Ahsing continued reading the story, the children varied in their opinions about the changing relationship between the tree and the boy. Some children took the perspective of the tree and responded that they did not think it was right for the boy to keep asking for things. Other children thought the tree should share, as sharing is important.

After reading the book, the children were asked to share their opinion with their fellow classmates. In one videotaped exchange, four children are seen talking about the book,

**Marcie:** [If I was the tree,] I would feel sad because the boy kept on picking my stem, the branches, and the apples.

**Kalei:** I would feel sad because he took all my stuff and he kept on saying, “Do you have money?” “Do you have a house?” “Do you have food?” So I would feel sad.

Your turn.

**Kainalu:** He wanted to cut off the tree with a rope. He wanted to cut off the tree to make a boat and a house.

**Kalei:** How did it feel?

**Marcie:** How did it feel?

Happy or sad?

**Kainalu:** Happy.

**Marcie:** Then you would just be a stick!

Marcie and Kalei both believe that the boy should not have asked for so much. In fact, Marcie’s feelings about this were quite strong. At first Kainalu begins to
retell the story by explaining what happened. Kalei and Marcie redirect Kainalu by asking, “How did it feel? Happy or sad?” When Kainalu answers, “Happy.” Marcie responds, “Then you would be just a stick!” In her simple words, she is alluding to the lack of lōkahi in the boy’s relationship with the tree by pointing out the lack of care on the boy’s part.

At a very young age, Kalei and Marcie are comfortable with taking an alternative position not offered by the book. The book leads the reader to conclude that the tree is content with giving itself to the boy unconditionally. At the end of the book, the tree is a mere stump and the last line reads, “And the tree was happy.” Kainalu has taken on this perspective and follows the thinking of the book. On the opposing perspective, Marcie and Kalei realize that the relationship between the boy and the tree is not quite right. Kalei responds that the boy kept coming to the tree and asking for everything it had. She explains, “I would feel sad because he took all my stuff and he kept on saying, ‘Do you have money?’ ‘Do you have a house?’ ‘Do you have food?’ So I would feel sad.” Marcie reiterates the same sentiment.

When I asked Mrs. Ahsing about her intent in teaching the lesson, she explained:

**Mrs. Ahsing:** The actual purpose was to put themselves in another perspective. The [dominant] message [of the book] is to just give. I wanted the children to think that is not ok for the tree to keep doing that. The boy shouldn’t have kept taking things.
When I asked Mrs. Ahsing why the children shared their opinions verbally and not through writing, she responded:

**Mrs. Ahsing:** It incorporates what I value. I want them to voice their opinion. I want them to see that, “What I have to say matters . . . What I think is important, and what I say is important, and my voice needs to be heard.”

Mrs. Ahsing explained that while she ultimately hoped that her students would come to the realization that the relationship between the boy and tree was not right, she also wanted to provide a venue through which the students could voice their opinions and come to their own conclusions about the relationship. This echoes an important concept put forth by Grace and Lum (2001) who suggest that students should be allowed to access multiple understandings so that they may choose to “negotiate or resist” the dominant messages of a text.

By having the students share their perspectives in small groups, both of Mrs. Ahsing’s goals were accomplished as the students shared their opinions through verbal debates reminiscent of the traditional Hawaiian practice of hoʻopāpā or verbal sparring. Hoʻopāpā is the Hawaiian art of verbal debate, which uses cunning words and references to draw attention to the flaws in another’s thinking (Kamakau, 1961). This is similar to Marcie’s pointed retort to Kainalu’s remark. When Kainalu said that, if he were the tree, he would feel happy, Marcie laughed and replied, “Then you would just be a stick!” In one quick verbal retort, Marcie attacks the reasoning behind Kainalu’s thinking.

Following the focus group viewing of this classroom video clip, the cultural experts agreed with the intent of Mrs. Ahsing’s lesson and offered suggestions for
possible subsequent lessons that could further emphasize the importance of lōkahi in our relationships with nature. Hawaiian cultural expert Kuʻulei says:

**Kuʻulei:** [The story] showed how to be lokomaikaʻi (kind and generous). It didn’t show the other side. The keiki (child) had no responsibility to [give] back. The tree mālama (took care of) the keiki. That is mea Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian) for the land to take care of the keiki. But it would [also be] a good thing . . . to show, “Yah but for it to work, [the boy] has to reciprocate the kuleana.”

The tree shouldn’t be sad because it is supposed to mālama the keiki; that is what it is supposed to do.

What should . . . the keiki have done? If he took care of the tree, he could have had apples forever!

Kuʻulei emphasizes that the lōkahi relationship between kānaka and nature is an important message for the children to learn. In order for the tree in the story to continue to take care of and provide for the child, the child also needs to take care of the tree.

Although, Mrs. Ahsing, in this one class session, perhaps did not take the lesson as far as the cultural experts would have liked, I believe that a sense of ancestral wisdom was nonetheless present as Mrs. Ahsing and other successive teachers will continue to return to and develop this concept of mālama ʻāina over time. In a parallel comparison to Grace & Lum’s work, Mrs. Ahsing provided the spaces for the children to explore a viewpoint not shared by the book.
In her interview, Mrs. Ahsing explained that while it was her intention to have the students develop an opinion around the injustice or lack of lōkahi in the story, she was also intent on establishing a safe space for the children to share their developing opinions in her kindergarten class—without rushing them to come to a particular conclusion. As Kanahele (2011) explains,

_We, as Native Hawaiians, must continue to unveil the knowledge of our ancestors. Let us interpret for ourselves who our ancestors are, how they thought, and why they made certain decisions . . . Entering the world of ancestral memory requires a certain mindset . . . Remember, this gift took many lifetimes to wrap. Don’t be in a hurry to unwrap it and become frustrated by doing so. (p. xv)_

In this quote, Kanahele suggests that ancestral wisdom is subtle and is best unwrapped slowly. In the case of this classroom example, Mrs. Ahsing and her students are just beginning to unwrap this gift of ancestral knowledge, which the children will return to continuously in a spiraling fashion throughout their elementary school years.

Cultural expert Liane suggests that Hawaiian ideas and practices, and the names for these practices, must be returned to and revisited throughout the curriculum at each grade level. For instance,

**Liane:** [When] teaching a‘o aku, a‘o mai [the concept of reciprocity or, literally, “teaching and learning”] . . . you introduce it in many ways. In our culture [that is a] huge dualism. So if you keep introducing [the concept of reciprocity] to them in different forms, the notion of what that is, keeps growing as
they learn. It happens in many different forms. Again there is this notion of responsibility; it has to reciprocate. This is an opportunity for [students] to grow up with that view of the world.

Liane explains that the Hawaiian world-view of lōkahi or harmony and reciprocity is validated and learned through the application of the viewpoint in many different settings. This also is reflected in Kanahele’s (2011) work as she explains that through time and context, “these gifts are unwrapped.”

In the next section, I will explore how the idea of lōkahi in kanaka/land reciprocal relationships is further developed in a fifth grade classroom at the same school as students continue to “unwrap” this Hawaiian world-view.

**Mālama ʻĀina in the Fifth Grade Play:**

**He Aliʻi Ka ʻĀina; He Kauwā Ke Kanaka**

The fifth grade program is famous for their fifth grade play. Fourth graders wait in anticipation for the play, and sixth graders wait to see if their play will be outdone. The play engenders a sense of pride not only from the students but also from the teachers and administration.

For the fifth grade classes, the play represents a culmination of learning. Each year, a different theme is chosen. This year, Mrs. Smith’s fifth grade class has chosen mālama ka ʻāina, or caring for the land, as their theme. In the opening scene of the play, two narrators introduce the scene as three children have taken on the roles and perspectives of a tree, a taro plant, and the ocean:
Student 1: Hoʻoulu Paʻāina. Thriving lands.

Student 2: Today our school is committed to perpetuating Hawaiʻi’s natural resources and working together with communities to develop the land that serves the entire ahupuaʻa.

When I asked Mrs. Smith, the teacher, how this theme was chosen, she shared that the theme evolved from something very different:

Mrs. Smith: It actually evolved from where we started. We started with [the theme of] “vibrant people” and not the land. But after talking [with] the class it didn’t seem right in our naʻau. The class decided, “Let’s do the land.”

In Mrs. Smith’s explanation, she suggests that focusing on the theme of “vibrant people” didn’t feel right in the students’ naʻau. In Hawaiian language, naʻau literally means intestine (Puku'i 1984), yet Hawaiians believe it is the place where intuition and wisdom reside. Kanahele (2011) helps place this situation in a context of Hawaiian thinking and learning. Kanahele says,

You become aware of something initially and you can either pay attention to it or discard it. Anyway, that very first feeling, my mother always said pay attention to it and see where it goes but pay attention to it. (p. 134)

Kanahele believes that by first paying attention to the naʻau, one can begin to unwrap ancestral wisdom.

In Mrs. Smith’s explanation of ultimately choosing the land as the play’s theme, she explained that the children did not feel that talking about people was as important as telling the story of the land. They felt that there was a deeper
story that must be told—the story of the historical degradation and more recent restoration and preservation of Hawaiian lands. When I asked Mrs. Smith why she followed the children’s lead in changing the theme of the play and how this decision is connected to her values as a teacher, she responded,

**Mrs. Smith:** I want [my students] to really observe before they make judgments. I want them to take the time to really listen to what they hear and not just go with it. To think about who the source is and to form their own opinion. With my tutu, she was very strong, when you were around her you always knew that you had to watch and listen before doing things. You didn’t just jump right in. It was never spoken but it is something that we knew [in our naʻau]. You learned it by watching the interactions. I want them to look to their kūpuna as a source of knowledge. I want them to look to them and learn from them or it will be lost. Hopefully [my decision to follow the children’s lead in choosing the theme of the play] shows that I value that we learn from the children [and] they learn from us ... and that there can be many sources of knowledge.

Mrs. Smith’s remarks echo the gist of Dr. Pua Kanahele’s earlier quotation; that is, an important learning in the Hawaiian worldview is that you must be aware when something doesn’t feel right. You must go with the feeling and see where it
takes you. It is this feeling that connects a person to the richness of his or her ancestral knowledge. In the case of the play, the children realized that something was not right about the direction in which the play was headed and they felt empowered to act on their opinion.

The cultural experts also agreed that the play’s theme of the necessity of caring for the land was an important story to be told. After viewing a portion of the play, cultural expert Liane commented:

**Liane:** I am so happy they are telling this story. It is so different from when I grew up at this school. We didn’t learn about these things. I was ecstatic when they started the play with He aliʻi ka ʻāina; he kauwā ke kanaka. Such an important story of who we are . . .

The play continues with the children speaking directly to the audience through oration and not through the lines of actors talking to one another as in a typical play. The following is a snippet of the exchange:

**Student 1:** 360,000 acres of [our school’s] land, about 19%, is marked for agriculture and conservation.

**Student 2:** He aliʻi ka ʻāina, he kauwā ke kanaka, “The land is a chief, man is its servant.” Our kūpuna always recognized the importance of the ʻāina. It is our kuleana to treat the land with aloha and respect.

**Students:** If we only took the time to stop, observe and listen to the land we might learn a lot.
Student 3: I am the wai kai [brackish water]. I speak for the fishponds.

Student 4: I am the kalo. I speak for the lo‘i.

Student 5: I am the koa [acacia tree]. I speak for the trees.

Students: And we would like to say a few words, if you please.

Student 5: Regarding the stories you are about to see. They actually happened, just take it from me. There is more to the stories than is what on the page.

So be prepared while we set the stage.

The characters continued to speak directly to the audience as they told the story of the school’s recent shift from early policies that viewed its generous land endowment solely as a source of financial income, to the schools’ current efforts to preserve agricultural and conservation lands in order to sustain future generations and Hawaiian cultural practices.  

I was struck by the way in which the children took on the perspective of the land, trees and kalo, for it was very similar to techniques that a kākā ‘ōlelo would employ. I asked Mrs. Smith why she chose this format, which is not typically seen in a play, where actors usually dialogue with one another. She explained, “We brainstormed different ways to present the knowledge as a class and we came up with the idea to have the land talk.” When I prompted her to continue talking about why this was important to her, she responded,

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8 From 1887-2000, the school’s main mission was to profit from land resources to ensure a bigger endowment. In 2000, the mission was changed to emphasize land stewardship, land restoration, the fostering of resource managers, and the collection and management of knowledge around land.
Mrs. Smith: They decided if they talk to the audience instead of talking to each other it would be more powerful. I value that it comes from them. I want them to know that their voices are powerful and people will listen if they raise their voices.

I was reminded of Mrs. Ahsing’s similar values. Both women believe strongly in having their students stand and speak their opinions. Both women believe in a sense of urgency for the children to value knowledge that our ancestors also valued, particularly around the theme of land. Yet, each teacher approached the situation differently as they work together, each in their respective grade levels, to teach their students to slowly unwrap the gift of ancestral knowledge that our kūpuna have left behind for us (Kanahele, 2001, p. xv).
Conclusion

ʻO Ke Kahua Mamua, Mahope Ke Kūkulu
(The Foundation First, Afterwards the Building)

This study set out to answer the following two research questions:

• What examples of nohona and 'ike currently exist in our elementary school’s language arts lessons?
• How can we build upon these existing positive examples as our school continues to strive for a more culturally relevant approach to literacy instruction?

In this conclusion, I will answer these two questions in turn. I will first summarize the major findings from the teacher interviews and focus group discussions pertaining to existing examples of culturally relevant Hawaiian instruction, which the teachers are currently employing in their elementary literacy lessons. I will then follow this discussion with the cultural experts’ suggestions for possible ways to build upon and extend the rich cultural environment that is already present in these classrooms. Consistent with the ʻōlelo no'eau, “O ke kahua mamua, mahope ke kūkulu,” (First the foundation, then the building), the chapter will be divided into two sections: 1) the foundation, or cultural elements that already present in the classroom lessons; and 2) the building, or suggestions for ways in which we can continue to enhance the Hawaiian cultural practices and knowledge in these classrooms.

First the Foundation: Ke Kahua Mamua

In every classroom studied, the teachers sought to provide their students with educational experiences that were connected to the students’ home lives and
ancestral pasts. In my interviews with the teachers, each of them recalled their own school experiences, which silenced their cultural identities and disconnected them from their home lives. They explained that they wanted to provide a different future for their students.

Other indigenous cultures have similarly experienced a disconnection between their home lives and schools, leading to severed ties between their cultural identities and the knowledge they have learned at these, typically Western, schools. Likewise, for Hawaiians, schools traditionally have served as institutions that foster Western thought while marginalizing Hawaiian cultural practices (Benham & Heck, 1998).

As the teachers navigated their way through defining an educational experience that was distinct from their own school experience and valued their students’ Hawaiian cultural identities, they simultaneously worked alongside their students to unwrap and redefine their own identities as Native Hawaiians. Consequently, the teachers and children in each of the classrooms formed a collective community with the common aspiration of reviving Hawaiian knowledge and cultural practices and recreating positive Hawaiian identities.

Cherokee scholar, England-Ayets (2013) describes the process whereby indigenous people recover a collective memory of their cultural past. Building upon the work of Yellow Horse Braveheart (2003), England-Ayets outlines four stages for the resolution of historical grief and trauma:

1. confronting historical trauma
2. understanding the trauma
3. releasing the pain
(4) transcending the trauma.

In all cases within this study, the teachers identified times in their educational pasts when they experienced the marginalization of their Hawaiian identities. In their more recent roles as teachers, these individuals understood, released, and confronted this historical trauma by providing different experiences for their students, which fostered their Hawaiian identities. Through this collective experience, the students, with their teachers’ support, are given an opportunity to transcend this historical trauma by experiencing a very different reality. This collective experience provided a moment of healing and social development for the teachers and their students. Yet, through England-Ayets, we learn that the entire process is not a linear one. Unwrapping ancestral knowledge and confronting historical trauma is a process that happens continually as indigenous people work to reclaim educational sovereignty.

In her framework for A Critical Pedagogy of Place, Alma Trinidad (2011), defines social political development as individuals redefining themselves and their position in society in affirmative ways. Trinidad writes,

In social political development, a sense of agency is conceptualized as collective efficacy, or a shared experience whereby a community pulls together to realize common aspirations. (p. 185)

Through classroom connections to Hawaiian cultural knowledge and ancestral memories, and the blurring of boundaries between home life and school life, the teachers and children in each of these classrooms worked together to reconstruct and reconnect with Hawaiian nohona and ‘ike.
As Assmann and Czaplika (1995) suggest, it is through these shared experiences and redefinitions, that cultural memory is reconstructed. They write,

Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation. True, it is fixed in immovable figures of memory and stores of knowledge, but every contemporary context relates to these differently. (p. 130)

Thus, as each teacher in this study worked with her students to unwrap Hawaiian ancestral knowledge and cultural practices, and apply it to their current classroom lessons, they approached the task in different ways.

Mrs. Kea’s Pedagogy of Aloha

Mrs. Kea’s kindergarten classroom, with its caterpillar lessons, epitomizes the employment of Hawaiian pedagogical practices, or nohona, that are consistent with the ‘ōlelo no’eau, “Aloha aku, aloha mai” (Give love, receive love) and “A‘o aku, a‘o mai” (Give knowledge, receive knowledge).

In her classroom, Mrs. Kea focuses on creating a loving environment for her students, one very reminiscent of aloha, so prevalent in Hawaiian culture. This loving environment, in which everyone is responsible for the success of the larger classroom community, provides the backbone or iwi kuamo‘o for Mrs. Kea’s literacy lessons.

Throughout Mrs. Kea’s literacy instruction, this sense of aloha fosters the belief that reading and writing are a social action. Children work together to decode words, create meanings from texts, and share stories orally. Within this supportive classroom environment, the words of Kamehameha III, “He aupuni
palapala koʻu” (My nation of literacy), resonate throughout the classroom, as Mrs. Kea’s class is, in itself, a small and young, but nonetheless vibrant literary community.

**Mrs. Akana’s Lessons on Naming, Genealogy and Oration**

Since Mrs. Akana’s Hawaiian identity was compartmentalized outside of her school experience as a student, within her classroom she works hard to bridge connections between the school lives of her students and their Hawaiian cultural identities. In her attempt to make these home-school connections, Mrs. Akana created spaces for lessons in Hawaiian naming practices, Hawaiian genealogy, and the Hawaiian literary practice of oration. Her students researched their family genealogies and the stories behind their names, and shared these stories orally with their classmates.

As Hoʻomanawanui (2008) attests, this practice of passing on knowledge through oration is critical to Hawaiian and indigenous literacy. She explains, While the emphasis in Modern society is on defining “literacy” as the ability to read and write text, the oral component of hearing, storing, remembering, and retelling or passing on information through oral means—typically referred to as “oral traditions” or “oral history,” is an important mode of indigenous literacy. (p. 214)

This sense of validating and valuing Hawaiian literacy through the mode of oration was prevalent in Mrs. Akaka’s class as the children orally shared their naming stories and passed on their family genealogy and knowledge to a larger audience.
Reading (and Listening to) the Land in Mrs. Ahsing’s and Mrs. Smith’s Classrooms

While a similar validation of the Hawaiian literary practice of oration was also evident in Mrs. Ahsing and Mrs. Smith’s class, the lessons in these last two classrooms additionally emphasized important Hawaiian literacy lessons in reading the land. As Ho’omanawanui (2008) explains, Hawaiian and indigenous conceptions of literacy are unique and distinct from Western conceptions. She writes,

Indigenous literacy not only incorporates literature about indigenous peoples but also focuses on the process of literacy, that is, what makes one literate, how and what is “read” and the context(s) in which reading occurs. (p. 210)

Through this definition, Hawaiian literacy can be expanded to include the reading of symbols, dances, weather conditions, navigational stars, and the land or ‘āina. Ho’omanawanui (2008) extends this idea of “reading the land” as she quotes Williams-Kennedy (2004),

The natural features within the homelands of each indigenous cultural group are therefore the symbols that contain important information. Indigenous people have drawn on this information to explain their origins, to make sense of their world and to practice to maintain their cultures. (p. 203)

In Mrs. Ahsing’s kindergarten Giving Tree lesson, she encourages her students to be sensitive to the messages that one might find in a withering tree or a deteriorating natural environment, and subtly encourages them to consider if
we, like the boy in the *Giving Tree*, are perhaps taking too much from our ‘āina without replenishing it in return. Similarly, the students in Mrs. Smith’s fifth grade play recite the famous ‘ōlelo no‘eau “He ali‘i ka ‘āina, he kauwā ke kanaka” (The land is a chief, man is its servant) and suggest that “If we only took the time to stop observe and listen to the land we might learn a lot.” They then go on to speak for the fishponds, the lo‘i kalo and the trees, as they take on the personas of these natural elements and ask “to say a few words, if you please.”

This critically important aspect of Hawaiian literacy—reading the land—is rooted in the intimate relationship between land and Hawaiian people, and, consequently, connects these young children to their Hawaiian identities. As Kana‘iaupuni and Malone (2005) suggest,

> Place, in all its multiple levels of meaning, is one light that all Hawaiians share in their spiritual way finding to a Hawaiian identity; one that is greatly significant to their existence as a people, both past and present. (p. 291)

**Giving Hawaiian Students a Voice**

While some classrooms emphasized the Hawaiian literary practices of ha‘i ‘ōlelo (speeches) and mo‘olelo (storytelling) while others emphasized ho‘opāpā or debate, an important element that resounded in each classroom was a sense of providing the students with an opportunity to identify and voice their own opinions. This affirmation of identity through voice and opinions is reminiscent of the century old Hawaiian language newspaper *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika*. During a time of cultural denigration, this newspaper provided a stage for Hawaiians to
represent their cultural knowledge through print, voice their opinions, and reaffirm their identity (Silva, 2004).

Each of the four teachers provided a foundation for their young students to explore their Hawaiian identities through culturally relevant Hawaiian pedagogy and literary practices. As *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* set the stage for a cultural renaissance under King Kalākaua, these four teachers have set the stage for a richer Hawaiian educational experience, or the pillars, kūkulu, which can now be built upon this initial foundation. 9

**Afterwards the Building: Mahope Ke Kūkulu**

Thus far, this dissertation has taken a strengths-based perspective by highlighting positive examples of culturally relevant Hawaiian literacy instruction that teachers are already employing in elementary school classrooms. In this next section, I will summarize the Hawaiian cultural experts’ recommendations for how these and other Hawaiian-serving teachers might further build upon, refine, and extend these existing Hawaiian pedagogical practices. The cultural experts’ recommendations focused on 1) increasing the use of Hawaiian language in the classroom, 2) making deeper and more explicit connections to our rich Hawaiian heritage, and 3) integrating and spiraling the instruction in Hawaiian nohona and ‘ike across the content areas and throughout the grade levels.

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9 Noenoe Silva suggests that the open forum set forth in *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika* provided a venue to fuel the cultural renaissance, which was a part of Kalākaua’s legacy. At his royal residence, ‘Iolani Palace, Kalākaua hosted many events that highlighted Hawaiian dance and practices, much to the dismay of American missionaries.
Increasing the Use of Hawaiian Language in the Classroom

In one of the first attempts to Westernize Hawaiians, American Missionaries set out to replace the Hawaiian language with the more “useful” language of English (Silva, 2004; Au & Kaomea, 2011; Chapin, 1996). As Au and Kaomea explain,

As the century proceeded and Hawaiian threatened to become a “language of power” (Anderson, 1991), demands for government, schools and other business to be conducted in English became more frequent and forceful (Silva, 2004). (p. 579)

Thus, in the same way that the attempted extinction of our mother tongue was critical to the colonization of Hawaiians, the revitalization of our language is likewise crucial to our educational sovereignty. As Naone (2008) explains, language carries all the norms and nuances of the culture and “gives us the context and framework from which we interpret and see the world” (p. 322). Naone continues,

Many Hawaiian immersion and Hawaiian language teachers have described language as the keeper of culture, and they have reminded us of the need to perpetuate our culture through language and vise versa. Language gives us the context and framework from which we interpret and see the world. (p. 322)

Likewise, in their focus group discussions, the Hawaiian cultural experts in this study suggested that the teachers at this school should try to infuse more Hawaiian language into their classroom lessons whenever possible. For instance, in Mrs. Akaka’s genealogy lesson, the children used the literary structure of a
Hawaiian moʻokūauhau (genealogy) as their guiding framework. However, the framework that they spoke from was translated into English. The Hawaiian language format for reciting a moʻokūauhau consists of multiple iterations of naming a wahine (female), a kane (male), and then their keiki (child).

In Mrs. Akaka’s class, the students followed this Hawaiian language format, but spoke it in English. The cultural experts cited this example as just one possibility of how Hawaiian language could easily be infused into the teachers’ existing lessons. Malia explains,

**Malia:** [One] opportunity that [was] missed [is that] there are simple ways to do your moʻokūauhau in Hawaiian. There are versions that you can share that are not too hard. Simple words, that you can add to [the students’] waihona (repository of knowledge).

In recent years, the school has made concerted efforts to incorporate Hawaiian language into the instruction by adding bi-weekly Hawaiian language classes (taught by Hawaiian language specialists) and providing the classroom teachers with opportunities to learn Hawaiian language through afterschool courses. While the cultural experts acknowledged and applauded these efforts, they agreed that they would like to see a continued focus on Hawaiian language instruction in everyday classroom lessons.

Kuʻulei, a cultural expert who teaches at a Hawaiian immersion charter school, told a story of when her Hawaiian immersion class once visited this school. The story depicts the disconnection that many of the students at this school have from their Hawaiian identity and language.
Kuʻulei: When the [class] gathered for a pule (prayer) we invited the [students at this school] to say the pule with us in Hawaiian. They looked at us like, “We don’t speak Hawaiian. That is not us.” Kuʻulei explained that her students looked perplexed.

Kuʻulei: [My students thought,] “What do you mean? You are not Hawaiian?”

In response to Kuʻulei’s story, Hanalei suggested that the teachers at this school could help bridge the students’ Hawaiian identity and Hawaiian language usage by modeling the use of Hawaiian words and phrases across various content and subject areas. For instance, in reference to Mrs. Kea’s caterpillar lesson,

Hanalei explained,

Hanalei: It seemed like when [Mrs. Kea] was talking about the kāhuli (Hawaiian tree snail) she used more Hawaiian words such as lei and pupule. But in the first [caterpillar] segment [of the lesson] it was about the milkweed and caterpillars. It was almost like when talking about English things you use English words, and when you are talking about Hawaiian things you use Hawaiian words. Even though they are not Hawaiian immersion children, it’s good for the children to know that it is ok to use Hawaiian when you are talking about English things.
Liane agreed,

**Liane:** Yes. By doing that [using Hawaiian words to talk about English things] you take away the feeling that we can only do this or this. You bring down the dichotomy. They need to know how to live in both worlds [English and Hawaiian]. They need to break down those barriers.

The cultural experts agreed that in order to help to build the Hawaiian identity of their students, the teachers’ incorporation of Hawaiian language into the instruction should be seamless. They also suggested that teacher in-service and staff development activities might be most helpful to this process if it focused on teaching language in particular contexts. For example, if all of the classes do a family unit at the beginning of the year, then the teachers’ Hawaiian language in-service lessons might focus on Hawaiian words and phrases that teachers can incorporate into their family lessons at various grade levels.

**Connecting Students to Our Rich Cultural Heritage**

In addition to increasing the use of Hawaiian language in the classroom, the cultural experts also suggested that the teachers could make a deliberate effort to strengthen the children’s connection to, and pride in, our kūpuna and their ancestral wisdom. As Malia suggests, these connections must be made explicit and not remain implicit:

**Malia:** [I would suggest that the teachers] always take the opportunity to link things back to our kūpuna. Our
kūpuna were so smart. Say to the children, “They knew this . . . or look at what our kūpuna use to do . . .”

To give an example, Malia referred to a video clip in which Mrs. Smith is reading a book entitled *Now Let Me Fly*, a story of the African slave trade. In one part, Mrs. Smith reads,

**Mrs. Smith:** Raise your head high. You are the daughter of a prince, the granddaughter of a great king. Yours is a great African heritage. No one can ever take that away.

Malia suggested that this would have been a great opportunity for the teacher to strengthen her students’ Hawaiian identities by highlighting this same theme in the students’ Hawaiian heritage.

**Malia:** After that part was read, I wanted her to say, “That is just like us. We are also from a great heritage. We are from princess and kings. Our heritage is a great one.”

Malia also acknowledged that, similar to other indigenous people, Hawaiians have a rich heritage with stories of good and bad, and that all of these stories matter and should be shared with the students. As an example, Malia referred to Mrs. Kea’s lesson on the kāhuli tree snail. In the lesson Mrs. Kea explained that one of the reasons that the kāhuli is endangered is because of (human influenced) habit destruction. Malia praises Mrs. Kea’s willingness to discuss these darker parts of our history:
**Malia:** I am glad she told the whole story. At this young age, she didn’t just tell the good parts but also the bad parts. This is important. That the story is not all hearts and rainbows. There are good parts and dark parts about our history.

In addition to suggesting that the teachers be explicit in highlighting the wisdom of our ancestors, the cultural experts also suggested that the teachers should be explicit about naming the Hawaiian literary forms and practices that the student engage in. For example, after watching a classroom lesson on poetry, the cultural experts agreed that this could have been a wonderful opportunity to make connections to the Hawaiian concept of kaona or metaphor:

**Malia:** After the children were working on metaphor, the teacher [could] have said, “Our kūpuna did this. They were good at it. Here are some examples of kaona that our kūpuna used . . .”

Similarly, in reference to Mrs. Ahsing’s lesson on *The Giving Tree*, Hanalei and Kuʻulei suggested,

**Hanalei:** If she had another moʻolelo that shows [not only] giving but also giving and taking . . . like [the story of] Hāloa . . .

**Kuʻulei:** She could suggest, “In Hawaiian, here is an example of an ʻāina story.”
Kuʻulei extends this idea by referring to a poetry lesson in which a kindergarten girl wrote about a wall outside the classroom. When Mrs. Ahsing asked the girl what she wrote about, the two had the following exchange:

**Mia:** The wall that looks like a worm.

**Mrs. Ahsing:** What wall were you talking about?

**Mia:** The one by the road back in the field.

In this example, Mia instinctively uses a traditional Hawaiian naming practice by identifying the place by what it looks like. This practice is very similar to Earl Kawaʻa’s quote, which was mentioned in a previous chapter, “Something happens and we give it a name, it is not an accident, it is purposeful.” Mia uses the visual cues of the wall to name it “the wall that looks like a worm.” However, rather than validating this description as a Hawaiian naming practice, as the cultural experts recommend, Mrs. Ahsing pulls Mia away from this metaphorical description as she asks, “What wall are you talking about?” Mia then replies with a more “acceptable” answer, “The one by the road back in the field.”

When Kuʻulei heard this dialogue she shared a similar story of an encounter that she had with her son. One day, when Kuʻulei was planning to pick up her son from the same school, her son asked her to pick him up “at the building.” Kuʻulei became frustrated because of his lack of specificity in defining the place where they should meet. She reminisced about the names that she and her classmates had developed for various places on the campus, and lamented that today’s students don’t seem to appreciate the value of Hawaiian naming practices and are no longer carrying on the tradition:
Kuʻulei: The keiki don’t name places like how we use to name places. For example, when we were growing up we called the place up in [the] high school Ronald McDonald Land, because the tables looked like the tables at McDonald’s. I asked my son and he didn’t know what that meant. It’s like they don’t look at places and call them by what it looks like. It is named this because it looks like that. They just call it, “Oh the place by the certain building.”

Kuʻulei suggests that because naming practice, or ola inoa, is not being used in daily situations students now have a tendancy to flatten words into one dimension. In previous examples, it would be like referring to the forceful, “coconut piercing” Kaʻōlauniu wind, which picks up speed as it moves down the Koʻolau Mountains, as simply a “wind.”

In Hoʻoulu: Our Time of Becoming, Hawaiian scholar Manulani Meyer (2003) explains that our kūpuna valued “naming, knowing the environment and understanding why places were named certain ways” (p. 173). Likewise, Kuʻulei suggests that Hawaiian naming practices were a type of knowledge that was specific to our people and, therefore, should be acknowledged, encouraged and maintained. When referring to the children’s use of metaphor in an earlier statement, Malia suggested that when students are learning to write metaphors, it would be helpful to the children’s Hawaiian cultural development if the teachers acknowledged this as a Hawaiian literary practice and named what they were doing as kaona. Echoing a similar sentiment, Kuʻulei suggests that if
students are naturally employing Hawaiian naming practices in reference to places in their environment, these practices should be acknowledged and encouraged as well.

**Weaving Hawaiian Instruction Through the Grades**

Hawaiian scholar, Kanoelani Naone (2008), suggests that Indigenous ideas about land, community, and language are not developed in isolation. Instead,

[They] are like the fine ribbons of makaloa that come together to make up a beautiful sleeping mat. Each ribbon is significant and vital in its own right; but when woven together create a masterpiece to be treasured for generations. (p. 5)

Similarly, the Hawaiian cultural experts suggest that, while each teacher’s efforts to incorporate Hawaiian culture and pedagogy into their lessons is significant and vital, numerous such lessons need to be woven together through the years and across multiple content areas in order for a true “masterpiece” to be created. As mentioned earlier, Liane suggested that a Hawaiian world-view is validated and learned through the application of the viewpoint in many different settings. She explained that if teachers keep introducing Hawaiian concepts to their students in many different ways and forms through the years, the students’ notion of these concepts would continue to grow and develop.

Keala echoed the same sentiment:

**Keala:** If you do it in one lesson, you have to keep doing it. It circles around throughout.
Kuʻulei also agreed and suggested that this type of spiraling Hawaiian curriculum, which is integrated across the subjects and grade levels, will require a good deal of collaborative planning. She explains,

**Kuʻulei:** All teachers need to team together as a community to insure the subjects are seamless. That is Mea Hawai‘i (a Hawaiian practice) to work and plan like a community.

The cultural experts acknowledged that some degree of spiraling of Hawaiian concepts and literacy practices already exists between the classrooms. For instance, the ideas of oration and mālama ʻāina, which were introduced in the earlier grades, were also evident in the fifth-grade play. At the same time, however, they caution that this Hawaiian content should not be strictly compartmentalized into a showcase for the purpose of a hōʻike. Malia explains,

**Malia:** I wouldn’t change the idea of a hōʻike. I think it is an important part of who we are. Yet, we have to make sure the children really feel it, [that] it is portraying who they are. It needs to be in everything we do.

Liane concurs:

**Liane:** It has to be done in everything that we do. They have to walk in both worlds. It has to be seamless. It cannot be separate. Easy to say hard to do . . .

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10 A hoʻike is a showcase, a type of performance assessment, which exhibits the final learning of a student.
Kuʻulei, a Hawaiian immersion classroom teacher, elaborates on the difficulty of planning a Hawaiian curriculum when there is no ready-made textbook to rely on. She compares the task of planning an original Hawaiian curriculum to the process that her friend goes through when preparing meals for her family on Molokaʻi where fast food restaurants are difficult to come by and a small family garden provides their daily vegetables.

Kuʻulei: It’s hard. It’s a commitment. It takes time. For example, my friend who lives in Molokaʻi, she cannot just decide what she wants to eat for dinner on the spot. She has to plan it out. It is like our teaching. We have to plan (Hawaiian content) way in advance. It takes commitment.

The unwrapping doesn’t happen instantaneously by reading up on Hawaiian content; the unwrapping and development take time. All of the cultural experts agreed that the task of creating a truly Hawaiian curriculum is not easy. It requires time, resources and collaboration. However, they also agreed that it is a commitment that we are all bound to as Hawaiian educators. Liane attests,

Liane: The impetus of changing the way I teach needs to be rooted in our historical past. I am going to change simply because I know what happened. I am committed and passionate to changing my teaching. That will make the shift. Why do we choose what we do?
As Liane spoke, I was reminded of a story told at Kūkaniloko by a Hawaiian scholar and kumu hula. She spoke of the birth of the ali‘i or ruling class. At the place of Kūkaniloko, the ali‘i were born with hundreds of people watching. The kumu told of the important responsibility felt by the ali‘i to be pono, to take care of their people, and to carry on the community practices already established. It is this tremendous sense of kuleana that Liane speaks to as she says, “I am going to change simply because I know what happened. I am committed and passionate to changing my teaching.” The same sense of community responsibility is found in Mrs. Kea’s kindergarten class where students as young as five or six years olds are made to understand that we must succeed together. This same sense of kuleana is evident in the interviews with Mrs. Akaka, Mrs. Ahsing, and Mrs. Smith, who each eloquently and passionately explain their efforts to teach in ways that give their students a voice; to connect their students to their home life; to provide an education much different than their own educational history.

Hawaiian scholar, Manu Meyer (2003) sums up the sentiments that are shared by these Hawaiian educators:

I have had no choice in this matter . . . It has been asked from me and my ‘ohana long ago. It has been my koho‘ia, the choice/no choice, of my life.

(p. 194)

As Hawaiian educators we have a deep responsibility, a kaumaha, a burden to unwrap our ancestral knowlege, to help others in their unwrapping, and to choose to connect our past to our future.
Final Thoughts

My hopes for this study is that instruction, specifically literacy instruction, will be structured with the same underlying principle for all Hawaiians: Teachers and students should be given opportunities that empower their lives, connect them to their past, value their backgrounds, and provide them with educational choices that empower their cultural voice. This underlying principle may be idealistic at times, but in order for us to live and exist in an age of globalization, we must think beyond the power struggles of a dominant/subordinant discourse and “fitting culture in” when it’s convenient (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, 2013).

As Chun (2010) suggests, our people must return to the fervor for education that was so prevalent in 1824 when Kamehameha III first uttered “He ‘aupuni palapala ko’u” (Mine is a kingdom of education). This fervor was rooted in a foundation in which Hawaiians cherished education because they saw relevant cultural structures, a sense of empowerment, and value in their own cultural knowledge and Hawaiian worldview.

By telling these stories, I hope to provide insight into Hawaiian lessons and pedagogical practices that are already successful at this school. Yet, as we plan for future growth it is important to also look forward to new opportunities and new horizons to accomplish so that, following the words of Kapiʻolani, we can “Kūlia i ka nuʻu” (Reach for the summit).

Throughout the process of researching and writing this dissertation, my intention has been to fulfill a kuleana to our people. This paper is written with the
same intention that Mary Kawena Puku‘i (1972) put forth in this quote,

Because of love,
And because it is well for Hawaiians to know
the good things of the past
the beauty of the chants
and the love of the ancestors,
this book was written. (p. i)

I heard a farm manager at Ma‘o Farms in Wai‘anae, Hawai‘i, once say, “I am an entity between two eternities and, when you see how small I am, my kuleana to contribute is not that big.” Similarly, this paper is my small contribution to an entity much larger than myself. The story still continues. The wisdom still unfolds.
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