DELIBERATION AND DEMOCRACY: THE DEATH OF NEUTRALITY

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Abstract

In her 2008 keynote address at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Donna E. Shalala shared,

“For Americans, freedom of speech, of religion, the right to assemble or petition the government to redress our grievances, and of the press are not privileges -- or benefits granted and capable of being rescinded. They are rights, guaranteed by the Constitution, in a free society.”

Processes used to mobilize communities to assemble, petition and/or redress can vary quite dramatically and every process is replete with complex political realities defined by varying degrees of power and historical influences. Facilitators who are asked to design these processes are also asked to navigate competing narratives and ensure the community’s outcomes are met. The facilitators have traditionally been viewed as “neutral third parties.” This dissertation will argue that a neutral position of engagement is often not sufficient in meeting community’s needs and can at times even be detrimental by reinforcing the status quo, which ignited the community to rally in the first place.

This study investigates two community efforts, facilitated by facilitators who view themselves as multipartial, or working for the interests of all participants affected by the outcomes of facilitated processes. This may involve spending more time with particular participants as needed, advocating for more diverse participation, including alternative narratives, diligently working to balance power in a group or providing strategic advising and/or coaching along the way. In both studies, the complexities of stepping beyond the bounds of neutrality are revealed. Through analysis of participant observation, first hand experience, one-on-one interviews with facilitators and participants, process evaluations, and organizational documents, this dissertation posits that facilitations are multifarious and intricate, demanding facilitators to discard neutrality from their toolboxes and embrace what it means to be multipartial in order for democracy to thrive.
My research is dedicated to my family.

To my three beautiful children, Kili (age 12), Hanalei (age 8) and Sequoia (age 5). May you grow to live in a more just and compassionate world and apply your peace building skills and spirits throughout your lives. And to my husband Neal. Thank you for believing in me and supporting my goals!

My work is also dedicated to everyone who uses his or her voice to affect change. I hope we continue to provide you with safe spaces to deliberate and problem solve.
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lessons learned, dreams and opinions about community based facilitation and affecting change. Your collective voices will prepare aspiring facilitators and problem solvers for the complexities and rewards of community based facilitation.
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**The names of the people and entities involved in the first case study on the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus ([AIEP]) are pseudonyms, while the names and entities in the second case study on Hui for Excellence in Education (HE‘E) are actual names.**

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Prologue: My Journey

“Many of those active within social policy, either as theorists or practitioners, became interested in the field in which they work at least in part through their perception of what they believe to be profound social injustices they see around them.”

– Craig, Burchardt, and Gordon, 2008

Early on a San Francisco morning in 1998, calls started coming into our office from Greenpeace and Earth Watch advising us that building was going to continue on the proposed playground structure in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood under Highway 80. The playground was to be built on the old site of an environmental waste treatment plant. They encouraged us to come down to the site with our visiting nonprofit management fellows from Japan to experience nonviolent protests using a human wall to block the bulldozers that were minutes away from spewing cancer-causing carcinogens into the air by moving the contaminated soil. At Japan–U.S. Community Education and Exchange (JUCEE), we facilitated global nonprofit management exchanges, supporting global fellows to work with partners in different social issue areas for three to six months, either in Japan or in the United States. Local environmental organizations had been working for months with neighborhood groups to build their capacity to advocate for themselves by first gaining knowledge of the public health impacts the polluted soil would have on their community, especially the children who would be playing in the playground. Once community members learned how to articulate their concerns, they were trained in community mobilization, strategic use of the media, and navigating the legislative labyrinth. They were at a juncture where mobilization had to happen, and it had to happen now.

We quickly rallied our fellows from their respective home-stays and hotels and rushed down to the site. The human wall was formed. The building contractors were yelling at the protestors in frustration, saying that they would be unable to complete their jobs and therefore would be docked pay, while the protestors stood silently. Quickly, the media arrived along with neighborhood board members, neighborhood families, the contracting company’s upper management, and representatives from San Francisco’s city government. The spokesperson for the protestors was demanding that the mayor of San Francisco come down before any discussion be pursued. Until then, the protestors weren’t moving. The police arrived too, but chose to watch rather than arrest. Within one hour, the mayor arrived.
It was at that moment that I had a personal epiphany of where I desired to be situated professionally in policy-making. The image of everyone standing around, many on their cell phones or yelling at one another, vying for or running from the media, and collectively waiting to hear from the mayor, remains vivid for me fourteen years later. I said to myself, there has to be a better way. The children who were going to play in what was supposed to be a top-of-the-line playground were days away from being exposed to significant contaminants, neighborhood families would start ingesting the polluted materials within hours, protesters were risking their lives by standing in front of bulldozers, contractors were going to be denied wages, and now the mayor had to leave what he was doing and rush down here to avoid a public embarrassment, given the extensive media that had arrived. How did this not get resolved sooner? In my remaining years at JUCEE, I pushed hard to develop inter-sector collaboration programming.

In 2001, my family and I moved to Hawai‘i and I entered the Ph.D. program in political science the following year. I was determined to obtain formal training in mediation and facilitation and get my Conflict Resolution Certificate from the Spark Matsunaga Institute for Peace, redirecting my energies to facilitating prevention rather than angry and adrenaline-filled reaction. Although activism and protest is a necessary and effective tool for mobilizing the public to act against injustices, protests do not always work alone. At the playground protest, fortunately for the children and families in the neighborhood, they did that time. I wanted to learn facilitation strategies to complement overt protesting strategies. I had completed an M.A. in international policy and had been “facilitating” for years with advocacy groups and community groups, but I did not have experience facilitating with such an array of people and diverse interests as was standing before me that day under Highway 80. In my M.A. program at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, we frequently discussed and debated local, national, and global policies with graduate students from business, policy, economics, nonprofit management, and military studies. This experience was important for me because I had the opportunity to engage in policy issues with people who represented an array of divergent positions.

However, my studies had not provided me with tools for effective problem-solving with people holding such divergent perspectives. I was in search of more productive and less combative strategies for influencing policy and tools for engaging the voices of those most negatively affected by poor policy making.
Archbishop Desmond Tutu expressed a concept that I believe is important:

We call it ubuntu botho. It means the essence of being human. You know when it is there and when it is absent. It speaks about humanness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on the behalf of others, being vulnerable. It recognizes that my humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together. 3

What would it take for people to connect around each other’s humanness? What would it take for people to truly listen to and understand one another’s truths? What would it take to mobilize groups of people with diverse interests as well as positions of influence to commit to creating policies and systems that lift entire communities, not just those in privileged positions? Fundamentally, I have always believed that communities benefit economically, socially, and environmentally when people are physically and emotionally safe and educated and have opportunities to support themselves. One of the leading obstacles to achieving thriving communities is the structural injustices we create, whether intentionally or unintentionally, through system and/or policy design meant to organize and lead ourselves.

To again consider the playground protest as an example, building a playground for a community that has been oppressed and marginalized might appear to be a kind gesture from the city of San Francisco. I will not get into why and how the community had gotten to such a place of economic deprivation or how an environmental waste treatment plant had come to be built in this particular neighborhood. The playground plan was hastily made to gain positive media attention for the city, appease the neighborhood board’s demands for cleaning an area that had been fenced off for over ten years after the plant was removed, and ultimately to save costs and time by avoiding conducting a formal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and community hearings. Policies were not in place that would require such a process, and the community, which had historically been oppressed, was assumed to be ill-informed and unlikely to pose an obstacle. Had it not been for the environmental groups working closely with the community, children and adults in the surrounding homes would have been exposed to copious amounts of dangerous chemicals. In the end, the project was stopped. The mayor approved a full EIS. When the time came for building, neighborhood families were temporarily relocated until the clearing was complete, and the top eight inches of soil were removed. Within a year, a playground was built on safe soil.
As I embarked on my studies, the complementary advanced learning in both policy and conflict resolution made me feel I had found my niche. However, I experienced great discomfort with the perpetual assertion that mediators and facilitators were “neutral third parties,” with neutrality being defined as “the state or position of being impartial or not allied with or committed to either party or viewpoint in a conflict.” I wrestled with this notion, first, on the simple basis that nobody is “neutral,” so it felt almost dishonest to pretend to be so. Additionally, I wondered what a facilitator was ethically expected to do when a participant in a process attempted to assert power and redirect the process in a particular direction to the detriment of those less powerful.

Yet I also respected that shifting hats from “advocate” to “facilitator” would demand a different sort of engagement. It was challenging to me to spend considerably more time listening and learning about the interests of “others,” whether they were developers, policy makers, or others in positions of economic and/or decision-making influence. It would be my job to connect to the humanness that Archbishop Tutu refers to of everyone “at the table” and to facilitate outcomes that groups could collectively support. Yet I knew my threshold for facilitating outcomes that were not in the best interest of the community and/or an organization as a whole was quite low, despite the expectation that I be “neutral.” So the tightrope training began, as I tried to figure out how to serve the groups I was working with in a perceived “neutral” third party position while still advocating for outcomes that best served the community and did not reinforce structural and/or personal dynamics that created the problems in the first place.

I resisted the notion of neutrality from the very beginning, feeling that it was too passive and posed an ethical conundrum for the work facilitators are expected to do. I was also keenly aware of the biases I held, coming as I did from the world of nonprofit management, policy, and advocacy. My resistance to the concept of neutrality was reinforced when I returned to working at the community level with my “new training.” I was thrust into locally complicated conflicts around environmental management, public education, and public health either at the community level or within organizations and departments. I attempted to wear my neutral facilitator hat, but I quickly found myself reacting to situations where I felt I was expected to support and facilitate an outcome that served those abusing their positions of power (e.g., the Federal and/or State Governments, organizational leadership, etc.)
rather than outcomes that (a) met the greater needs of those most affected by the decisions or (b) would result in more sustainable solutions.

In my experience, clients and/or participants expected me to have some content knowledge, participate in the strategic design of products, form personal relationships with participants, and actively balance power in a room. If my contract was short, say one or two days, then engaging in a neutral way was easy. However, when I was engaged with clients on longer contracts over a series of months, neutrality became much more challenging—although it could be challenging in a positive way, not in a detrimental one. A former state senator whom I interviewed, who was part of one of the case studies, described this transition to richer engagement:

In beginning neutrality is good but the longer a facilitator stays on, the less neutral they become. This is a good thing most of the time. You evolve to become a friend. On one hand you were a facilitator and on another hand you were a participant of sorts, someone I wanted to interact with you on a peer level (#10, 05.03.11).

I had been engaged in facilitation for years and with relative success prior to my formal studies, and I had not then felt bound by the constraint I was now up against. My facilitation work had been in strategic planning and running small work groups within my own organization, as well as facilitating community conversations about education, public health, and similar topics. Unencumbered by “conventional practice,” I did what came naturally, and neutrality was not a natural position for me. Yet after years of study, I was feeling pressure to formally profess my neutrality in front of groups, and it felt insincere and dishonest. In both mediation and facilitation Codes of Ethics, “neutrality” or “impartiality” is identified as an existing value or pillar. Ironically, despite this profession of “impartiality,” both Codes of Ethics make room for opportunities to move beyond neutrality as needed.

It was not until I read Christopher Moore’s work that I felt that perhaps I had found a more realistic and honest body of literature that would enhance my ability to positively assist in policy making that more accurately reflected affected voices. Moore expanded the notion of neutrality by introducing concepts of multipartiality, thereby bringing ethics of social justice to the conversation. John Paul Lederach, a professor of international peace building at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame, sealed the deal for me through his memorable books and teachings, which I will speak of throughout this dissertation. Simultaneously, in political science, I was exposed to poststructuralist literature by Seyla Benhabib (1996, 2002), Edward Said (1994, 2002), and Michel
Foucault (1971, 1977), and alternative dispute resolution literature by Barbara Gray (1989), Patsy Healey (2006), Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker (2011), and John Forester (1988), which more accurately reflected the realities of problem-solving within diverse communities, particularly those steeped in postcolonial effects. The diversity of these texts, my experiences in the field, and the successes I was witnessing by practitioners who embraced justice in their work solidified my commitment to continue.

[Tamara] Walsh, founder of Facilitators Inc., is a community facilitator and systems thinker in Hawai‘i and was one of the practitioners who helped solidify my commitment. In 2003, I attended a training on “Facilitating in Pacific Ways,” conducted by Walsh and Pono Mansfeld. The training was timely and, ironically, fully supported what I had been reading in Moore’s work. I left the training encouraged that my years of advocacy work through nonprofit organizations did prepare me for becoming an effective community facilitator. In the training, an emphasis on relationship building with participants, balancing power dynamics in the room, and addressing historical trauma resonated with what I knew to be true about sustainable outcomes in our communities being based on building capacity for those most disenfranchised. If collaborative processes are to be encouraged, then those most affected need to not only be present but also to have the capacity to participate fully in negotiation and decision-making.

Although the training was targeted at working with Pacific Island communities, I walked away from it with a strong sense that this methodology can and should be used with as many groups as would be open to it. It felt effective, innovative, and responsive to underlying needs and, most importantly, it advocated for full participation, particularly from those most affected by the outcomes.

Similar situations exist whenever decisions are made that will affect portions of the population that are not included in the processes of decision-making, whether that exclusion is based on gender, ethnicity, positions of authority, age, or other factors. I know that my own family struggled greatly when they emigrated from Serbia and the immigration and employment policies at the time stifled their abilities to thrive for one full generation. Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon has spoken directly to full democratic participation when addressing issues of gender inequality. He highlighted the need for greater participation by women not only in deliberation but in decision-making: “While women’s political participation improves democracy, the reverse is also true: democracy is an incubator
for gender equality.” And he added, “It provides public space for discussion of human rights and women’s empowerment. It enables women’s groups to mobilize. It makes it easier for women to realize their political, civil, economic and social rights.” I believe that it is the responsibility of the facilitator to ensure that those most affected are included from the inception of any process and have opportunities to contribute to decision-making outcomes. In the playground project under the highway in San Francisco, had it not been for nonprofit agencies providing training and capacity for the communities most affected, they would not have been asked about how the playground was going to be built or informed of the risks if layers of soil were not removed.

Later in 2003, [Walsh] called me and asked if I would be interested in helping Facilitators Inc., her mediation, facilitation, and training company. I couldn’t have been happier to have the opportunity to work with her and learn from the folks involved. I spent the next four years observing and collaborating and was able to witness the risks facilitators take in stepping outside of the neutrality box. Yet I also experienced the necessity to do so at times, if groups were going to address and truly resolve underlying and systemic issues. This involves a higher level of advocacy for the group but can come with great risks, such as losing a contract with the result that the group returns to the power-sharing dynamics that brought you to the group in the first place; upsetting participants who feel that the time spent by the facilitator with various participants is not equitable; upsetting participants who felt that you were brought in to simply run the agenda and not to collaborate around content, particularly when they disagree with your input; or getting yourself too involved in the stakes of the outcomes, to the point where you lose sight of what is in the best interest of the group.

Although I have been facilitating now for over fifteen years, both before and after formal training, I have not codified my style or approach in ways that many others have, but I am confident that I am situated under a “multipartial” rather than “neutral” umbrella in facilitation. Because advocacy and policy are what brought me to the field of conflict resolution in search of more preventative and constructive approaches to resolving the social and economic challenges in our communities, a position of multipartiality has an obvious attraction. Multipartiality also makes intuitive sense to me, in contrast to “neutrality” as I have heard how others explain and expect it from facilitators. I have spent the last nine years experimenting with the role of a facilitator to determine what is most needed in what contexts. Until this research, I had not expressed “on paper” my guiding principles and assumptions.
This has been an incredibly important project to my own practice, and I believe it has helped me grow as a professional facilitator in a multitude of ways. I share similar assumptions and practicing principles with [Walsh], which include those listed here.

- Include those most affected by outcomes in decision-making
- Respect and honor the humanity and worldview of each participant
- Facilitate what is in the best interest of the community at large
- Ensure that all outcomes are informed by data (scientific, social, economic, etc.)
- Tailor processes based on each group’s unique aspects and needs

My assumptions fall within academic and practice-based categories and will be more explicitly described throughout this dissertation. Generally, they speak to issues of power, language, evolution of the field of conflict resolution, social justice and democracy, personality, and unique contexts.

One of the assumptions I hold is that we are generally expected to engage groups through democratic processes to affect community or whole organizational capacity building. The diverse roles we are expected to play by those who hire us or those who participate in processes can inherently challenge the conventional notion of neutrality. Joshua Cohen said “the notion of deliberative democracy is rooted in the intuitive ideal of a democratic association in which the justification of the terms and conditions of association proceeds through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens.” Deliberation is one of the key components of facilitation, and I would assert that the majority of those we engage with expect democratic processes. If it is expected that people be treated fairly and equally, as Habermas and others suggest, it takes a more robust position of engagement that goes beyond neutrality.

Because the literature on unconventional practices is so limited, and I was witnessing a disconnect between the existing literature and what I was experiencing on the ground, I felt the need to explore more deeply this notion of “neutrality” from participants’ perspectives. Most of the literature on facilitative practices is presented from the perspective of the facilitator. I have yet to discover a set of literature that represents the voices of those for whom we facilitate. What matters most is that participants in a process feel confident in how facilitators engage with a group, and it is our role as service providers to meet the needs of our participants as best we can. I began asking questions.
Introduction

“I believe we are on the edge of a quantum leap into a whole new way of organizing and living as a human family.”
– Mairead Corrigan Maguire

Purpose and Intention

The purpose of my research was, first, to learn from our participants how they experience power and politics in facilitative processes. Second, I wanted to learn how they would like facilitators to respond when power and politics are impeding outcomes. I did not enter my research with this particular topic; rather it emerged through participant-observation on several projects as a fundamental challenge in facilitation work. Through multiple conversations with participants, I learned that participants want us to address issues of power imbalances and that one of the impediments to doing this well was when facilitators took a position of facilitator neutrality. I set out to learn how issues of power imbalances, content knowledge, and relationships challenge a facilitator’s ability and/or willingness to remain “neutral,” defined as “someone who sets aside personal opinion and bias in order to support the decisions of the group. Research on “neutrality” has been conducted and discussed primarily from the facilitators’ viewpoint. I have not been able to identify research that incorporates participants’ perspectives. To serve groups most effectively, I felt participants’ voices and opinions needed to be highlighted to gain a unique perspective on what is expected and desired of facilitators in the context of neutrality. I explore neutrality through case studies that involved community-based deliberative democratic processes as a tool for consensus building and community mobilization, and then I critique how a facilitator’s position of neutrality affects or does not affect the politics that exist.

I used the following methods to collect data:

a) I engaged thirty-one participants across two case studies in two-hour interviews about their expectations of a facilitator, looking specifically at issues of power and neutrality;

b) I interviewed nine professional facilitators who have each had over twenty years’ experience working on multi-stakeholder community processes in Hawai‘i about their experiences with power issues, trust building, and neutrality;

c) I served as a participant-observer in both case studies;

d) I served as the lead facilitator in one case study; and
e) I utilized data from secondary sources including design and planning notes, e-mails, and formal contracts.

Case Studies

I chose two case studies with characteristics similar to the situation in San Francisco, to explore what type of facilitation is needed in extended multi-party processes that use collaborative decision-making models. Participants in my research, including the facilitators I interviewed, were ethnically very diverse, held varying levels of power in the room, had assorted experiences with facilitation, and were all committed to education. Each interview lasted between one and three hours with follow-up questions and exchanges. Interviews were designed in a talk story format with open ended guiding questions, so no two interviews were exactly the same in structure. However, by the end of each interview, I had been able to glean the necessary feedback to allow me to compare interview results with accuracy.

[Walsh] facilitated the first case study, the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus, where I served as a small group facilitator and recorder. In the second case study, I was the lead facilitator with the help of a graduate student recorder. The two case studies are described here:

1) The Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus

The Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus ([AIEP]) was the first case study in which I engaged in 2006. [AIEP] is an organization that is responsible for assessing, coordinating, reporting, and making recommendations on the status of Indigenous education under a federal act designed to provide support for the education of Hawaiian children. [AIEP] receives, on average, thirty million dollars annually from the US Department of Education (USDOE) for programs that serve the indigenous community in Hawai‘i. An audit was done on [AIEP] in 2006 (published in 2007), which found that [AIEP] was not fulfilling its mission and was failing to assess and report how the grant monies were being spent and the impacts on investment. In order for federal funds to continue flowing to grantees, USDOE was demanding that [AIEP] put measures in place to ensure the necessary data would be submitted to ensure continued federal support.
[Tamara] Walsh was hired in 2006 to help facilitate a series of meetings with [AIEP] grantees to collaboratively design the necessary systems. One of the leading obstacles expressed by grantees was a fundamental disconnect between the success indicators identified by No Child Left Behind and culturally relevant success indicators they felt were important for Hawaiian children. The bulk of Walsh’s participation involved facilitating the discussions that identified culturally appropriate indicators and helping to create a matrix to evaluate program outcomes. Once these indicators and matrix were created, they successfully advocated to the USDOE for the inclusion of both.

[AIEP] hired Walsh not only for her facilitation expertise but also for her background in education and evaluation. She had extensive experiences working closely with the largest and most influential Hawaiian school in the islands. Walsh was introduced to [AIEP]’s Executive Council and grantees as a “facilitator,” someone who would help design meeting agendas, facilitate discussions and document outcomes of each meeting. Her contracts with [AIEP] defined the same roles and responsibilities. However, in addition to these roles, she was asked over a two-year period to participate in political strategy, advise on organizational leadership, accompany the team to Washington, D.C. to advocate for the new designs, and to collaborate with partners on creating an evaluation matrix. This myriad of roles could all be perceived as requiring her to step beyond a facilitator’s role of being neutral.

After working closely with [AIEP] for two years, she was let go by the group’s Executive Council. The perceived reasons, according to [AIEP] staff and Walsh were that (a) the leadership changes needed to achieve their desired outcome threatened people in decision-making positions, (b) she had possibly become too involved in the content, and (c) the Executive Council was not comfortable with a non-Hawaiian getting credit for any of [AIEP]’s successes. This case study provides an example of some of the risks facilitators take in stepping beyond neutrality by participating in design and having a stake in the outcomes.

Given its direct relation to my focus on facilitator neutrality, I originally planned to make [AIEP] my sole case study, but after Walsh’s departure I was denied access to many of the participants I intended to interview. I had been peripherally engaged with the group for two years (2006–2008), serving as a small group facilitator and participating in a handful of design meetings. I felt that the successes they were enjoying were partially due to the unique process designs and multiplicity of roles [Walsh] was
allowed to play. I also felt that the group members’ abilities to collaborate effectively with one another and then speak to the USDOE with one voice made the case study deeply intriguing. I met with my advisor, and he suggested I keep the case study and interview as many people as were willing. Given that other work I am involved with in the community overlaps with that of many of the grantees, I had to be very cautious about with whom I spoke. I decided to add a second case study and provide a comparative analysis. The second case study was the Hui for Excellence in Education (HE‘E), where I served as the lead facilitator.

2) **Hui for Excellence in Education (HE‘E)**

HE‘E’s mission is to

> promote a child-centered and strength-based educational system in which families, communities and schools are valued and empowered to help every student succeed. HE‘E brings diverse stakeholders together to harness collective energy, share resources and identify opportunities for progressive action in education.¹⁷

In October of 2009, the State of Hawai‘i responded to its budget crisis by furloughing public school employees, which resulted in students missing seventeen days of instruction with a proposed increase to twenty-four days of missed instruction the following year. The community responded in a variety of ways. For example, many organizations provided services and programming for children on the furloughed days to help families with childcare and supplemental instruction, and parent groups organized to figure out how to overturn furloughs and become part of the solution. I was asked by a friend to help facilitate the conversation and strategy for these parent groups to work most effectively together. Through that experience, a local funder approached me to discuss the viability of a statewide coalition, but we wanted to ensure we would have committed leaders for such an effort.

In May 2010, the Learning Coalition, Hawai‘i Education Matters, and the University of Hawai‘i College of Education organized an ‘Ohana Engagement Forum to focus on how key stakeholders involved with pre-school through post-secondary education (P–20) might work together with schools, families, and communities to support one another more effectively. I attended the forum and listened to feedback. Participants overwhelmingly supported the formation of a statewide education coalition to coordinate member efforts and leverage existing resources in support of transformational change within Hawai‘i’s public school system. I was hired to facilitate a strategic planning process to lay the
groundwork for the coalition within a one-year time frame. Approximately thirty to forty community organization representatives, policy-makers, teacher union representatives, and Department of Education specialists gathered to collaboratively create a vision, mission, five-year priorities, governance structure, and policy platform for the coalition over an eight-month period. Hui for Excellence in Education (HE‘E) was launched at the state capitol in January 2011. The Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus grantees were invited to participate throughout HE‘E’s efforts.

We held six large group meetings that involved all potential stakeholders. These meetings were open to the public. I facilitated an additional ten to fifteen planning sessions with a planning team comprised of representatives from each priority group. I was contracted to serve as a strategic planning facilitator, but was hired because of my expertise in community mobilization and coalition building. Having intimate experience with [Walsh]’s challenges with walking the neutrality tightrope, I was overly conscientious about my perceived role, wanting to ensure that everyone knew what I was being asked to provide and when I was taking off my neutrality hat.

Throughout my engagement with HE‘E, the issue of neutrality was significant to me, particularly because at the time I was teaching the course “Survey in Peace and Conflict Studies” at the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa, where methods of conflict resolution are introduced. Simultaneously, I was navigating my engagement with HE‘E and introducing western methods of problem-solving and group process where neutrality is continually reinforced. Not only was I uncomfortable perpetuating the expectation of neutrality, but my students had clear and fundamental questions about, among other issues, (a) how realistic neutrality is, (b) whether neutrality reinforces harmful relationships, and (c) whether neutrality is culturally relevant. The ways I was serving HE‘E were not consistent with what I was teaching. The more I reflected on [Walsh]’s work with [AIEP], the more convinced I was that this expectation was fundamental to the challenges many of us experience with facilitation. So I began my research by first asking participants what they need and expect from a facilitator, if and how facilitators should address issues of power and politics that affect outcomes, and how their responses relate to this issue of neutrality. I felt that if my data suggested that neutrality truly is a “myth,” as Lederach proposes, then I would have the grounds to argue that it is essential for western practitioners to reconsider how they train and teach methodologies of facilitation.
Similarities and Differences

The two case studies shared the following variables: (a) a public education policy focus, (b) long term facilitation contracts, (c) low trust among participants and the system they were trying to affect, (c) large numbers of participants, (d) collaborative decision-making processes, (e) a highly political focus, (f) similarly applied facilitated processes, and (g) diversity in expectations of the facilitator’s role.

Fundamentally, both case studies involved issues of politics and social justice. Politics is a term generally used to describe the art of running governmental or state affairs, but it can also describe many other group interactions, including those of corporate, academic, nonprofit, community, and religious institutions. Seyla Benhabib defines politics more explicitly: “Politics refers to the legitimized and public contestation, primarily by organized and unequal social powers, over access to the resources available to the public authorities of the collectivity.”\(^{18}\) Social justice addresses the structures and systems that perpetuate inequality, political repression, discrimination, poverty, hunger, environmental abuse, and so forth.\(^{19}\)

Where the case studies diverged was in their respective outcome goals, advertised expectations of the facilitator, and collective ethnic identities. First, in the HE‘E study, I could be safely explicit and transparent about the different roles I was being asked to play (planner, coalition builder, strategist, and facilitator), whereas [Walsh] needed to be more cautious because of the disparity in expectations between the client and participants. Second, [AIEP] participants were approximately ninety-eight percent Hawaiian, while HE‘E participants were more representative of the islands’ ethnic makeup. Third, [AIEP] participants were responding to national mandates, while the HE‘E participants mobilized voluntarily to affect state policies. Fourth, [Walsh]’s engagement with [AIEP] was three times as long as my engagement with HE‘E (nine months) and involved multiple islands. Fifth, power and influence were distributed differently in each study. Finally, [AIEP] participants risked losing funding if they did not mobilize and provide assessments and evaluations, so the pressure was greater to achieve their outcomes.

Although the consequences of the islands’ historical experiences with colonization were present in each case study, they were particularly relevant in the [AIEP] study. Given the community’s commitment to self-determination, there was significant pushback to having a non-Hawaiian so intimately involved in the outcomes. Conversely, within HE‘E, there was a clearly expressed need to not favor any one
identity, but rather glean the strengths of all, and my direct involvement was less threatening. HE‘E proved to be a safer environment in which to don the different hats of facilitation as deemed necessary.

**Why This Research Is Important**

As highlighted in my prologue, conflicts in our communities that need collaborative decision-making often involve multiple participants and are historically, socioeconomically, and politically complex. Frequently, they involve systemic issues that need redesigning for sustainable solutions to result. A major component of a system’s redesign is shifting public and/or organizational policies. As I watched the overt conflict unfold on the contaminated soil under the highway in San Francisco and thought about what was needed to prevent what I was experiencing, it became clear that everyone present should have had the opportunity to sit down and collaboratively decide what needed to be done before playground construction began. Money and time would have been saved and children’s lives protected. This type of scenario happens time and time again in our communities, and facilitated dialogue and problem-solving is one viable solution for preventing conflicts that otherwise drain resources.¹⁰

However, the style of facilitation is critical and must be based on the contexts within which facilitators are hired. When I first learned the formal mechanics of facilitation while pursuing my Graduate Certificate in Conflict Resolution, I was introduced to the concept of a *neutral* facilitator. I was concerned after my very first training, and I lacked confidence that a position of neutrality would be sufficient for truly assisting groups to affect policies, given existing power imbalances and content gaps. I fundamentally felt that facilitators should have a commitment to ensuring that those most affected by the outcomes of a process should have opportunities to participate in decision-making. I also felt that facilitators should have general content knowledge of the areas within which they work.

Significant research critiquing neutrality in conflict resolution processes dates back to the 1970s when the field of alternative dispute resolution was being formalized. My research is unique in that it reveals expectations of those whom we serve and compares their expectations to the assumptions academics and practitioners have made about the role of neutrality. My work, first, provides organizations hiring external or internal facilitators ways to think more critically about the benefits of multipartial processes, to become more comfortable with such processes, and to identify with more clarity the type of facilitation they are seeking. Second, my intention is to influence facilitators to (a) identify for
themselves practicing values that can guide them in their practices, ideally incorporating elements of social justice, and (b) stimulate more honest conversations about the myth of neutrality, thereby relieving facilitators and participants from the fundamental constraints neutrality inherently assumes.

My research demonstrates how claims of neutrality can actually perpetuate existing injustices by reinforcing the abuse of power, preventing groups from seeking creative solutions, and restricting those most affected by the policies and the decision-makers themselves. By interviewing participants from different facilitated processes, I gleaned more accurate reflections of how neutrality feels to those whom we serve. Throughout my work, I use the phrase, “in the room” to describe figuratively the contexts of particular processes. Not all processes are literally “in a room,” rather they are held elsewhere: in parks, in homes, on the beach, and in retreat centers, for example.

A Preview of My Findings
Generally, what I learned from the participants in my research was not far from what I had expected based on my experiences in the field. There seems to be a wide array of expectations of a facilitator that challenge a facilitator’s ability to remain truly neutral. What did surprise me was how quickly many participants responded with a “yes” when asked if they expected a facilitator to be neutral. Yet when urged to go deeper into what is truly expected, such as leveling power imbalances, contributing content knowledge, and having a commitment to the community and the outcomes, their responses did not necessarily match with the expectation of a neutral facilitator. The following findings provide some insight.

a) Participants in a process do not necessarily expect a facilitator to be neutral and/or impartial, even those who clearly stated that they do. They expressed that they have high expectations for fair process, a facilitator’s content knowledge, relationships with the facilitator, belief that the facilitator cares about the outcomes, trust, and a level playing field. Neutrality to them feels too distant and removed.

b) Deliberative democratic processes are what we are often being asked to facilitate. All of the participants I interviewed expressed this need. A position of neutrality does not always support such processes. Rather, multipartiality, whereby a facilitator is partial to individual needs to fully participate, is a more accurate expectation.
c) Neutrality is a western value taken from a formal legal framework. Although it works beautifully in some contexts, it falls short in contexts where the power imbalances hinder full participation and, subsequently, more socially just outcomes and/or policies.

d) Facilitators need new language to describe what we do to serve our communities better. The more clear we are with our groups about the role(s) we are playing, the more transparent we are, eliciting greater trust and better potential outcomes.

The remainder of this chapter will introduce facilitation vis-à-vis alternative dispute resolution processes and explore the use of deliberation as a communicative tool. Facilitator neutrality will be defined and multipartiality explored to provide the reader with foundational research concepts to better understand the case studies.

**Conflict Resolution and Facilitation**

Facilitation has been around since the first group of humans needed to negotiate together, often using family and community elders or shamans and spiritual leaders as informal “facilitators” for discussions, problem-solving, and negotiating. “Facilitation” can be found in every ethnic enclave around the globe. The Latin root of “facilitate” means “to enable, to make easy.”²¹ Locally, in traditional Hawaiian communities, the kūpuna (elders) often serve as “haku” to problem-solving processes called ho’oponopono that provide ways of forgiving and restoring relationships. Less formal processes include kūpuna “facilitating” community conversations. In Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese, and Filipino societies, spiritual leaders, heads of families, or respected elder community leaders facilitate conversations and problem-solving efforts. Given Hawai‘i’s unique ethnic landscape, it is the perfect context for experimenting with alternative styles of problem-solving.

The field of facilitation became more formalized in the United States when, just following the civil rights movements in the 1960s, a more fervent demand for greater transparency and public participation in policy making emerged. Facilitation is one of four main non-judicial forms of problem-solving found within alternative dispute resolution, although a myriad of nontraditional methods are used as well. The three other main forms are arbitration, mediation, and negotiation, and all involve “neutral third
parties” or people outside of the group who do not have a stake in the outcomes and who help design and implement problem-solving processes.22

In 1972, the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) was formed, espousing the belief that resolving disputes through negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and “other neutral interventions” can be of great benefit to disputing parties and to society. Facilitation was identified as one of the “other neutral interventions,” utilized as a problem-solving tool through planning, collaborative decision-making, and/or group process when more than two parties to an effort are needed. Facilitation is unique vis-à-vis the other methods given the focus on collaboration among multiple parties, and it will often include multiple days of engagement.

Christopher Moore describes the four forms: Arbitration is a

\[\text{Arbitration}\]

generic term for a voluntary process in which people in conflict request the assistance of an impartial and neutral third party to make a decision for them regarding contested issues. The outcome of the decision is binding. One person or a panel of third parties may conduct arbitration. The critical factor is that they are outside of the conflict relationship.24

Mediation is generally defined as “the intervention in a conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power, who assists the involved parties to voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement of the issue in dispute.”25 Mediation differs from arbitration in that the parties to a mediation decide on the resolutions, whereas in arbitration, an arbitrator decides the outcomes.

\[\text{Negotiation}\]

is described as

a bargaining relationship between parties who have a perceived or actual conflict of interest. The participants voluntarily join in a temporary relationship designed to educate each other about their needs and interests, to exchange specific resources, or to resolve less tangible issues such as the form the relationship will take in the future or the procedure by which problems are to be solved.26

Finally, facilitation “involves managing group processes and the dynamics influencing how members work together. The nature of that responsibility calls for a high degree of neutrality about content issues and a focus on group needs.”27 Mediation and negotiation are often informally integrated components of a facilitation process. As Roger Schwarz adds, “Facilitation helps a group improve how it identifies
and solves problems and makes decisions, to increase the group’s effectiveness.”\textsuperscript{28} Michael Doyle, one of the co-founders of meeting facilitation, postulated two lessons about facilitation:

1. If people don’t participate in and “own” the solution to the problems or agree to the decision, implementation will be half-hearted at best, probably misunderstood, and more likely than not, fail. Facilitation is a form of participatory decision-making.

2. The key differentiating factor in the success of an organization is not just the products and services, not just its technology or market share, but the organization’s ability to elicit, harness, and focus the vast intellectual capital and goodwill resident in their members, employees and stakeholders.\textsuperscript{29}

Facilitation harnesses the human factor of an organization and/or community, focusing on how people work together to achieve their goals and outcomes. Conflict resolution scholars disagree on the boundaries of the field, with some scholars excluding arbitration and including conciliation processes, for example. Others do not include facilitation as one of the leading four non-judicial forms. For the purpose of this paper, western conflict resolution will include all four intervention processes.

This formal classification of dispute resolution methods hides the fact that the boundaries between these processes are blurred. In both community processes and in the court-based dispute resolution system, sometimes all of these processes are applied as part of a “case management” system. Throughout a facilitation process, particularly on extended contracts, multiple opportunities arise that need some form of problem-solving, whether it is through mediation or negotiation. The longer the contract, the more blurred the different practices become.

**Deliberative Democracy**

In community processes, facilitators are frequently hired to facilitate deliberative processes whereby members of the community and others who will be affected by the outcomes are gathered, and processes are designed to elicit honest discussions, brainstorming, and collaboration around solutions. The concept of *deliberation* may in fact be one of the leading assumptions in facilitation. Seyla Benhabib defines *public deliberation* as a process that “recognizes the right to equal participation between conversation partners, whom I define provisionally as all whose interests are actually or potentially affected by the courses of action and decisions which may ensue from such conversations.”\textsuperscript{30} *Public deliberation*, then, is the process through which *deliberative democracy* occurs, not just in a public realm but in private realms as well.
Deliberative democracy holds that, for a democratic decision to be legitimate, it must be preceded by authentic deliberation, not merely the aggregation of preferences that occurs in voting. **Authentic deliberation** is deliberation among decision-makers that is free from distortions of unequal political power, such as power a decision-maker obtained through economic wealth or the support of interest groups.31 If the decision-makers cannot reach consensus after authentically deliberating on a proposal, then they vote on the proposal using a form of majority rule. In our field of community-based facilitation, the majority of processes are designed to be democratic and deliberative in that they support equitable participation and consensus building while balancing pragmatism, cooperation, and compromise. Processes are intended to create environments where stakeholders feel safe and prepared to express themselves and to participate in decision-making. Both of my case studies highlight two viable examples where deliberation was intentionally written into process designs and used as a tool for reaching consensus on outcomes.

There are cases when democratic principles are not expected or desired. First, when people are privileged in decision-making, leadership, or funding positions, they may have a strong preference about how group feedback will be utilized or they may have certain outcomes in mind that they hope the facilitator will reach with the group. Second, democratic process may threaten certain participants, either individuals or groups, because it means compromising certain positions and interests. Both situations suggest legitimate apprehensions of “deliberative democracy.” In some circumstances, a facilitator is brought in and outcomes have already been defined, predominately by the client. The facilitator is then asked to facilitate the group reaching those outcomes rather than having the group identify the outcomes themselves. “Efficiency” is often used as the reason to pre-set outcomes, although we often see that it is also a strategic way to get one’s desired outcomes achieved.

Two dichotomous outcomes may result if outcomes are predetermined. First, if the group has established trust with the client and each other and they have agreed to the set of pre-defined outcomes, then the group can often work efficiently by already knowing the desired end result. Strategies are more direct and the end goals clear. However, if the group is unaware that the facilitator and client are working to reach predetermined outcomes and they learn either midway through or even after a process, then trust, relationships, commitments, and integrity are often jeopardized, with not only
immediate effects but also residual effects in future processes. When outcomes have been predetermined, it is critical for a client to explain what is expected from the group, how feedback will be used, and so forth, to both the facilitator and the group so that they can be informed and determine their commitment to a process.

More challenging is when the outcomes have already been decided but not shared and the feedback being generated from a group is simply being used by the client as window dressing or to be able to check the “public participation box.” To open up a process and then deny the group consideration of their outcomes can quickly cause distrust, leading to fear and disappointment, and ultimately impacting productivity and creating negative work environments. The same is true for community-based processes like coalition building. Such situations can be even more delicate, perhaps, because many of the community members do not have a history of working with one another and, worse, may have a history of tension and conflict. If they are gathered, their voices, ideas, and time should be as honored as promised.

Seyla Benhabib asserts that

> democracy is best understood as a model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals.\(^\text{32}\)

A criticism of deliberation is that potentially it allows those most skilled in rhetoric to sway the decision in their favor. This criticism has been made since deliberative democracy first arose in ancient Athens. In both case studies, efforts were made by the facilitator to ensure that everyone was as prepared as possible to share. Where they couldn’t share eloquently or succinctly, the facilitator tried to ensure their message was conveyed. This opportunity and ability to share is what Jürgen Habermas describes as “communicative power” relative to “administrative power.”\(^\text{33}\) Communicative power refers to the power of ideas and decisions that emerge from the group, whereas administrative power is the inherent power people in positions of authority hold to make decisions without consulting with the masses. It is between these two “powers” that facilitators sit, ruminating on how to build the necessary bridges that will elicit informed outcomes and build relationships.
Habermas speaks to a connection between the public and the administrative state in a way that respects individual rights but also creates procedures by which communicatively generated power can steer (or counter steer) administrative power. In his discussion, the administrative state can be substituted for the administrative power in any organization and/or community. Following a Weberian conception of administration, Habermas argued that administrative power is predominately instrumental in nature—decisions are made from a standpoint of efficiency. Structurally, reducing the norms to mere rationalizations allows administrative power to exclude the influence of communicatively generated power. Terrance Kelly asserts, “When popular sovereignty is realized, the political system is structured in such a way as to create procedures by which the free and open public sphere can generate and communicate ideas that mark the range of appropriate administrative discretion.”

Communicative power acts in “the manner of a siege” as it provides a “normative filter” that limits the range of legitimate decision-making in the administrative state. When leaders say “democracy is not always in the best interest of leadership,” they are referring to this tension of communicative and administrative power, balancing participation with efficiency and control.

Terrence Kelly argues that “not only is the legitimacy of administrative power best secured through collaborative government, the legitimacy of the entire democratic state is dependent on citizen collaboration at the administration level.” Collaborative leadership is what secures the notion of a deliberative democracy. Again, decision-making structures within any organization struggle with balancing the voice of its people and administrative responsibilities. It is the role of the third party to ensure such procedures are constructed in a deliberative democratic process and that the decision-making is truly collaborative and not simply a strategy to quiet dissenting voices. The challenge is that deliberative democracy assumes a level of equitability in decision-making and influence, which is rarely the case when a facilitator first engages with a group.

Seyla Benhabib expands on Habermas’s ideas by suggesting that “the emphasis of the deliberative democracy model on democratic inclusiveness makes it particularly attractive to the concerns of the excluded minorities, whether the sources of this exclusion lie in gender, ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, religious or sexual preference.” Approaches that go beyond neutrality highlight the potential of deliberative democratic processes in mitigating the tension not only between administrative and communicative power, but among participants who share little trust and great power disparities.
How facilitators and process participants navigate the river meandering through such power influences and cultural dynamics is critical to the success of a true deliberative democratic process.

If we accept that deliberation is a critical component of a deliberative democracy, and is an effective tool for cutting through the politics that hinder progress, Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs (2007) suggest that, “building on these theories, in recent years practitioners—from government officials to citizen groups, nonprofits, and foundations—have increasingly devoted time and resources to strengthening citizen engagement through deliberative forums.” In this context, public deliberations involve the “public” literally, putting government and/or organizations opposite the public. As I speak about facilitation throughout this work, I assume that facilitating “deliberation” is in fact one of our key roles and responsibilities, whether we are working literally with the “public” or working with groups of people. Whether the client is a government agency, a not-for-profit or for-profit entity, or a community board, the client inherently has people/groups working for and with them and a public to engage. When they desire a process to engage others, deliberation is most likely intended. Both case studies are situated within this space of overlap.

The concept of public deliberation emerges from democratic deliberative theory. Democratic deliberative theory begins with a turning away from liberal individualist or economic understandings of democracy and toward a view anchored in conceptions of accountability and discussion. Talk-centric democratic theory replaces voting-centric democratic theory. Voting-centric views see democracy as the arena in which fixed preferences and interests compete via fair mechanisms of aggregation. In contrast, deliberative democracy focuses on the communicative processes of opinion and the formations that precede voting.

In Hawai‘i, not necessarily uniquely among other areas of the globe whose native communities were subjected to colonization, public deliberation can be very difficult and complicated. Not only do the effects of colonization such as distrust, identity issues, self-determination, trauma, and economic stability factor into any process, but even the process itself can pose a challenge. The abovementioned authors refer to deliberation as “talk-centric” and this style of communication may not resonate with certain cultural groups. Another threat is the notion of assimilation. Sometimes facilitative processes can appear to be a consensus-based process used to assimilate communities. However, in Hawai‘i,
assimilation is not always the goal. Evidence of such assimilation strategies can be seen when we look at the formation of nation-states, given that such formations have defined the boundaries of human interaction as well as of systemic intersection.

The following are comprehensive but relatively untested assumptions in “The Deliberative Citizen: Theory and Evidence” by Tali Mendelberg (2002).39

1. If it is appropriately empathetic, egalitarian, open-minded, and reason-centered, deliberation is expected to produce a variety of positive democratic outcomes (Barber 1984; Benhabib 1996; Bickford 1996; Bohman 1996; Chambers 1996; Cohen 1989; Fishkin 1995; Gutmann & Thompson 1996; Mansbridge 1983, 1996; Sunstein 1993; Warren 1992, 1996).

2. Citizens will become more engaged and active in civic affairs (Barber 1984).

3. Tolerance for opposing points of view will increase (Gutmann & Thompson 1996).

4. Citizens will improve their understanding of their own preferences and be able to justify those preferences with better arguments.

5. Citizens will improve their understanding of their own preferences and be able to justify those preferences with better arguments (Chambers 1996; Gutmann & Thompson 1996).

6. People in conflict will set aside their adversarial, win-lose approach and understand that their fate is linked with the fate of the other, that although their social identities conflict they “are tied to each other in a common recognition of their interdependence” (Chambers 1996; Pearce & Littlejohn 1997; Yankelovich 1991).

7. Faith in the democratic process will be enhanced as people who deliberate become empowered and feel that their government truly is “of the people” (Fishkin 1995).40

To summarize, public deliberation is supposed to be an egalitarian and reason-centered process intended to promote safe citizen engagement. By participating, citizens will become more tolerant of diverse views, learn to engage with others with more skill and empathy, and connect to the shared human condition. Finally, citizens will build their trust and faith in democratic processes. This is as idyllic a view of process as a facilitator could imagine, but unfortunately, it is rare that all of these possibilities are realized without encountering challenges. Mendelberg describes potential negative perceptions of process, such as the following:

1. Some analysts are concerned that public deliberation is little more than another enclave of “gated democracy”—a practice reserved for the same group of affluent Americans who disproportionately deploy their checkbooks to lure candidates to their favorite positions or who are already well-endowed with social capital.
2. Civic forums are “just talk”—idle chat that is cut off from government decision making about important issues. Perhaps most damning, some argue that a majority of citizens lack the skills and/or opportunities to deliberate effectively, that public deliberation can produce unintended consequences (Price et al. 2003).


Will Kymlicka provides a description of what ensued once nation-states were formed, suggesting that homogeneity was the goal. Yet one can imagine that if the political system is organized around such imagined and/or forced homogeneity, then policies and decisions would naturally marginalize significant communities within the new nation.

Kymlicka repudiates the older idea that the state is a possession of a single national group by suggesting that

instead, the state must be seen as belonging equally to all citizens. Second, as a consequence, a multicultural state repudiates any nation-building policies that assimilate or exclude members of non-dominant groups. Instead, it accepts that individuals should be able to access state institutions, and to act as full and equal citizens in political life, without having to hide or deny their ethnocultural identity. The state accepts an obligation to accord recognition and accommodation to the history, language and culture of non-dominant groups, as it does for the dominant group. Third, a multicultural state acknowledges the historic injustice that was done to minority groups by these policies of assimilation and exclusion and manifests a willingness to offer some sort of rectification for them.42

Kymlicka goes on to assert:

In the past, all of these countries had the goal and expectation that indigenous peoples would disappear as distinct communities, as a result of dying out, intermarriage or assimilation. A number of policies were adopted to speed up this process, such as stripping indigenous peoples of their lands, restricting the practice of their traditional cultures, languages, religions, and undermining their institutions of self-government.43

This description of historical policies perfectly highlights how and why such histories and practices resulted in and still may have profound impacts on community-based processes today in Hawai‘i, where Hawaiians strive for “recognition and accommodation to their history, language and culture.”

Another assumption of deliberative democracy is its inherent structural expectation that identities are malleable and will be affected by how diverse identities “engage” with others in interstitial spaces of understanding. These interstitial spaces are created when diverse groups are engaged in deliberation and where verbal and even physical violence erupts. Homi Bhabha suggests that these “in between”
spaces “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”

Deliberative democracy also assumes that voting and participation are two key pillars of democracy and not equitably accessed or provided. The reality is that our societies are replete with sociopolitical and economically dynamic and complex systems that can make deliberative democracy challenging.

**Deliberative Democracy and Politics**

Facilitation is a tool to advance opportunities for people to engage in deliberation to advance democratic means of discussion and decision-making. Facilitation does not occur in a vacuum. Instead it is situated within the complexities of politics. Sheldon Wolin said, “Politics is continuous, ceaseless and endless.” Politics comes from the Greek word πολιτικός, meaning “of, for, or relating to citizens.” It is a process by which groups of people make collective decisions. Patsy Healey offers the following description of politics, focusing on gaining control and power. Even though her description is couched in terms of a government system, her description is reflective of dynamics that facilitators experience with groups of people coming together to problem-solve, brainstorm, make decisions, or collaborate on issues important to them and their communities.

Politics are deliberate efforts in social mobilization, in order to gain control over the mechanisms for the management of collective affairs. It involves taking control over the flows of resources, which pass through government systems, over the power to define formal rules, in law and government procedure, and over the agendas of governments.

In summation, it involves who controls what and how. In both case studies, politics were fully present and existed both internally and externally.

What I have seen in my experiences as a facilitator, in my observations of others, and in sharing with participants is three distinct politics that create murky conditions for facilitators. They are the politics of history, differences, and structures, and they are found in every space facilitators enter. They exist between participants but are also found within the larger context of any given facilitation. All hundred hours of interviewee feedback could be situated within at least one of these three politics. The figure below illustrates the flow that facilitators engage in as it moves from disparate politics, using deliberation as a bridge to achieve democratic processes.
Politics of History

According to Robert Penn Warren, “History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future.” Understanding the history of the “place” as well as the history of the “people” with whom you are working is critical. The political history of the Hawaiian Islands plays a significant role in how people engage with and categorize one another and how systems have been built. Layers of marginalization have existed over hundreds of years, beginning first with the indigenous communities that suffered under colonization and then the plantation communities of foreign workers who were subjugated by wealthy business owners. The politics of the past are reflected in today’s political realities. Western policies, languages, and cultural values have defined the US education system. So it should not be surprising that Hawaiian children have struggled within the confines of the United States Department of Education (USDOE) system.

Politics of Difference

Politics of difference is a natural by-product of the politics of history and determines who holds the most power in a society, within a family, in a work place, and within a group of participants. Kymlicka suggests that there are two different versions of it: a politics of positional difference and a politics of cultural difference. As he states, “They share a critical attitude towards a difference-blind approach to policy and politics. They differ, however, in how they understand the constitution of social groups, and in the issues of justice that they emphasize.”
If one of our goals as facilitators is to help groups design and impact policies that affect their communities, then we cannot be blind to difference. Unfortunately, what we learn in conventional mediation and facilitation trainings reinforces the difference-blind approach. Such an approach assumes that (a) everyone enters a room with similar shared knowledge of the content and process, (b) everyone enters with a full understanding of the politics of history, and (c) everyone shares power or is in consensus about where power is situated. This would be a facilitator’s dream, but it is very rarely, if ever, the reality.

The politics of positional difference can be cut in two ways. First, if some believe that they have more inherent rights than other human beings because of the “position” they were born into or perceivably “achieved” (e.g., socioeconomic class and/or position in society or an organization), than politics of difference clearly contributes to the privileging by certain policies of a select group of people. Conversely, a politics of positional difference can allow us to view it and accept it as just that, “a politics,” which can be altered if we deem it necessary.

In addressing the politics of cultural difference, Iris Marion Young suggests that “politics of difference represents a clear case where difference-blind treatment or policy is more likely to perpetuate than correct injustice.” She adds,

Under these circumstances of inequality of freedom, members of embattled cultural groups frequently demand special rights and protections to enable their culture to flourish and/or claim rights to a political society of their own either within a federated relationship or that of the dominant culture(s).

The politics of cultural difference can at times prevent groups from seeking necessary allies and/or engaging in certain systems that will help propel their cases forward.

Young concludes,

Both the politics of positional difference and the politics of cultural difference challenge commitments to political equality that tend to identify equality with sameness and which believe that the best way to pursue social and political equality is to ignore group differences in public policy and in how individuals are treated. They both argue that where group difference is socially significant for issues of conflict, domination or advantage, equal respect may not imply treating everyone in the same way.

Young’s statement is significant to the field of facilitation and the expectation of neutrality, and it sits at the core of my exploration.
Politics of Structures

Our politics of history and subsequent politics of difference have shaped the structures and systems within our societies, organizations, and families. The dynamics of these politics are not dependent on the diversity or homogeneity of a group. Rather, the dynamics of “histories,” “politics,” and “otherness” are ubiquitous in any given group. The definitions we create for distinguishing one another directly influence how structures are built and who holds the power. Whether structural differences are defined by communication systems, decision-making structures, group protocol, access to information, or organizational policies, it is within the bowels of these structures that the complexity of issues can be identified and addressed. Michael Reisch states that you cannot look at the politics of structures without examining the politics of difference when he declares that

in order to affirm individual identity it is essential to recognize the existence of systematic discrimination on the basis of group identity, which persists, in part, because of the conceptualization of racism and sexism in individual-to-individual terms (Johnson, 2001; Hill Collins, 2000; Young, 1990).

Kymlicka introduces the importance of looking critically at structures rather than cultural issues when he discusses the claim that

the focus on cultural difference has displaced attention to class. On this view, the real problem is economic marginalization not cultural misrecognition, and the solution is not to adopt multiculturalism policies (MCPs) but rather to improve people’s standing in the labour market, through better access to jobs, education and training and so on.

It is within these more pervasive problems of structural injustices or inequalities that we navigate when groups of diverse stakeholders gather to resolve complex issues. It is critical that facilitators are able to distinguish a structural issue from a cultural issue, along with the histories and politics that relate to these issues.

Iris Young supports Kymlicka’s differentiation when she says,

Persons suffer injustice by virtue of structural inequality when their group social positioning means that the operation of diverse institutions and practices conspires to limit their opportunities to achieve well-being. Persons suffer specifically culture-based injustice when they are not free to express themselves as the wish, associate with others with whom they are share forms of expression and practices, or socialize their children in the cultural ways they value, or when their group situation is such that they bear significant economic or political costs in pursuing a distinctive way of life. Structural inequalities then sometimes build on perceived cultural differences.
It is not difficult to see that structural inequalities perpetuate culture-based injustices, which is what Hawaiians experienced through colonization and beyond.

There are, obviously, interrelatedness and dependencies among the three politics. To seek more just and fair policies that will not only benefit the groups we are serving but the community at large, it is essential that these dependencies be interrupted. Among facilitators there is a mixed response about whether or not that is in our “job description.” This is true among participants as well, especially those who hold power and enjoy the privilege of decision-making, justly or unjustly. It may not be in our official “job description,” but I do believe it is in our description of being human.

Young puts it this way:

Many conflicts over cultural toleration or accommodation in contemporary liberal democracies occur within a context of structural inequality between the dominant groups and cultural minorities. What is at stake in many of these conflicts is not simply freedom of expression and association, but substantively equal opportunity for individuals from marginalized groups to develop and exercise their capacities, and to have meaningful voice in the governance of the institutions whose policies condition their lives. When the politics of cultural difference dominates political discourse or group difference, however, these positional issues are harder to raise and discuss. The weight of felt grievance about structural injustice then may bear down on these cultural conflicts.56

Young eloquently states the complexity of the contexts within which we facilitate.

Neutrality
As the field of facilitation emerged and practicing principles were identified, those who wrote the training manuals and provided literature on the practice highlighted the concept of “neutrality” as a pillar value of the role of a third party “intermediary,” or someone from the outside who comes in to help when there is a problem or to help assist a group that intends on moving forward with a project. Given the fact of forced assimilations, a position of neutral engagement seemed safe and as if it could build trust with disparate people and groups. Multiple definitions of “neutrality” exist, but all incorporate elements of a third party being from outside of the group, remaining in equitable distance from each participant, and having no stake in the outcomes of a particular process. A neutral intervener would be expected to refrain from contributing to the content of the discussion.57 It has been argued that a position of neutrality establishes trust and respect with the group and serves to legitimize the process.58 As an indication of its apparent importance, the term “neutrality” appears more than thirty-five times in the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution’s standards of conduct.59 Many believe that the presence of a neutral third party serves to legitimize the facilitation process.
Comparatively, in other parts of the world, problem solvers are often trusted people from within the community and in positions of influence, such as spiritual leaders, heads of households, friends, or neighbors, and neutrality is not specifically identified as a necessary attribute. Cultural differences in expectations of a problem solver are clearly evident in the Hawaiian Islands, which is the world’s most ethnically diverse location per square mile. What I have personally experienced working in Hawai‘i and what became evident in my research is that not only are there cultural differences in expectations, but a position of neutrality for the facilitator is not always desired by participants. In fact, such a position could potentially risk perpetuating existing power imbalances that are preventing groups from moving forward, hinder alternative opportunities from being considered, and prevent important relationship building necessary for gaining trust with participants.

Since the field of conflict resolution has existed, the expectation of neutrality has been consistently revisited. Many practitioners differentiate between process advocacy and content neutrality in their attempts to incorporate the challenges of power imbalances by suggesting that they could be addressed through good process. For example, Doyle states,

Content neutrality means not taking a position on the issues at hand; not having a position or a stake in the outcome. Process neutrality means not advocating for certain kinds of processes such as brainstorming. We found that the power in the role of the facilitator was in becoming content neutral and a process advocate—advocating for fair, inclusive and open processes that would balance participation and improve productivity while establishing a safe psychological space in which all group members could fully participate.

In his definition, it is clear that he advocates that facilitators remain neutral on content, however, and not be involved in the outcomes. My research will reveal why this is a fundamental challenge and is not always desirable in the view of participants, particularly when facilitators are hired for their content expertise. Even if a facilitator does not have relevant background experience, science has demonstrated that unconscious bias is a significant factor in how we make decisions. According to the Association of Medical Colleges, “There is overwhelming scientific evidence that unconscious bias may influence the evaluation and selection of candidates from entry-level to leadership positions in all types of organizations.” Similarly, unconscious bias shaped by our value systems, life experiences, and unique histories most likely affects the ways we engage with groups, challenging the presumption of true “neutral” positions. Not only does neutrality appear to be an impossible goal, but it may not be strategic.
for achieving what a group really wants to accomplish. It can, in fact, risk reinforcing leadership structures that are preventing groups from seeking viable solutions. A facilitator’s position of neutrality could also prevent groups from considering a wide array of possibilities and solutions that they might not contemplate if not prodded by facilitators.

Soon after the field developed, Lawrence Susskind (1981) challenged the fundamental notion of neutrality and looked critically at the issue of content neutrality in particular. Susskind provides a snapshot of a community process in Canada on the islands of Haida Gwaii off of British Columbia. The process was meant to transform a primarily top-down and one-time-spending version of economic development into a community-controlled model, and it involved indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. They were negotiating an accord about the use of Regional Economic Development Initiative resources.

The successful mediators were willing to inject themselves into the substance of the disputes. They were not content to just encourage discussion among the parties. In that regard, they were activists. They had personal views about the appropriate scope and content of the agreements that were emerging. They did not take sides in a way that might have jeopardized their credibility with the parties, but they were not neutral in the usual sense. They worked behind the scenes, between meetings, and during meetings to find elements of agreement that could be treated separately and items on which the momentum of the negotiations could be used to pressure holdouts. Susskind challenges the fundamental notion of content neutrality by suggesting that the facilitators’ content knowledge and their stake in the outcome were actually needed to reach a viable agreement.

Significant research has been conducted by mediators and facilitators about the conundrum of asymmetrical power and whether or not third parties should “get involved.” In terms of mediation, Michelle Maiese suggests, “Some definitions of neutrality say no, that would violate the mediator’s code of conduct,” and she goes on to say, “but most mediators acknowledge that a relatively even balance of power is necessary to obtaining a fair settlement.” As Maiese further points out,

Inherently one of the mediator’s central functions is to guide the communication process in such a way that all parties have a fair chance to participate in decision-making. Fulfilling this responsibility can become particularly problematic in cases where there is a huge discrepancy in the parties’ ability to communicate effectively, or one party is so overpowering that the other does not speak up to defend their own interests.
Maiese suggests that providing fair chances to participate in decision-making is a central function of mediation. In most cases, this is true for facilitation as well. It demands courage to build opportunities into the process design for voices to be elevated and to creatively and strategically balance power either as part of the process, during breaks, prior to a process, or thereafter, as needed. This expressed need and expectation fundamentally challenges notions of “neutrality.”

Christopher Moore is a practitioner who argues “efforts on the part of mediators to redress power imbalances between the parties will fly in the face of their alleged neutrality.” He suggests that the mediator take steps to help the weaker party to mobilize the power he or she already possesses. However, unless the mediator has the approval of both sides, he or she should not act directly to develop new power for the weaker disputant. To act as a direct advocate puts neutrality and impartiality at risk.

Christopher Moore’s work informs mediation and facilitation training nationwide, highlighting where, perhaps, the disconnect is between what facilitators identify as their role as “neutral” third parties and what participants expect, particularly in relation to power imbalance issues. Moore’s statement feels disconnected to me in that he professes that developing new power for the weaker disputant may usurp neutrality, when in the International Association for Facilitators Statement of Values and Code of Ethics, one of the identified values is “Respect, Safety, Equity, and Trust,” qualified by the statement:

> We strive to engender an environment of respect and safety where all participants trust that they can speak freely and where individual boundaries are honoured. We use our skills, knowledge, tools, and wisdom to elicit and honour the perspectives of all.

How, as a facilitator, are you to promote “equity” in particular without developing “new power for the weaker party”?

Maiese responds to this concern by saying that neutrality can often lead to unfair settlements in mediation, when “the mediator is unable to correct power imbalances in the course of the mediation process, or to counter an unfair outcome.” She goes on to say that neutrality may result in an unfair settlement and a loss of rights for the weaker party. Thus, in cases where power is inequitably distributed, neutral intervention may simply allow for the domination of one group by another and lead to unjust settlements. In facilitation, we are often asked to become engaged because groups are having difficulty moving forward, whether that be in planning, resolving conflicts, collaborating, or another
process. By maintaining a commitment to neutrality we risk reinforcing the challenges we were brought in to fix. Several years ago, Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess wrote that since neutral mediators cannot adequately address these difficulties, what was needed, in addition, were “enlightened advocacy advisors.” They go on to say,

In response to this problem, the dispute resolution field has struggled to find a way to add empowerment responsibilities to the role of the neutral intervener. Unfortunately, it appears that as the neutral’s empowerment efforts expand, his or her ability to successfully carry out the neutral role diminishes.

When groups of people have been marginalized, there may be a deep tendency to withdraw from engaging in political discourse, to be distrustful of the system within which they are operating, and to lack any hope of affecting decisions. What this usually demands of facilitators, then, is that they need to encourage, coach, and spend more time with these groups so that they can participate fully in a process and articulate their interests and positions in a way that is both educational and persuasive to others in the process. We are also often expected to present the political pathways to decision-making as well as the terrain within which we are operating. Leah Wing, director and trainer at the Social Justice Mediation Institute, states, “since conflict occurs within a larger social context in which aspects of identity and oppression are present, these factors ought to be fundamental to our considerations of mediation intervention techniques and processes.” By viewing the mediation process with a social justice perspective, the implicit power dynamics perpetuated by the society in which we live are actively addressed and thus a more honest dialogue can take place between disputants. Wing’s comment connects my discussion of the roles facilitators play vis-à-vis internal/external power imbalances with justice issues, which relates specifically to my two case studies. Wing’s view is that where we situate power is directly related to history and oppression and should be addressed in mediation and facilitation processes honestly and deeply.

Clearly those in the field of conflict resolution have grappled with this idea of neutrality for quite some time. My research, however, uniquely illuminates the participants’ needs more clearly, thereby clarifying the role that neutrality plays in facilitation.

**Alternatives to Neutrality**

After I participated in the 2003 training designed by [Tamara] Walsh and Pono Mansfeld on “Facilitating in Pacific Ways,” as well as subsequent opportunities to observe their facilitation styles, I
felt confident that grounded alternatives to neutrality existed. [Walsh], whose work I focus on in the
first case study, and Mansfeld suggested a more realistic alternative to neutrality, multipartiality. Their
interpretation of multipartiality is consistent with what others like Leah Wing, Deepkita Mayra,
Christopher Moore, Canadian Gerszon Associates, and members of the German Berghof
Foundation have introduced as “multipartial” mediation or facilitation. All propose multipartiality as
a more realistic description of the roles we are expected to play, suggesting that it meets the needs of
the client as well as the participants more fully.

Moore in particular gradually shifted his perspective between 1996 and 2010. Initially, he claimed that
before the process begins, the independent mediator should explain that he or she is impartial in his or
her views and neutral in his or her relationship to the parties. Later, however, Moore spoke more of the
term that is becoming more popular and is actually a good one, multipartial, in other words we are not removed, we
are partial to all parties to get their interests met. Within the context of multipartiality there are also broader
principles of fairness and reasonableness that mediators need to be comfortable with as well as parties.

Moore goes on to explain that “multipartiality assumes that a facilitator will be “partial” to whoever
needs support to fully engage with others to get their interests met, helping remove barriers to
participation.” Moore highlights the ethical component of facilitation by suggesting that
multipartiality ensures that mediators, facilitators, and others working as third party intermediaries do
not perpetuate harm that is being done through the processes used and the decisions that are made. He
uses the example of facilitating a multi-party public process in a developing country where a large
extracting company is being accused of taking significant advantage of the local people as a dilemma
for mediators or facilitators. He suggests that as a facilitator, it is his responsibility to introduce options
of reciprocity, like a Community Development Fund, emphasizing that he does not make the decisions
for them, but rather ensures that more fair and just alternatives are considered.

Others, like Wing and Marya (2007), provide a supporting and more detailed definition of
multipartiality.

Multipartiality differs from impartiality in that the facilitator “favors all” instead of “favoring none” in conflict
resolution by tending to diverse needs so that all stories may be told. Multipartial strategies include: 1) Notice and
seek to understand asymmetry that exists between parties; 2) Consider the momentum or distraction the facilitator’s
social identity brings to the process; 3) Take responsibility for actively equalizing power; 4) Make social identity available as a topic; 5) Understand that context is always relevant; and 6) Emphasize creating a safe space.80

[Walsh]’s work is guided by the following five commitments, consistent with multipartial engagement (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011):

1) Participation needs to be voluntary in training/planning
2) Processes [are] customized for each unique setting
3) Processes are built for sustainability
4) Processes are data informed
5) Processes and outcomes are in the best interest of the “community.”

Her assumptions include the following (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011):

Generally, people desire to be fully heard and [have] their humanity respected;

People value democratic processes;

Power is abused more frequently than not and it is the facilitator’s responsibility to (a) be aware and (b) work towards balancing that power through creative process;

It is the ethical responsibility of facilitators to ensure that processes and outcomes “do no harm” to those in the room and the community at large; and

When processes are being irrevocably influenced from those in power at the expense of others in the room or the community … the facilitator has the ethical responsibility to pull-out of the contract if amendments cannot be made.

Risks of multipartiality are plentiful and include: (a) seeming too partial to one particular individual and/or group or idea, thereby losing the trust of others; (b) having too much influence over the outcomes; (c) being too involved in the conversations in the room; (d) upsetting people by publicly identifying issues of unjust decisions and practices, to name a few. Through the case study analyses, these challenges will be explicitly presented. When working with people with disparate views, high levels of sensitivity and creativity are needed, particularly when moving beyond the bounds of neutrality. What facilitators find and what was confirmed in my case study interviews is that issues of culture, power imbalances, politics, content knowledge, and expertise all challenge the underlying assumptions of the need for neutral facilitation.
**Hybridized Facilitation Designs**

Iris Young challenges some versions of deliberative democracy as cutting political processes too sharply away from cultural forms of communication. She says, “by restricting their concept of democratic discussion narrowly to critical argument, most theorists of deliberative democracy assume a culturally biased conception of discussion that tends to silence or devalue some people or groups.”

Young further argues that “a broader conception of communicative democracy requires in addition to critical argument” that allows for culturally specific greeting, rhetoric and storytelling.”

Habermas, Young, and others highlight how deliberative democracy could favor one “culture” over another based on communication norms. But this depends on how the process is structured. How a facilitator empowers every individual to engage in deliberation with his or her unique communication patterns will determine how deliberative any given process is.

Multipartiality provides a facilitator approach that can more readily address issues of politics and power, especially when the power differential between parties is high. A position of multipartiality can also assist in the design of a process. For example, when working with people with high ethnic and historical diversity, a western conflict resolution modality may not feel comfortable to participants, creating obstacles for some if a process is not modified in some way. If the facilitator and her participants are confident in her multipartiality, she will ensure that the process design meets the needs of all participants and this could mean the creation of a “hybrid” process that incorporates non-western protocol, communication strategies, and design. Multipartiality in and of itself could be viewed as a hybridized role for a facilitator, combining a myriad of roles. Over the last two decades, a considerable amount of research has informed the alternative dispute resolution field of “multicultural” or “hybridized” processes of mediation and facilitation that are more creatively designed to meet the challenges of working within communities steeped in effects of colonialism, racism, and multiple forms of oppression. Such processes blend practices from diverse communities and are designed to accommodate the various differences in the room. The literature spans a variety of disciplines, highlighting not only that there is increased attention to multipartiality but also a fundamental need for it in the different facets of our lives. The following is a short list of such disciplines: conflict resolution, indigenous studies, political science, sociology, and planning.
The need for such research stemmed from the limitations practitioners in the field were experiencing when applying western methods of conflict resolution, which had the general assumptions of individuality, low-context communication, argumentation, linear methodology, and relatively top-heavy decision-making processes. Among the menagerie of differences in nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on, these methods and assumptions placed great limitations on our work. Many people of diverse identities either outwardly resisted engagement or simply remained on the sidelines because the framework was culturally not comfortable or familiar. Additionally, the relationship between the third party intervener as a mediator or facilitator began to blur. As expressed by Trujillo and her colleagues:

The basic assumptions: that a third party intervener could and should be neutral; that power imbalances among disputants rooted in social structures of inequality could be righted through (western) collaborative process; that conflict interveners could and should mediate process not content, suggested an absence of power relationship between professional and clients; that empowerment was the conflict intervener’s to endow.

Through their own professional work and recent compilation of essays, Trujillo and others have suggested that, “A sizeable number of people of color feel largely invisible in the accepted training modalities and literature, perceiving their experience and insights to lie outside the boundaries of what is defined as pertinent knowledge.” Clearly, there is a transformation and a “re-centering” occurring in the field.

The field of facilitation is surprisingly expansive and complex. When I began with my initial training in facilitation many years ago, it was presented as relatively straightforward, with a clear formula and a delineated position of neutrality. My own experiences challenged me greatly to view and engage with the work differently. [Walsh] provided me with an opportunity to learn and experiment with what I found to be more applicable and successful approaches that fell well beyond the bounds of neutrality. In doing so, I was met with the risks of multipartial engagement and needed to explore more fully how to most effectively deal with the issues of power, politics, and history that are present in every group with which facilitators engage. Having the opportunity to observe and fully participate in the following case studies allowed me to dig much deeper into discovering the most strategic ways of working with these complexities. Most importantly, the participants’ feedback through my interviews revealed that participants expect us to move beyond neutrality, albeit cautiously.
**Dissertation Format**

I will first provide a comprehensive background of the field of conflict resolution, distinguishing *facilitation* from the other methods of problem-solving, and explain more thoroughly [Walsh]'s and my own approaches to the work. I will then introduce my case studies and the methodology I used to conduct my research. A thorough exploration of how facilitation and perceptions of neutrality mesh with the complexities of politics, deliberation, and democracy will integrate data from my interviews. Findings will be presented throughout my dissertation, but a chapter has been dedicated solely to my participants’ feedback on facilitator neutrality, which will introduce alternative roles participants may desire facilitators to play.
Chapter 1 Complexities of Facilitation

Assumptions, Pluralism, and Culture

“The role of a facilitator is to get people together and get shit done.”
—A seasoned facilitator

This chapter will explore facilitation more deeply by providing a brief history of the field in the United States, propose a set of practice assumptions, explore how culture may impact the role facilitators play, and conclude with a description of a facilitation continuum that introduces the variety of facilitation approaches beginning with neutrality-based approaches and concluding with more advocacy-based approaches.

What Is Facilitation?
Facilitation is a unique process relative to other forms of conflict resolution approaches in that it involves multiple parties and often engages people over a longer period of time rather than engaging two opposing parties within an established time frame.

In the United States, the citizenry has opportunities to directly influence public policies and thus a need for formalizing such exchanges emerged. “Go-betweens” or “trusted leaders,” people who could help guide the dialogue in a safe environment, were identified and eventually such roles were labeled “facilitators.” Facilitation became a paid practice in the United States during the civil rights movement in the 1960s as a tool to assist people in “becoming architects of their own future.”

Michael Doyle explains group facilitation as “an informal, flexible alternative to the constricting format of parliamentary procedure.” He adds that facilitation is “an approach that is proactive, solving conflicts before they arise, as well as one that can handle multiple constituencies. It is a viable alternative to mediation style approaches.”

The formalization of the field began following the emergence of learning facilitators, who organized in the 1960s to play key roles in “the nascent human potential movement” and the “women’s consciousness raising movement.”

In learning or encounter groups, the facilitator’s focus was on building awareness and enabling learning through dialogue. Soon thereafter, task-oriented group facilitation emerged in industrial and information-rich societies where time is a key factor, to find methods for people to work together more effectively. Doyle and David Straus were the
two co-founders of meeting facilitation in the 1960s, followed by Geoff Ball and David Sibbet with their “tight-knit organization development and training community in the San Francisco Bay Area” in the 1970s. Doyle explains, “We saw group facilitation as both a social contract and a new, content neutral role—a more formalized third party role in groups.”

About a decade after the first formalization of meeting facilitation, the alternative dispute resolution community began identifying facilitation as a viable alternative to mediation, negotiation, and arbitration, particularly when conflicts involved the larger community and multiple parties. Facilitation was identified as a viable tool to connect policy makers with their constituencies. Public issues addressed through facilitation included the environment, public health, education, land disbursements, urban planning, poverty, and other concerns that directly affected the community. Through this particular type of facilitation, the process is grounded in “public deliberation.” Public deliberation is defined as “a combination of careful problem analysis and an egalitarian process in which participants have adequate speaking opportunities and engage in attentive listening or dialogue that bridges divergent ways of speaking and knowing.

James Bohman defines public deliberation as “a dialogical process of exchanging reasons for the purpose of resolving problematic situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation.” He goes on to defend why public deliberation is a necessary strategy for creating effective and sustainable solutions:

Consider how risk averse the public is in comparison with experts. Even if decisions made by a public were not always as reliable as decisions that would be made by its best informed members, public deliberation could still be positively defended on other grounds; one could simply argue that it is constitutive of the autonomy of citizens. Although self-expression is a political value, this is not my argument here. Rather, I argue that the best defense of public deliberation is that it is more likely to improve the epistemic quality of the justifications for political decisions. When deliberation is carried out in an open public forum, the quality of the reasons is likely to improve. In such a forum, public opinion is more likely to be formed on the basis of all relevant perspectives; interests and information are less likely to exclude legitimate interests, relevant knowledge or appropriate dissenting opinions. Improving the quality of the reasons employed in political justification will ultimately affect the quality of the outcomes that they produce: reasons will be more public, in the sense that they reflect the broader input of all the deliberators who are affected.

Bohman is suggesting that engaging in public deliberation not only boosts public opinion of political decisions but also enhances the quality of outcomes by including legitimate interests, relevant knowledge, and dissenting opinions. By expanding the influence on political decisions, the quality of
the outcomes is enhanced. Negotiation and mediation may be used throughout facilitative processes but are not always necessary. Mendelberg illustrates how public deliberation has been around since the creation of city-states in Greece as a means of engaging the citizenry:

The celebration of public deliberation by citizens has a long history that flows from the city-states of ancient Greece to the town hall meetings of colonial New England to the salons and cafes of Paris to, most recently, internet forums and chat rooms. At least one tradition within democratic theory has long designated public deliberation as a cornerstone of participatory democracy and representative government (Barber 1984; Connolly 1983; Dahl 1989; Dewey 1954 [1927]; Fishkin 1992, 1995; Habermas 1996; Mansbridge 1983).101

In Mendelberg’s description, the “group” is defined by the state, which has the decision-making authority, and its citizenry, whom the decisions directly affect. Similar structures can be found within organizational institutions and social groups as well. Being a part of a “group” is ubiquitous and found within every culture around the world. As Fred Alford suggests: “In the beginning was the group. This is the fundamental truth about human nature and politics, and neither modern nor contemporary political theory has yet come to terms with it.”102 How groups work together and make decisions, and the means by which the group is informally “facilitated,” is determined by the group’s cultural norms, whether that culture is influenced by ethnicity, gender, age, position in society, economic status, sexuality, or other factors. Group dynamics are also determined fundamentally by the legal structure within which the group is situated. Within more democratic environments, decision-making processes often involve someone or some group stepping forward to lead a discussion, organize people, and make decisions. In such environments, decision-making is often more collaborative whereas in more autocratic environments, decision-making is centralized in a few key leaders in a group.

It has become increasingly common for federal, state, or city agencies or community organizations to hire a third party to engage all affected parties in collaboratively resolving an issue. A typical facilitation process involves the facilitator meeting with the client, or entity that hired her/him, reaching out to parties to learn more about the context, designing a process for engaging affected parties, facilitating the process, and providing documentation of the process and agreements that were reached to all parties.

Sam Kaner identifies the following as “participatory values” that guide facilitation practice.
In 1983, the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) Board of Directors charged the SPIDR Ethics Committee with the task of developing ethical standards of professional responsibility because they were finding that government agencies were using such processes to their advantage, by using public participation efforts as a façade to hide a lack of real community engagement. One of the facilitators I interviewed was on the Ethics Committee and subsequently contributed to the more updated version, “Best Practices for Government Agencies: Guidelines for Using Collaborative Agreement-Seeking Processes.” In his words:

The government was using these methods as a way of making themselves look good and the whole field had to push back and ensure we provided proper guidelines to hold agencies accountable and to educate people on what to look for in consensus building efforts. Agencies would try to control who was invited to participate, co-opted participants to a process or prescribed and mandated approaches that were not in the best interest of those most affected. (Greg Bourne, telephone interview, 08.08.2011)

Bourne and his colleagues worked to codify conflict resolution processes between government and its citizens, focusing on the role of facilitated public deliberation as a viable means for engaging citizens more directly in public policy issues. For the purpose of this research, it will be this particular form of facilitation that will be presented and analyzed through my community-based case studies.

**Western Facilitation Methods**

In the *Facilitator’s Fieldbook*, Thomas Justice and David W. Jamieson echo Doyle’s definition by stating,
Facilitation is the design and management of structure and processes that help a group do its work and minimize the common problems people have working together. Facilitation is therefore a neutral process (with respect to the content and participants) that focuses on:

- what needs to be accomplished
- who need to be involved
- design, flow and sequence of tasks
- communication patterns, effectiveness, and completeness
- appropriate levels of participation and the use of resources
- group energy, momentum and capability
- the physical and psychological environment.

It is difficult to define specific facilitation methods because methods used are contingent on (a) the expected outcomes, (b) the people and interests in the room, (c) the scope of the work, and (d) the values of the facilitator. Michael Doyle shares a comprehensive list of common “ingredients” to group facilitation:

I see group facilitation as a whole constellation of ingredients: a deep belief in the wisdom and creativity of people; a search for synergy and overlapping goals; the ability to listen openly and actively; a working knowledge of group dynamics; a deep belief in the inherent power of groups and teams; a respect for individuals and their points of view; patience and a high tolerance for ambiguity to let a decision evolve and gel; strong interpersonal and collaborative problem-solving skills; an understanding of thinking processes; and a flexible versus a lock-step approach to resolving issues and making decisions.

Doyle’s ingredients provide a thorough set of values that facilitators bring to a room. Justice and Jamieson (1998) provide nine primary core steps of facilitation that introduce more of the mechanics:

- Analyzing information about purposes, desired outcomes, work context, and participants to determine the best approach.
- Designing meetings to enable the group to succeed at its purposes using appropriate structures, processes and sequences.
- Establishing group climate, norms, and roles with the group to help members do their work.
- Creating and implementing structures and processes to accomplish tasks and meet objectives.
- Intervening to manage group dynamics, to enforce norms, and to influence what members are doing and how they are doing it.
- Coaching/training group leaders and members in effective behaviors.
- Evaluating meeting and facilitation effectiveness to make adaptations and enhance the group’s learning.
- Navigating decision processes through the established organizational hierarchy or decision structure.
- Ensuring follow-up action related to production and distribution of the meeting record, results, communication with stakeholders and implementation of decisions.

Although processes vary, the majority of western approaches follow a similar flow to what Justice and Jamieson outlined. What determines the process is often influenced by a facilitator’s assumptions based on what they have learned and experienced.
Assumptions of Facilitation

When the field was being formalized in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, neutrality was cited as one of the key pillars of the practice, and it was defined as refraining from taking sides or having a stake in the outcome. Doyle defines a facilitator as

an individual who enables groups and organizations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. She or he is a “content neutral” party who by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view during the meeting can advocate for fair, open and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group’s work.107

Similarly, in “Best Practices for Government Agencies: Guidelines for Using Collaborative Agreement-Seeking Processes,” one of the eight recommendations for government officials to help ensure successful use of collaborative processes was: “The sponsoring agency should ensure the facilitator’s neutrality and accountability to all participants.”108 The majority of us trained in the practices of facilitation have been greatly influenced by Doyle and Justice and Jamieson’s work. And since then, numerous assumptions about facilitation have emerged.

I will introduce four professional conflict resolution practitioners whose work spans the globe. Each provides interesting comparisons between western and non-western approaches to facilitation. First, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, an associate professor at the American University’s School of International Service in International Peace and Conflict Resolution in Washington, D.C., and director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute, compares Western and Middle Eastern conflict resolution methodologies. He observed that the emergence of conflict resolution as an interdisciplinary field grew out of five movements in the United States that swept across management, academics, religion, the legal system, and family life:

1) The industrial and labor management based on the work of which emerged from the organizational relations in the 1960s (Shepard and Mouton (1964); 2) the problem-solving and mediation workshops which were introduced in international relations by Burton (1969), Kelman (1976), Doob (1971), and Mitchell (1981); 3) religious figures redirected their work in peace-related endeavors to an emphasis on “peace-making” (Scimecca, 1987); 4) lawyers and the court system were criticized by the general public which resulted in what is known today as alternative dispute resolution (ADR); and 5) the interpersonal and family disputes practices emerged as another level of conflict resolution derived from human relations practices, as led by Walton (1971), Hynes (1981), and Coogler (1978).109
Through the professionalization of the field, practices became rationalized and, naturally, were influenced by the cultural backgrounds of the writers. Trainings were created, centers were established, and codes of ethics drafted. There existed an overarching set of western assumptions in the original publications and trainings.

Second is John Paul Lederach, known for both his writing and his social justice activities. Lederach has practiced on the periphery of western methodologies and is widely known for his pioneering work on conflict transformation worldwide. He describes western conflict resolution practices as the “North American Model,” and he explains its assumptions as follows:

1. Mediation (and/or facilitation) is formalized and often takes place inside.

2. Face to face communication is assumed.

3. There are many assumptions about time and temporal organization and it is linear in thinking.

4. A large degree of autonomy and individualism is assumed. People are expected to be responsible for resolving their own conflicts with a strong emphasis on “I.”

5. A core assumption of the varying problem solving roles defined is the “outsider-neutral,” suggesting that the facilitator should come from outside the conflict situation and have no commitment or connection to either side.\textsuperscript{10}

Abu-Nimer provides a complimentary set of assumptions he observed during his research. His observations include:

1. Conflict resolution can benefit both parties, and has the potential to satisfy conflicting interests and needs of the parties, particularly those of the underdog parties.

2. One can rely on interest-based negotiation and a cooperative approach to achieve a task. In this case the parties used a collaborative decision making process to reach consensus over an action plan.

3. Existing civic laws are accepted as a main framework for intervention in a dispute (Merry, 1989).

4. Third party and the general communities perceived the law as rules to be preserved and used for achieving their goals, therefore, the outcomes had to be according to legal procedures.

5. Since Western society is based on individualism (Bellah et al., 1985), then people who are not related directly to a conflict have minimal involvement in the process and outcome of any settlement.

6. Social pressure and relationships do not operate as influential factors that increase parties’ commitments to the settlement.

7. Conflict is not necessarily a negative interaction that should be avoided. On the contrary, facing and confronting a conflict is a basic assumption in the Western conflict resolution approach.
8. Face-to-face negotiation and bargaining is assumed to be the most effective approach for dealing with disputes.  

Third, Leah Wing, a professor and practitioner of social justice mediation, describes the value of neutrality in western conflict resolution practices as being based within a western ideology of positivism. She argues that a “commitment to the Western values of positivism and its attending concept of neutrality are at the core of the hegemonic paradigm permeating mediation literature and practice in the United States.” Wing links neutrality to positivism by suggesting that taking a position of neutrality can risk serving some while not serving others, often those in marginalized positions.

Fourth, Elli Nagai-Rothe complements Wing’s assertion by suggesting that conflict resolution methodologies are naturally defined by cultural assumptions: “Mainstream conflict resolution practices and methodologies are espoused as being culturally neutral. However, these foundational assumptions at the core of the mediation process carry implicit cultural meaning and are shaped by specific culturally bound systems and epistemologies.” Wing asks some important questions about the core values and assumptions within the western notion of neutrality:

Whose interests are being served in Alternative Dispute Resolution practices based on the concept of neutrality? When differing experiences of violence and of access to power, decision making, and respect impact the lives of the participants, who is better served when power inequities are attended to by neutrality?

These are important questions to ask of the field in critically examining if and when it is necessary to move beyond the bounds of neutrality. My research focuses specifically on the assumption of a “neutral” third party being the most viable facilitator for public processes.

Another significant shared assumption by many participants and facilitators is that facilitations will be designed with values of “pluralism.” Diana Eck from the Pluralism Project at Harvard University provides this definition of pluralism:

1. Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity.
2. Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference.
3. Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments.
4. Pluralism is based on dialogue.
Eck continues, “Dialogue does not mean everyone at the ‘table’ will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.”

William Connolly describes how pluralism provides a space for the legitimacy of new ideas and solutions, as it is marked not only by a constitutive tension between the already established pattern of diversity and the periodic eruption of new constituencies seeking a place on the register of legitimacy. It is also defined by multiple sites of potential citizen action, within and above the state.

It is at this site of “potential citizen action” that facilitators of public processes reside and grapple with the efficacies of their processes. The goal of taking “the responsibility to show respect for credible alternatives while pushing the strengths of your own” seems laudable. How such dialogue is carried out, how diverse identities are honored yet encouraged to remain fluid, how equitable access to decision-making is ensured are the critical issues facing practitioners. Pluralism invites the juxtaposition of individual and group identity and attempts to allow the paradoxes to collide respectfully with the expectation that creative solutions will emerge. Theoretically, pluralism sounds idyllic if everyone is truly equal. Practically speaking, the realization of pluralism is deeply challenging to facilitate and implement with its representation of a myriad of identities steeped in rich histories and values.

Is an assumed context or goal of pluralism necessary for public deliberation to be safe, effective, and potentially transformative? I would say yes, in any given environment, given the diversities of perspectives, but I would also challenge the fundamental assumption that everyone necessarily desires “pluralism.” Is not pluralism antithetical to cultural purity and/or sovereignty? Accepting “plurality” as what is and what will be is almost assuming that sovereignty is not possible. Although pluralism provides for a framework and an eventual ideal, challenges remain as to how to effectively implement the virtues of pluralism into the contexts of public deliberations throughout our communities. This section provided a brief comparative literature overview of western and non-western approaches to facilitation. I will explore in more depth the three pillars of pluralism put forward by Connolly.
The Three Pillars of Pluralism

In facilitation, pluralism is often an assumed goal. In both case study facilitation processes, the three pillars described by Connolly were honored: *politics of becoming, agonistic respect, and critical responsiveness*. These three pillars offer great insights and provide a foundational framework for conducting deliberative processes in the islands.

Connolly describes the *politics of becoming* as

that paradoxical politics by which new and unforeseen things surge into being, such as a new and surprising religious faith, a new source of moral inspiration, a new mode of civilizational warfare, a new cultural identity unsettling an existing constellation of established identities, a new collective good, or a placement of a new right on the existing register of recognized rights.120

This type of politics assumes a transformation not only of possible solutions, but even of the identity of those who are helping shape such solutions. Multipartial versus neutral facilitative approaches encourage richer, deeper, and more equitable participation, which would be a pre-requisite to the *politics of becoming*. [Walsh]’s approach advocates for such politics of becoming in something she refers to as Higher Ground,121 whereby “disparate groups form agreements that clarify and document (a) a group’s particularized aspirations and values, (b) agreement about specific principled conscious and constructive behaviors, and (c) how the agreements will be strategically used to increase the group’s capacity to fulfill its purpose and potential.”122 Higher Ground is a methodology that is utilized toward the latter portion of a group’s engagement. If it is approached too soon and in some instances if it is approached at all, it threatens those groups who have no intention of continuing to work with one another or fear that collaborative engagement will threaten one’s identity through assimilation. This issue will be addressed in the latter half of this work. In both case studies, there was an intention to transform relationships, and committing to working differently with one another in the future was a goal.

Connolly’s second pillar, *agonistic respect*, is described initially through the lens of faith groups coming together but is similarly important to any groups coming together from divergent perspectives:

Agonistic respect grows out of mutual appreciation for the ubiquity of faith to life and the inability of contending parties, to date, to demonstrate the truth of one faith over another It grows out of reciprocal appreciation for the element of contestability in these domains.123
“Faith” can be replaced by “interests” or “values”—to understand the interests of “others” and to admit the contestability of one’s own interests and desires is critical to moving forward on creating solutions that empower the diversity of voices. Multipartial facilitation strives to reach the human being behind each identity that enters the room and to help foster the creation of threads of commonality that participants can cling to when their projected identities cause confrontations. As Connolly goes on to say, “In a relation of agonistic respect, something in the faith, identity, or philosophy of the engaged parties is placed at risk,” a comment that introduces the complexity and challenges of developing such fundamental respect among participants who are otherwise defined by their differences and who often strategically use their represented differences as a source of bargaining strength. Participants in both case studies committed to what Connolly refers to as “agonistic respect,” ensuring relationships were preserved while having safe and difficult conversations.

Connolly’s third pillar, and the one that I would argue is the most critical in terms of reaching either politics of becoming or agonistic respect, is critical responsiveness:

It takes the form of careful listening and presumptive generosity for constituencies struggling, to move from an obscure or degraded subsistence below the field of recognition, justice, obligation, rights or legitimacy to a place on one or more of those registers.

Critical responsiveness provides a critical space for those who enter a deliberation with a history of being suppressed, and it encourages a collective response for possible redress and empowerment for such groups and individuals. In multipartial approaches, this is the most challenging in that it demands that the facilitator risk her perceived neutrality by bolstering the ability of participants who would otherwise be marginalized by the discourse to participate effectively and fully in a deliberative process. It is done in coaching sessions before the deliberation as well as strategically carried out during deliberations. Additionally, it challenges all participants, regardless of power status, to effectively listen and, as Connolly suggests, it is not enough to make assertions and give reasons, one must also be heard. Democratic theorists, politicians, and advocates of social issues value speaking, but they less often focus on the more important component of listening and actually hearing. In the [AIEP] case study, participants entered the room with a relatively similar shared history of colonization, so “critical responsiveness” among the participants was a given. However, it was a tipping point when the USDOE began to recognize and truly hear what [AIEP] participants were advocating, which was a new set of indicators for academic success. In the second case study, by the end of the coalition building, HE‘E
participants were able to critically hear one another and respond with strategic solutions that could meet all needs.

If facilitations are steeped in values of pluralism and pluralistic democracies involve multiple cultures and perspectives, it is important for this research to explore what I mean by culture.

**What is Culture?**

On the wings of what has been termed globalization, a significant amount of research has been conducted regarding how to negotiate and facilitate cross-culturally. From the late 1970s through the 1990s, much of the literature on cross-cultural negotiation was situated on the boundaries of national identity and employed insightful lenses through which to examine national negotiation and conflict resolution strategies. The shortcoming of cross-cultural literature rooted in national boundaries and traditional essentialist views is that it presupposes certain behaviors for the majority of individuals residing within a particular nation or who share the same skin color. It fails to consider diverse elements of gender, race, socioeconomic differences, positions, power, and politics that affect every individual residing in any nation around the world.

By not recognizing the complexities of culture, defined by variables beyond ethnic identity, facilitators can fall into a trap of making false assumptions about the groups with which they are engaging. For example, within the Hawaiian community, one organization or group will operate quite differently from another, despite shared missions or “cultural identity,” because they are influenced by unique histories, decision-making structures, visions, and personalities.

When Benhabib cites the “complexities of culture,” she is incorporating cultures of gender, socioeconomic status, sexual preference, positions of authority, and decision-making, and area foci such as education, public health, business, nonprofit, military, and government. In facilitation, the challenge is to look even more deeply into the individual culture of each person. As one participant expressed her opinion when I asked the question about the importance of facilitators being “culturally responsive,”

Culture means something different to me. It’s a way of thinking, organizing, making decisions, communicating, sharing with one another and every group has its unique culture. Every professional area has a “culture”; cultures of
education, nonprofit, for profit, public health, academia, etcetera. Every community has a culture, even if it’s made up of people with multiple ethnicities. Every family has a culture. We have to start thinking this way. I’m not from here but I look “local.” Growing up in California, I never had to explain my identity like I do here. When I begin working with new groups, I spend 15–20 minutes fielding questions about where I went to high school, where my family is from, and when they learn that I am actually not from here, it takes that much longer for me to gain trust. (#1, 05.14.11)

For another participant, being culturally responsive meant that the facilitator “respects the person of every participant.” He went on to say, “It’s important that the facilitator does not allow a participant’s cultural bias to sway a process to the detriment of the others in a room. I see this all the time here and I grew up here!” (#4, 05.12.11). What he was really referring to was the emphasis often placed on honoring indigenous Hawaiian traditions and ways of being over other ethnicities and races. He would consider himself “local” and of mixed ethnic descent. With the ethnic and historical complexities present in the islands, many groups feel dishonored or disrespected when too much emphasis is placed solely on Hawaiian protocol and practice. Eighteen out of thirty-one participants and seven out of eight facilitators indicated that “cultural sensitivity” was something they looked for when hiring a facilitator. “Cultural sensitivity” was the sixth most common criterion mentioned by interviewees. Twenty-five out of forty interviewees still spoke to the notion of culture as being purely ethnic. Those who did not specifically mention “cultural sensitivity” most likely would not disregard its importance, rather they simply did not identify this criterion when I asked the question. More interesting responses came in the latter part of the interviews when I asked, “How would you describe a facilitator who is ‘culturally responsive’?”

Participants had strong reactions to the question; they either found “cultural responsiveness” extremely important, dismissed it entirely, or shared rich personal stories of cultural identity in the islands. I find it interesting that, for many, being culturally responsive meant being responsive to Hawaiian culture specifically. Twelve out of thirty participants shared that connecting to “place” is important; understanding the cultural norms such as humility, honoring kūpuna, and opening and closing with pule (or prayer) are important. Two out of the eight facilitators expressed specifically that it is our duty to be more responsive to Hawaiians’ needs to help heal the community at large, which would naturally risk a facilitator’s position of neutrality. This also highlights that every facilitator enters a room with her/his own set of values, which directly influence how one will engage with the group.
Others highlighted the importance of connecting with each unique culture group (or ethnic group) in the room by being tuned in to how members of a particular culture communicate, how their worldviews are shaped, where they come from, and so forth. Specifically for Hawaiians, this was critical. One interviewee expressed, “If a facilitator doesn’t understand our history, appreciate what the Hawaiian people have gone through, they risk reinforcing western systems that don’t work here and continue to oppress our people” (#24, 05.25.11). Similar responses included: “Cultural sensitivity is really important. We need someone we know understands our history and respects present resulting struggles. It’s absolutely critical that the facilitator understands and respects the cultural paradigms in the room” (#25, 05.25.11). Conversely, another interviewee shared, “Trust trumps cultural sensitivity. If one has trust, then culture dynamics are less important” (#26, 05.25.11). The following participants highlighted the delicate balance for facilitators to consider: “If you are too responsive to any one culture in such a diverse place, you will most likely not gain trust or achieve best outcomes for the larger community” and “Honoring ethnicity is nice but not necessary, we live in a multicultural island. Sometimes focusing too much on ‘culture’ bogs down a process” (#3, 05.06.11). [AIEP] participants felt strongly that Hawaiian culture should be catered to in every group process to compensate for the history of colonization. HE’E participants, on the other hand, were very sensitive about elevating any one ethnic cultural group above another. They felt that focusing on individuals was more important. It is interesting that all of the facilitators highlighted the importance of being responsive to individuals rather than making assumptions about any one particular ethnic culture, perhaps because their assumptions have hindered or complicated processes. These responses provide a snapshot into the tensions around ethnic culture, reflective of each group’s unique histories in the islands.

One Hawaiian interviewee provided a strong critique on “cultural sensitivity” when she said,

There is this whole concept in the Department of Education—we’re going to be culturally responsive by implementing lei day, ethnic food, celebration of Hawaiian holidays—it’s an ingredient approach—shallow. We’re not about the additive approach. Culture is the framework by which we operate; philosophically in tune in the way we design programs, operations, the way we engage one another. It’s not an activity, it’s a way of life. (#15, 06.02.11)

It is this “way of life” that facilitators need to learn from each group, regardless of the ethnic boundaries in a room. She speaks more to the depth of “culture,” of “being,” and it is these depths that are necessary to explore as a facilitator, particularly when working with groups in need of empowerment and justice. Each group and/or individual in the room engages with a certain way of...
being and discovering the multitude of representations and, as one participant described it, “pulling out the strengths” should be one of the facilitator’s greatest tools.

When asked if the processes they were engaged in felt culturally responsive, one participant from HE‘E shared,

Yes, I think you were specifically sensitive to Hawaiian culture and that’s appreciated. That was visible but you probably have an innate sense of looking at the group and making sure you see that the conflicts and identities are complex. (#13, 04.15.11)

Not surprisingly, she responded immediately to “ethnic culture.” The broader notion of culture will be integrated throughout the remainder of my dissertation in relation to each case study.

Cultural Influences on Facilitation

The definitions, methods and assumptions shared thus far have been predominately influenced by western styles of facilitation. Wing and Nagai-Rothe begin to discuss the culturally-bound influences of western methodologies. Because western facilitation has been codified and is now taught in higher education settings and around the globe, it is important to look critically at assumptions and how those assumptions are perceived by non-western participants.

Lederach and Abu-Nimer both speak to the five “cultural dimensions” identified by Geert Hofstede—Power Distance Index, Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Masculinity versus Femininity, and Long-term Orientation versus Short-term Orientation—when describing their perceptions of western practice. They also speak to Edward Hall’s Low-Context versus High-Context patterns of communication. Over a period of forty years, Hofstede conducted surveys to determine where people from fifty countries rated themselves within his five dimensions. Descriptions of the five dimensions follow. It is important to note that Hofstede categorizes people by nationality, whereas I am using these indicators more holistically, identifying where groups and individuals, regardless of nationality and/or ethnicity, fall along the identified indexes.

**Power Distance Index (PDI),** that is, the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below, not from above. It suggests that a society’s level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. Power and inequality, of course, are extremely fundamental facts of any society and anybody with some international experience will be aware that “all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others.”
Individualism (IDV) on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. The word “collectivism” in this sense has no political meaning: it refers to the group, not to the state. Again, the issue addressed by this dimension is an extremely fundamental one, regarding all societies in the world.

Masculinity (MAS) versus its opposite, femininity, refers to the distribution of roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found. The IBM studies revealed that (a) women’s values differ less among societies than men’s values; (b) men’s values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women’s values on the one side, to modest and caring and similar to women’s values on the other. The assertive pole has been called “masculine” and the modest, caring pole “feminine.” The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men’s values and women’s values.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) deals with a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to man’s search for Truth. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, different from usual. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth; “there can only be one Truth and we have it.” People in uncertainty avoiding countries are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. The opposite type, uncertainty accepting cultures, are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to; they try to have as few rules as possible, and on the philosophical and religious level they are relativist and allow many currents to flow side by side. People within these cultures are more phlegmatic and contemplative, and not expected by their environment to express emotions.

Long-Term Orientation (LTO) versus short-term orientation: this fifth dimension was found in a study among students in 23 countries around the world, using a questionnaire designed by Chinese scholars It can be said to deal with Virtue regardless of Truth. Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance; values associated with Short Term Orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one’s “face.” Both the positively and the negatively rated values of this dimension are found in the teachings of Confucius, the most influential Chinese philosopher who lived around 500 B.C.; however, the dimension also applies to countries without a Confucian heritage. 

Edward T. Hall describes High-Context cultures as:

- Less verbally explicit communication, less written/formal information
- More internalized understandings of what is communicated
- Multiple cross-cutting ties and intersections with others
- Long term relationships
- Strong boundaries—who is accepted as belonging versus who is considered an “outsider”
- Knowledge is situational, relational
- Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority

Hofstede and others suggest that countries identified as high-context are found in Asia, South and Central America, the Middle-East, and Africa. Community-based examples across the globe include
small religious congregations, a party with friends, family gatherings, neighborhood restaurants with a regular clientele, undergraduate on-campus friendships, and sports teams.¹³⁰

According to Hall, Low-Context cultures share the following characteristics:

- Rule oriented, people play by external rules
- More knowledge is codified, public, external, and accessible
- Sequencing, separation—of time, of space, of activities, of relationships
- More interpersonal connections of shorter duration
- Knowledge is more often transferable
- Task-centered. Decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done, division of responsibilities.
- Countries identified as low context are found in North America and Europe where generally more diversity exists. Community examples worldwide include airports, chain supermarkets, sports where rules are clearly laid out, western for profit business entities.¹³¹

For the purpose of this research, I will be focusing primarily on two of Hofstede’s dimensions that most directly affect the role of a facilitator: Individualism versus Collectivism and the Power Distance Index. I will also be incorporating Hall’s Low-Context and High-Context communication styles. It is important to note that while these paradigms are sometimes useful in describing some aspects of a culture, an entire dissertation could be written on the validity of these cultural dimensions. For example, one can never say a culture is “high” or “low” because societies all contain both modes. “High” and “low” are therefore less relevant as a description of a whole people, and more useful to describe and understand particular groups of people, situations, and environments. When a facilitator is getting to know a group, she should be looking for the unique patterns that define that group only, rather than making assumptions based on group members’ ethnicity, gender, profession, age, and so forth. Particularly in Hawai‘i with its rich ethnic, socioeconomic, and historical diversity, it becomes even more challenging to generalize about groups of people. When I refer to “culture,” I share John Paul Lederach’s meaning: “culture is rooted in the shared knowledge and schemes created and used by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing and responding to social realities around them.”¹³² Although Hofstede’s dimensions are rooted in national cultures, I will apply his dimensions to the unique culture of each group with which a facilitator engages.

To understand how western methodologies have been influenced, it is helpful to look at Hofstede’s results for the United States.
The high Individualism (IDV) ranking for the United States indicates a society with a more individualistic attitude and relatively loose bonds with others. The populace is more self-reliant and looks out for themselves and their close family members.

The next highest Hofstede Dimension is Masculinity (MAS) with a ranking of 62, compared with a world average of 50. This indicates the country experiences a higher degree of gender differentiation of roles. The male dominates a significant portion of the society and power structure. This situation generates a female population that becomes more assertive and competitive, with women shifting toward the male role model and away from their female role.

The United States was included in the group of countries that had the Long Term Orientation (LTO) Dimension added. The LTO is the lowest Dimension for the US at 29, compared to the world average of 45. This low LTO ranking is indicative of the society’s belief in meeting its obligations and tends to reflect an appreciation for cultural traditions.

The next lowest ranking Dimension for the United States is Power Distance (PDI) at 40, compared to the world Average of 55. This is indicative of a greater equality between societal levels, including government, organizations, and even within families. This orientation reinforces a cooperative interaction across power levels and creates a more stable cultural environment.

The last Dimension for the US is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), with a ranking of 46, compared to the world average of 64. A low ranking in the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension is indicative of a society that has fewer rules and does not attempt to control all outcomes and results. It also has a greater level of tolerance for a variety of ideas, thoughts, and beliefs.

Despite Hofstede’s generalizations, “cultural” patterns do play an important role in evaluating how a group operates. Ho-Won Jeong states, “A Western resolution model is more “structured, task oriented, directed towards agreement.” On the other hand, collectivist cultures focus on a “dynamic directed to resolving tension in community,” with an “emphasis on responsibilities of disputing parties and reconciliation.”

Abu-Nimer describes the overlaps of individualism and low-context communication when he says,

The Western model calls for a direct method of interaction and communication. Also the language of emotions and values is perceived as an obstacle to reaching an agreement. The focus on tangible interests and substantial issues is the main concern of the conflict resolver in the American public policy disputes context. In addition, the assumption in Western society is that every behavior is calculated according to rational measures. Therefore, there are generally between 5 and 12 major steps to solve a conflict. These steps are pre-determined and fixed for disputes in the different areas of conflict resolution. This structured model provides the third party with rules and guidelines for behavior.

Abu-Nimer clearly states how individualist cultures tend to use low-context communication. Hall identified the value of low-context communication in situations with a high diversity. A fundamental disconnect is that situations with high diversity often involve people from more collectivist cultures who may not feel comfortable with low-context environments. This fundamental challenge could not be
more pronounced than in Hawai‘i with its rich intertwining of cultures. Such challenges emerge in my case studies, highlighting the need to look critically at facilitator neutrality.

**Cultural Dimensions and Facilitator Neutrality**

Interview results identified four main contexts where a position of “neutrality” was not desirable: (a) groups with collectivist versus individualist group norms, (b) groups with high-context versus low-context communication patterns, (c) groups with power imbalances that hinder effectiveness, and (d) groups that desire content expertise from facilitators. As critical as I am of Hofstede’s and Hall’s tendency to essentialize culture based on nationality or ethnicity, their identified paradoxes resonate when facilitators evaluate a group’s relationships among members, communication patterns, decision-making structures, and content expertise. The following graph demonstrates the correlations between the different contexts and the desire for a neutral third party that I heard expressed in my interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Desire for Neutrality</th>
<th>Why?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collectivist Relationships</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Building relationships is critical, including a close trusting relationship with the facilitator. Often a person from the group or familiar community member is preferred over someone from the outside. Even though the insider may be trusted, they may not be neutral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Context Communication Patterns</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Often part and parcel of a collectivist culture. In order for a facilitator to read verbal and nonverbal cues, the facilitator needs to be familiar with the culture in the room, which demands building relationships, which can perceivably jeopardize a position of neutrality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing Power</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Whether or not the power imbalance is internal or in relation to an external entity, there exists an expectation that the facilitator will ensure to the best of her/his abilities that everyone has opportunity to fully participate in the process, contribute to decision-making, and feel safe in doing so. This could result in facilitators spending more time with certain parties, advocating for others, etc., naturally jeopardizing their position of neutrality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Content Expertise</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Sometimes facilitators are hired for their content expertise as well as their facilitation expertise with an expectation that they will contribute to the content of discussions, coach, train, and strategize as needed. This participation naturally affects outcomes and can be perceived as being too engaged.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The latter two conditions appeared to be the most sensitive for both participants and facilitators. The majority of interviewees, all but two, expressed that it was the role of the facilitator to correct power imbalances to promote a better process. Clients or those hiring facilitators were less comfortable with this condition, feeling that those in leadership positions have a responsibility to make decisions and can risk efficiency or expertise if they share decision-making and/or design. Content expertise was the most sensitive issue, with all interviewees except three suggesting that content knowledge was critical. However, every interviewee commented about the balance needed for a facilitator to contribute when asked, be sensitive to how much they are contributing, and not steer outcomes in favor of a facilitator’s own opinions or those of the client.

If collaboration and democratic processes of discussion and decision-making are expected, then what Hofstede refers to as Power Distance Index needs to be evaluated. If a facilitator identifies that certain individuals and/or groups of people are being disregarded or suppressed in the process design and/or implementation, the facilitator may need to advocate for their participation and do capacity building for them to fully participate. When a facilitator confronts existing power imbalances, this can be viewed as moving beyond the bounds of neutrality. Jeong argues, “The quality of conflict resolution is certainly improved by process-oriented fairness. Yet sustainable peace cannot be achieved by neglecting such concerns as abuse in power asymmetry and ignorance of common good for the community.”

You almost become an advocate of the community—rather than an advocate for any one party. One of my interviewees highlighted this point when she responded that “it almost seems like facilitators are advocates for the group rather than advocates for the client” (#2, 05.06.11). What she was referring to were the numerous discussions we had about the schisms between the divergent outcomes of what the group desired and what she as the client desired.

Jeong concludes with,

In fact, effective resolution may not be achieved by a value-free intervener who is devoid of opinions. In particular, deficiencies with a neutral, noninterventionist third party are clear when one party has low self-esteem, status, and power or is lacking personal confidence. A submissive personality combined with poor verbal and personal skills is likely to presage an unfair outcome for a party, which has nonassertive bargaining strategies. This kind of situation raises questions about strict neutrality.

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Related to high-context communication patterns, non-assertive cultures adopt indirect means of communication (e.g., a go-between) supported by the involvement of recognized leaders. This reduces perceptions of threat through face saving, balances power, and equalizes verbal skills. Jeong suggests that

in linear western models of mediation and facilitation, one thing at a time is discussed within a defined schedule of discrete sessions. On the contrary, issues and relationships are interwoven, while tasks and schedules are secondary to relationships and social ritual in community-oriented cultures.¹³⁸

Jeong touches on characteristics of more collective-oriented groups. Polly Walker echoes Jeong when she suggests that

in the dominant approaches to mediation, mediators and facilitators are valued and selected for their ability to separate themselves from the conflict and for their expertise in the tool of mediation, not for their expertise in the particular conflict at hand. Contrastingly, many indigenous conflict resolution models emphasize relationships over technique, involving family and community members in the collective transformation of conflict.¹³⁹

Walker highlights the contrast between someone without content knowledge and someone close to the participants with content background; her discussion suggests a way of integrating Hofstede’s assumptions about collective cultures and interviewee responses on the need for a facilitator to have content knowledge.

Jeong’s and Walker’s comments illustrate important cultural underpinnings of western societies (individualistic, linear, and time-bound) and of many indigenous communities (communal, inter-connected, and cyclical). These approaches are inherently shaped by culturally bounded assumptions regarding the role of a mediator and/or facilitator. Cultural expectations and norms clearly mold expectations of the role of a facilitator in any given context.

Pluralism, Deliberation, and Culture

Many disruptions exist in implementing pluralist processes, often involving culture.

Risks of Essentializing Culture

Carrie J. Menkel-Meadow, a legal scholar who reflected on the regulatory negotiations between Native American tribes and the Federal Government, introduces the dangers of essentializing cultural groups:
For those of us in the dispute resolution and negotiation field, there remains a spirited debate about whether there really are nationalistic, gendered, racial, cultural, or simply more individual or personal differences in negotiation style or behaviors (see e.g., Gadlin, 1994; Kolb & Coolidge, 1991; Rubin & Sander, 1991). Here with 48 different Indian tribes, there is a danger of essentializing Native American cultures into “one” culture for disputing purposes, which may mask cultural variations among tribes, just as there might be differences among the federal departments involved as well. The danger of essentializing cultures in consensus building environments is that it can lead to too much expected or projected behavior.\textsuperscript{140}

To the degree that individuals connect themselves to such cultural groups, this could be a good thing for building consensus, but to the degree that individuals view themselves differently, we risk, first, insulting and alienating certain individuals, which could affect their willingness to participate fully and, second, missing opportunities for sliding into a “Third Space”\textsuperscript{141} of engagement. Bhabha suggests that this space is, “unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.”\textsuperscript{142} Within this “Third Space,” ideas informed collaboratively from diverse worldviews could be discovered.

Connolly expresses the opinion that

we have already seen enough to appreciate how in a pluralistic society people are both linked by fate and separated by diversities of age and experience, sunk into divergent layers of memory, perception, judgment and action. Perception, judgment and action can be intense because affect clings to the memories that help constitute them and the anticipations that flow from them. Politics does not begin after those issues are settled.\textsuperscript{143}

Those issues are never settled, but finding ways to assist people in, first, connecting to the core of their own identities and, next, discovering points of similarity between their own and others’ identities is the greatest challenge in effective deliberation. Many of the ontological (approaches to identity) and epistemological (approaches to ways of knowing) assumptions rooted in notions of pluralism have presented interesting tangents, which I have had to explore. The most potent disruptions in the realization of pluralism are (a) the democratic assumptions of argument as a form of discourse, (b) equal access to process and decision-making by those affected by policies, and (c) participants’ willingness to revisit people’s identities or interests in response to a plea for agonistic respect.

My personal discomfort with essentializing stems from my day-to-day experiences with people — myself included—who elude their cultural stereotypes, whether those are based on ethnicity, race, gender, or other aspects of identity. Reactions that Richard Fenno encountered during his research on the US Congress show this simply: “The trouble with political scientists,” his participants would say,
“is that you don’t understand that all these personalities are different.”¹⁴⁴ He ended up concluding that the “‘what’s he like—what’s she like’ might be more important than what I had thought.”¹⁴⁵

I am continually confounded by my inability to commit to a lens through which to view this issue and my perpetual vacillation between conversations that use “culture” to generalize about someone’s nationality, ethnicity, or race and conversations with a more nuanced concept of culture that is intrinsically much more complicated, fluid, and malleable. One would think that after fifteen years of being engaged with this issue, I would have a clearer perspective, but the lines are only getting more indistinguishable for me.

Academically and professionally, I strive to adhere to the more generalized definition of culture put forward by Trujillo: “Culture is used generally to connote a social grouping with shared viewpoints, experiences, histories or identities.”¹⁴⁶ She goes on to say, “Who we see ourselves as being, who we are seen by others to be, when one identity matters rather than another (for we all have many identities), these markers of where we live in a complex, shifting geography tie us into the variety of cultures each of us inhabits.”¹⁴⁷ She taps into identity as being multidimensional and fluid, as does Clifford Geertz in his essays in “The Interpretation of Cultures” when he explains that, believing that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”¹⁴⁸ I do feel that one shapes the “webs of significance” oneself, but only in relation to contexts within which individuals are and have been engaged historically. Mary Adams Trujillo claims that “culture informs how conflict is lived, conceptualized, enacted and ultimately how it is resolved or transformed,”¹⁴⁹ regardless of how the cultures are defined.

**Argumentation**

If pluralism assumes an inescapable existence of power, conflict, and contradiction,¹⁵⁰ how can people who are deeply uncomfortable or inexperienced with conflict function in a process designed to confront conflict head on? Argumentation is a culturally bound strategy for engaging in conversation and deliberation. [Walsh] too, deeply believes that participants’ best chance of influencing public policy is through overt and persuasive expression and articulate argumentation (T. [Walsh] interview, 03.20.2008). Chantal Mouffe, in an essay on democracy and difference, accepts the ubiquities of conflict and the demand for confrontation for creative solutions. Mouffe states, “In a democratic polity,
conflicts and confrontations, far from being a sign of imperfection, indicate that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism.”

In the same compilation of essays, Iris Young expresses her apprehensions of such assumptions: “Pluralism’s tendency to restrict democratic discussion to argument carries implicit cultural biases that can lead to exclusions in practice. Individuals may not feel comfortable with nor capable of engaging.” Young goes on to suggest that

the social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others.

She thus introduces not just a discomfort with conflict but a systematic suppression of voice that is inherently experienced within societies and played out in deliberations.

In many deliberations, those with higher degrees often act as though they have a right to speak and that their words carry authority, whereas those of other groups often feel intimidated by “the argument requirements and the formality and rules of parliamentary procedure, so they do not speak, or speak only a way that those in charge find ‘disruptive.’” Argumentation is set up as a competition, a bargaining situation, often as a zero-sum game.

Equality

Pluralism falls short of suggesting how we should navigate such demands in order to recalibrate the inequality of access and experience in deliberation.

Connolly suggests that

a majority assembly in a culture of multidimensional pluralism is more analogous to a potluck supper than a formal dinner. It is fashioned through a series of resonances between local meetings, internet campaigns, television exposes, church organizations, film portrayals, celebrity testimonials, labor rank and file education, and electoral campaigns by charismatic leaders.

[Walsh] applies the potluck analogy by encouraging all to “come and share and ingest new ideas with the intention that they will leave fully satisfied, a bit tired and eager to potluck again” (T. Walsh interview, 03.20.2008). Yet many participants may be intentionally left out of such processes, may be unaware such processes exist, or may not attend because they are unfamiliar with what a deliberation
demands. The challenge lies with not only getting all of the affected voices represented in the room, but also preparing them to participate fully.

Barbara Gray says

Proponents of pluralism argue that it provides the widest access to decision-making arenas of any political process. Groups who want to influence political agendas have the freedom to organize and to express their viewpoints through public hearings, use of the media, lobbying and so forth.\textsuperscript{156}

In reality, the majority of individuals and groups who will be the most affected by certain policies are greatly unfamiliar with lobbying and unskilled in mobilization strategies. If pluralism ensures the freedom to organize and represent one’s interests in a safe forum, then a vehicle for mobilizing such individuals is essential.

\textit{Politics of Identity}

Connolly states,

The most general (and idealistic) idea is to subdue the politics of generalized resentment by moving on two fronts—first, by removing social injustices that exclude a large variety of constituencies from the material and cultural life of the whole and, second, by criticizing modes of existential resentment that intensify social dogmatism with respect to identity, responsibility and otherness. They are interdependent in that a politics of freedom cannot make much progress on either without making some on both.\textsuperscript{157}

Herein lies probably the greatest of disruptions to the realization of pluralism. Pluralistic engagement threatens those who operate within the “politics of identity” and strive for cultural purity by assuming a level of \textit{politics of becoming}, \textit{agonistic respect}, and \textit{critical responsiveness}, thereby weakening their positions and arguments for ethnically or racially defined policies. The reaction of groups striving for independence from nation-states within which they reside would generally find participation in pluralistic deliberations threatening to their cause, yet their voices are essential if policy making is going to reflect the community’s interests.

Connolly states,

My identity … it is deep in its contingency. It is contingent in the sense that happenstances of genetics, family life, historically specific traditions, personal anxieties, demands, and aspirations, surprising events (the death of a parent, the intrusion of a war) all enter into its composition and give shape to the porous universals that mark me as human. It is deep in the sense that some of these elements become impressed into me as second nature, bonded to my first nature and not readily detachable from it.\textsuperscript{158}
Counter to notions of identity being fluid, Connolly puts forth the notion that identity is defined by its contingencies and systematic compartmentalization of who we are socially, politically, and spiritually.

The politics of identity also solidifies identity in order to push legislation and acknowledgement forward in order to benefit an identity-based group. The politics of identity demands a “conscientization”\(^{159}\) of one’s current or historical oppression and creates ways for liberating oneself and one’s group from its constraints. Although the politics of identity serve a greater purpose by providing for marginalized voices to mobilize and regain their position in society through the recreation and perpetuation of their culture, the “politics” of identity can present great challenges, particularly when groups are engaged in pluralistic processes. The challenge becomes how to assist people to move beyond the borders of their identity to engage in a process that may very well threaten the legitimacy of the borders of that identity by expecting individuals to “mutually adjust.”

In response to Nietzsche’s later writings, which expected that any practice of democracy would curtail independence and enhance resentment (which is what threatens many national groups seeking independence), Connolly suggests,

> But if it unfolds through the right idealism, democratic politics can be a medium through which to expose and redress the politics of resentment. Democracy enables (but does not require) anyone to come to terms with the strife and interdependence of identity/difference, to ask whether the drive to punish difference is an expression of existential resentment and whether the overt feelings of indignation reflect a mix of injustices in the world and the demand that the world provide a meaning for existential suffering. When democratic politics is robust, when it operates to disturb the naturalization of settled conventions, when it exposes settled identities to some of the contestable contingencies that constitute them, then one is in a more favorable position to reconsider some of the demands built into those convention and identities.\(^{160}\)

Connolly here suggests a way to understand the potential of pluralism that may appeal to groups engaged in identity politics. The complexities of history, culture, and pluralism mean that a facilitator’s design must be a complicated mosaic. The following discussion presents the multitude of approaches available, which extend well beyond the traditional neutral role.

**Approaches to Facilitation**

Approaches to facilitation occur along a continuum and can be adapted as contexts and participant needs shift. I will present the different approaches in a linear fashion, beginning on one end of the spectrum with the most widely publicized of conventional practices, the neutrality-centered approaches, and ending with riskier and less utilized advocacy approaches.
Neutrality-Centered Approaches

Neutrality-centered approaches assume the involvement of a neutral third party or someone from the outside who comes in to assist. Such third parties are expected to be content-neutral in that they do not contribute to the facts and discussions, have no stake in the outcomes, and are symmetrically distanced from all parties. Benefits of neutrality-centered approaches include (a) providing confidence that the third parties will not be biased toward any one individual and/or group, (b) being from the outside, the facilitators do not have previous relationships with anyone in the group and may provide a fresh set of eyes, (c) they are experts in process and will ensure that the process does not benefit any one group and/or individual over the other, and (d) they do not have a stake in the outcome and will therefore be unbiased in process and content.

Brad Spangler from Beyond Intractability.org shares a description of a neutrality-centered approach:

In the context of U.S. alternative dispute resolution (ADR), facilitation is generally considered to be a process in which a neutral person helps a group work together more effectively. Such facilitators are process leaders only—they have no decision-making authority, nor do they contribute to the substance of the discussion. The facilitator’s job is to lead the group process; to help them improve the way they communicate, examine and solve problems, and make decisions.161

Other professionals in the field provide criteria for neutrality-centered approaches, which compliment Spangler’s. According to experienced mediator Robert Benjamin, neutral third parties

• will not intervene in the substance of the dispute;
• are indifferent to clients’ welfare;
• have no relationship with the parties outside of the mediation;
• will not attempt to alter perceived power balance differences;
• are disinterested in the outcome; and
• are unconcerned with the impact of the settlement on unrepresented parties.162

Kevin Gibson, Leigh Thompson, and Max Bazerman identify three distinct conceptions of neutrality relative to mediation but add to Benjamin’s criteria by introducing the balance between keeping equidistance between parties and designing processes whereby everyone has full opportunity to share and participate.

• Neutrality as impartiality, which holds that the mediator should be free of bias and should set aside his or her opinions, feelings, and agendas.
• Neutrality as equidistance, which focuses on the idea that mediators should try to give equal consideration to each side.

• Neutrality as a practice in discourse. Mediators are supposed to shape problems in ways that give all speakers a chance to tell their story in a way that does not contribute to their own de-legitimization or marginalization. The mediator gives each side a chance to talk about their positions and concerns, and then reframes these issues in a more neutral way so that parties are more likely to listen to and understand the other side’s viewpoint.

• Then the mediator helps the parties to explore settlement options and to move toward a solution that all can agree on. Neutrality means that the mediator who facilitates this discussion should not have an interest in advancing the goals and positions of any party involved.\textsuperscript{163}

Gibson, Thompson, and Bazerman clearly describe the distance and care that must be taken to ensure that the third party is perceived as unbiased. Risks involved in maintaining a neutral position as a third party include reinforcing the status quo that may be fraught with power imbalances that are preventing groups from moving forward together; losing credibility and trust by not knowing enough about content or not having prior relationships with participants; and being perceived as apathetic about the outcomes and/or missing opportunities to introduce scientific or cultural knowledge relevant to achieving more sustainable outcomes. Finally, Bernard Mayer says,

Moreover, if mediators and facilitators remain committed to strict neutrality, this significantly limits what sorts of services they can offer. If the disputants believe that neutrals will not offer sufficient opportunities for justice and validation, they are unlikely to be willing to participate.\textsuperscript{164}

\textbf{Impartial/Independent/Balanced Approaches}

Impartiality or independent-centered approaches suggest a bit more involvement of third parties. The International Association of Facilitators’ Code of Ethics describes the role of facilitators:

Facilitators are called upon to fill an impartial role in helping groups become more effective. We act as process guides to create a balance between participation and results. As group facilitators, we believe in the inherent value of the individual and the collective wisdom of the group. We strive to help the group make the best use of the contributions of each of its members. We set aside our personal opinions and support the group’s right to make its own choices. We believe that collaborative and cooperative interaction builds consensus and produces meaningful outcomes.\textsuperscript{165}

Where the Code of Ethics steps beyond neutrality, perhaps, is when it suggests that facilitators strive to help the group make the best use of the contributions of each of its members. Otherwise, it feels somewhat close to positions of neutrality.
In reaction to the concept of impartiality, Robert Benjamin suggests that

the term “impartial” may lead to a picture of a mediator who is detached and distant. Some have begun to prefer the term “balanced.” A balanced mediator has a responsibility to protect both parties rather than being neutral and disengaged. He or she has permission to question parties about their perspectives and address any circumstances that stand in the way of an effective and lasting agreement.\textsuperscript{166}

A similar notion to “balanced and fair” is “rational,” suggested by Gibson, Thompson, and Bazerman:

In moving away from the idea that mediators should be neutral, we emphasize that mediators should guard themselves against certain kinds of bias. They maintain that the central role of the mediator is not to stay out of the proceedings, but rather to provide symmetric, rational advice to each side.\textsuperscript{167}

A group of professional facilitators from Hawai‘i felt that the definition of a facilitator needed to be expanded and more clearly defined by incorporating the more complex roles they had been expected to play. Each of the facilitators has over twenty years in the field and is trained in western and non-western modalities of conflict resolution. They generally felt that a strict position of neutrality did not reflect the complexities facilitators experience; rather, it would be more accurate to call it an impartial or independent position, a position that would provide for more influence on the creation of equitable processes. In 1998, they gathered to create a “Facilitator’s Credo” to clarify what they believed to be the roles and functions of a facilitator, expanding beyond neutrality. In the Credo, they employed a broad definition of facilitation to incorporate the diverse roles we are expected to play. They also included a core set of beliefs that guide their work, which step just beyond the bounds of neutrality. The Credo describes what “facilitators” are in the following way:

We are professionals who provide technical assistance to groups. Some of us work with communities. Others of us work in business and government settings. Generally, we are retained to assist groups as they try to exchange information, gather feedback, consult with others, build consensus, make plans, solve problems, or resolve conflicts and disputes.

Although we each come to our work with a different style or approach, we often share the term “facilitator” to describe our efforts. In turn, the word “facilitation” can mean many things and sometimes obscures more than it reveals.\textsuperscript{168}

In a few short sentences, they clearly articulate the diversity of roles and expectations of facilitators. They list their beliefs as:

1. A Good Faith Contract
2. Trustworthiness and Impartiality
3. Inclusion and Participation
4. Respect for Culture
5. Clarity about Ownership and Decision-making
6. Better Politics
7. Clarity in the Facilitator’s Role

Although they list “impartiality” as one of their beliefs, they integrate inclusion, participation, respect for culture, and better politics, which could all mean addressing power imbalances and diverse cultural contexts and needs, as well as ensuring that outcomes result in “better politics.” My reaction to these beliefs is that they actually move beyond impartiality and into the realm of “multipartiality.” Risks to maintaining an impartial position as a third party are similar to the risks involved in keeping a neutral position.

**Multipartial Approaches**

Practitioners who feel that neutral and/or impartial positions are too distant for either their own comfort or for the needs of the groups they engage with define themselves as “multipartial,” which Christopher Moore defines as when “third-parties are involved with and concerned about how to help achieve satisfaction of all parties’ issues and interests.”

Oberlin College’s Ombuds Office uses the following definition of multipartiality:

> The ombudsperson does not act as an advocate for any side in a dispute, but strives to consider and fairly present all sides of a situation. The goal of multipartiality is to give all participants the means and opportunity to tell their stories. Multipartiality means we take the sides of all people that we work with in order to help them feel empowered both during the process and with its results.

The Berghof Foundation, a philanthropic organization that works to transform violent political conflict throughout the world, shares the following definition of “multipartiality”:

> Third-party mediators should strictly apply the principle of multipartiality as it helps to engage with all the parties without being seen by one or more of them as partisan, one-sided or lowly-committed. Multipartiality, which is not the same as being neutral, means understanding and identifying with a diverse range of opposing positions and standpoints, without seeming to favour one of these above the other.

Multipartiality is a needs-based approach to facilitation in that it is partial to an individual’s and/or group’s needs. For example, if an individual and/or group needs capacity building and strategic advising to fully participate, if their voices need to be more fully heard, if outcomes demand more
diversified participation, then a multipartial facilitator assists to create a more equitable participative experience. Multipartiality comes with the risks of seeming unfairly biased toward one party, which can cause distrust; seeming unprofessional if neutrality is expected; having too much influence on outcomes; imposing too much if contributing to content; and potentially losing a contract if the client feels threatened and not supported. Multipartiality is the segue approach to move from a more neutral position of engagement to a more empowered approach to facilitation. How it is applied varies based on the facilitator and her/his perception of what is needed.

According to Arghavan Gerami, most mediators fall into two camps:

In the first group are those who are settlement driven, often offering suggestions, reframing issues or putting forth reality checks, with an eye on helping the parties reach a settlement. In the second group are mediators who primarily focus on enhancing communication and constructive dialogue to encourage the parties to bring forth their needs, concerns and interests. Whatever camp a mediator falls into, he or she is an “active and influential agent of change”—a participant in a three way dialogue. Mediators from both camps employ techniques to break down the whole into smaller more manageable pieces, while “repolarizing” and making more attractive the pieces to bring about resolution.

Gerami concludes with,

The takeaway is that ethical mediators, in our professional discussions and in our individual practices, must stay alert to neutrality and power pitfalls, choosing to acknowledge our power while neutrally “steering the wheel” to bring the parties toward their desired outcome.

Empowerment Approaches

Although similarities exist between multipartial and empowerment approaches, empowerment approaches are more forthcoming with attempts to balance the power and capacity of each participant. The Berghof Foundation offers the following scenario when empowerment approaches should be considered:

Upon request, third-party actors should help to prepare the conflicting parties for the negotiation processes (i.e. developing content- and process-related capacities) and prepare for challenges, which different negotiation options entail. In asymmetric conflicts, the need for preparations might be very different for the respective parties.

They later highlight the inherent risks of an empowerment approach:

In asymmetric conflicts, the mediator often is requested (and tempted) to provide capacity building for the weaker negotiation party (e.g. providing expertise for power sharing, training in negotiation techniques; organising study
tours). However, mixing the roles of mediation, capacity building and monitoring is problematic for the third-party mediator as it impacts on the perceived impartiality/multipartiality, thus triggering suspicion and mistrust.\textsuperscript{176}

Empowerment approaches introduce similar risks as multipartial approaches, particularly if neutral positions are expected. I view multipartial and empowerment approaches as being quite similar in providing capacity building for the less prepared parties to ensure that everyone in the process is able to fully participate. Not only does choice of approach depend on the facilitator, but it also is heavily influenced by expected roles identified by the client or the group and/or written in the contract.

Gerami shares a concept of empowerment facilitation using the language of mediation: “The concept of mediator neutrality is exploded as an impossible theoretical construct.” In mediators’ efforts to bring the hidden interests of the parties to the surface, Gerami argues,

\begin{quote}
they attend to the content of the agreement so that all interests are represented. Whether refocusing the issues, reframing the client’s statements, or reconstructing the contours of the conflict, mediators shape and exert control over the conversation. This mediator power, unchecked and unexamined can derail the mediator’s ethical responsibility to remain neutral.\textsuperscript{177}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Social Justice Approach}

“Social justice mediation and facilitation” assumes a much more proactive role for facilitators as well as a need for more open, honest, and potentially difficult conversations. Social justice facilitation places significant importance on history, structural injustices, forgiveness, and moving forward.\textsuperscript{178} Varying definitions exist for “social justice.” For the purpose of this research, I will refer to the following definition put forward by the Labour Party’s commission on Social Justice (CSJ), “the equal worth of all citizens; equal right to be able to meet basic needs; need to spread opportunities and life chances as widely as possible; and requirement to reduce and where possible eliminate unjustified inequalities.”\textsuperscript{179}

The fundamental challenge to explicitly defining “social justice” is that what might seem and feel just for one individual and/or group could naturally feel unjust for other groups. For example, affirmative action policies, which consider race during admissions decisions in educational institutions in the United States, could arguably be “just” to the thousands of minorities who have historically been structurally marginalized. Conversely, they could arguably be viewed as “unjust” to those who are denied opportunity based on socio-economics and/or family culture, despite their race.
Regardless of the contextual details around issues, social justice involves elements of healing; the policies are meant to heal groups and/or communities. In communities experiencing the effects of colonization like Hawai‘i, social justice facilitation has the potential for initiating or speeding the healing of the local communities by not only creating just processes, but providing safe spaces for education, sharing, and discussion about historical moments that have shaped current realities, current structural and emotional impediments to healing, and opportunities for overcoming such obstacles. Often, historical influences, race, gender, or age issues are shunned in discussions because of potential volatility, but such issues are often the undercurrents shaping group dynamics.

Wing addresses the importance of understanding the historical dynamics of colonization and how they relate to identity and power when we engage with one another:

> If mediation training is grounded in a social justice approach to critical race, interveners could learn how to mediate with the assumption that racism and other forms of oppression are commonplace and that privilege is more likely than not to be at play in a session.  

Wing discusses social justice mediation in the context of “race”; however, even within racially homogenous groups of people, privilege and power are inherently present and understanding the dynamics is critical for both facilitators and for the group at large to work most collaboratively.

Barbara Gray states, “Who defines the nature of the problem, how it will be addressed, and what actions will be taken with respect to solving it are all political matters.” First, being aware of who, how, and what, facilitators and parties involved can rewrite the invitation list and ensure the issue is addressed from multiple perspectives, with privilege given to those most affected. Social justice mediation and facilitation provide a space for honest discussion about issues of race, gender, oppression, sexual orientation, or other issues that are often left untouched because of their capacities to ignite already confrontational dynamics. Most facilitators are not prepared for honest discussions about social justice issues, despite those issues potentially being foundational to a particular conflict and/or process.

Wing and Gray echo what Michel Foucault proposed in “restoring, resurrecting, or even reconstructing subjugated accounts not only of suppressed, marginalized and dominated groups, but of ordinary
planners seeking to attend to issues of public welfare and injustice, need and suffering”182 as it applies to the trajectory of public deliberation. Roberto Vargas uses different language with a similar meaning when he says, “The proactive facilitator desires more outcomes for the group’s effort—that all aspects of the group experience serve to advance individual and group empowerment and overall social betterment.”183

“Social justice,” “proactive,” and “empowerment” facilitators go way beyond the bounds of neutrality in the ways they engage with their groups. They assume that it is their ethical responsibility to unearth the deeper underlying systemic obstacles of oppression and prejudice so that outcomes can be more directly tied to paradigm shifts in society. As Michelle Maiese explains,

Unlike the neutral, whose goal is reaching a solution that is acceptable to both sides, the advocacy advisor would focus on reaching a just agreement that represents the weaker side’s interests. The underlying notion was that the advocacy advisor can fulfill the task of empowering the weaker party so that the mediator can remain genuinely neutral.184

The risks of a social justice–based approach to facilitation are obvious. Not only is a facilitator advertising her/his partiality, but she/he is working to ensure that the weaker sides’ interests are met. Given that people and/or groups in positions of authority are most often the ones who hire the facilitators, facilitators may risk losing the trust of their clients unless their clients’ intentions are shared. They also risk losing the trust of participants who view the facilitator as having a strong stake in the outcome or who privilege one side. This approach to facilitation demands full disclosure in contracts and publicly.

**Insider Facilitation**

The multiple definitions and roles that have been introduced are all assuming a “third party” involvement, most often from someone outside the community. There are numerous examples of insider facilitation around the world where someone from inside the community facilitates group processes. I would venture to guess that insider facilitation is more the norm in most societies, with friends, neighbors, family members, teachers, and what Lederach defines as insider-partials, or people who are already involved in the conflict and aligned with one of the parties. Lederach describes insider-partials:
Despite this person’s partiality, he or she is someone who is known and respected by all parties to the conflict and trusted to be fair. This individual’s personal knowledge of the disputants’ histories and the issues at hand is often extremely useful in helping parties to resolve their differences.\footnote{185}

The Berghof Foundation, which funds conflict resolution efforts worldwide, defines an insider mediator (facilitator):

Insider mediators play the role of trusted individuals like NGO leaders, traditional or religious authorities, former politicians, respected academics and social activists who serve as intermediaries helping to exchange information and messages or testing the ground for (in)formal talks. These insider mediators are characterized by their in-depth knowledge of the conflict situation, cultural sensitivity and close relationships to the parties (and, in some cases, their normative authority). The quality of this usually unofficial mediation is crucial, as it may not only open the doors for formal mediation but also complement the negotiation processes.\footnote{186}

The Berghof Foundation identifies in-depth knowledge of the conflict situation, cultural sensitivity, and close relationships to parties as potential strengths of insider facilitators. They also note that the unofficial nature of the facilitation might be a crucial step of a larger, more formal process. Risks include being too close to the issues to be objective or seeming biased toward one perspective. In western approaches, a common strategy for outside third parties is to identify “allies” within the group: people you know are trusted by everyone and held in high esteem. Throughout the processes, this ally provides the third parties with the temperature of the group, allowing third parties to adjust processes as needed. Insiders play a more pivotal role than is advertised in conflict resolution literature. The following is a picture that depicts the continuum of facilitator involvement.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{continuum.png}
\caption{How close facilitators get to clients, participants, and issues at hand depends greatly on what is negotiated when the facilitator comes onboard. It also depends on the unique contexts, needs, and expected outcomes of a process. It is important to note that on the continuum of facilitation, cultural}
\end{figure}
sensitivity and/or responsiveness is discussed only as one moves toward the empowerment facilitation end, where it is identified as something critically important to consider. In the neutrality-centered and impartiality-centered approaches specifically, there is little guidance about looking critically at the culture of the groups and adapting the facilitator’s position.

**Conclusion**

In 1997, the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) identified facilitation as an alternative neutral intervention relative to other non-judicial forms of resolving conflicts such as arbitration, mediation, and negotiation. This chapter has provided a rich journey into the field of facilitation, exposing its complexities. I explored the assumption that processes are meant to support values of pluralism and its three pillars, as presented by Connolly. I discussed how this assumption may be problematic for groups of people who are resisting any notions of perceived assimilation or compromise on positions. Cultural dimensions of the field and how those dimensions shape assumptions in the practice, particularly in public spaces, was subsequently discussed. I first presented culture with a big “C” or ethnic culture, and then culture with a small “c” to expand the notion of “culture” and critically think about how we use it. Cultural analysis looks at the ways we define ourselves and engage with others, which naturally affects facilitation process design and outcomes. The different styles of communication, expectations of decision-making, and relationship with the facilitator vary from group to group, individual to individual. The four cultural contexts that provide the greatest challenges to facilitator neutrality include (a) collectivist versus individualist group norms, (b) high-context versus low-context communication patterns, (c) power imbalances that hinder effectiveness, and (d) content expertise from facilitators.

The facilitation continuum organized the different approaches to facilitation in a way that moves facilitator engagement beyond neutrality. Although my research is based exclusively on facilitation, similar challenges exist in other forms of dispute resolution. In my experiences, groups often request a facilitator’s content knowledge and expertise, training, coaching, and planning, which fundamentally are counter to the conventional facilitation literature that touts neutrality and impartiality as core values of the practice. I have come to believe that we as facilitators are agents of change and instruments of peace in our communities and organizations. With these roles come immense responsibility and a commitment to integrity. Our expectations of ourselves in the way we engage with clients and diverse
stakeholders are the same expectations we hold for individuals and groups working with one another. We are often uniquely situated at the crossroads of politics and social and economic systems, relatively close to the center of decision-making. This unique space demands high levels of veracity and trust and often demands that we step beyond the bounds of neutrality.

Based on what I heard from my interviewees, I believe that it is time for new language that gets further away from the values of neutrality and moves more diligently toward reflecting the complexities of contexts and our ethical obligations to those complexities. We need language that we can use to better prepare our students and our communities for more fully understanding the diversity of roles facilitators play. The remainder of my dissertation will explore what is needed and/or desired, in terms of neutrality and with reference to the continuum of approaches, in community-based conflicts involving multiple parties, social justice issues, and public policy outcomes.

John Forester highlights the disparity between what we experience in any given room and what much of the literature purports about the field of facilitation:

The practice of public dispute resolution appears to be light years ahead of any “theories” purporting to characterize public dispute resolution practice. That suggests both good and bad news. The bad news is that accounts by practitioners can be expected to be ambiguous, nonsystematic, long on symbolism and short on analysis, and hardly adequate to the political complexities and richness of their own practice. The good news is that relevant debates about public management and public deliberation, about pluralist interest group politics and conceptions of public good, about individual autonomy and social identity (in political philosophy), show us the political significance of public dispute resolution efforts.187

Forester justifies the importance of this very important conversation.

Before moving into the case studies, it is important to provide the background for understanding the context within which the processes are situated. The following chapter will describe the perspective in the Hawaiian Islands, and discuss the effects of colonization on current conditions. I will then introduce the concept of hybridized designs as a way of implementing multipartial engagements in pluralistic environments.
The multitude of facilitation approaches introduced in this chapter will be revisited during the case study analyses, where it becomes evident that going beyond neutral engagement is not only desired but often necessary. The analyses will also highlight that a variety of approaches can be used within one project, depending on the pending needs.
Chapter 2 Island Canvas

History and Hybridization

“Pain that is not transformed, is transferred.”

Richard Rohr

The Canvas

An artist often begins with a blank canvas. As she begins to paint, draw, sketch, a picture forms. An artist has the means to create what she envisions, erase what does not work, and simply start over. As a facilitator, we do not have such luxuries. We are faced rather with an already-painted canvas, similar to one where only the addition of water is needed to bring the picture to life, that is often historically complex, politically unjust, and socially stressed. The more water we add, the more we see, feel, and experience. Working in the Hawaiian Islands, the canvas is complex. The colonization of the Hawaiian Islands has had significant ramifications that continue to play out today, politically, socially, and economically, for not only Hawaiians but for everyone who has found their way to the islands. Facilitative processes unfold within this larger context. It is critical for facilitators to learn about the broader historical, political, and socioeconomic influences in order to understand fully how a situation came to be and what effects create the diverse positions of each participant and/or group. My case studies are both situated in Hawai‘i and involve issues in public education. I will first provide a brief history of the colonization of the Hawaiian Islands. I will then discuss the consequences of colonization on facilitated processes to provide a texture to my case studies, followed by an explanation of “hybrid” processes that blend ways of knowing and ways of being.

Historical Background

In this section, I attempt to capture the significant events that led to the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom to ensure understanding of the systematic, intentional, and illegal actions taken by the United States; this understanding informs my discussion of the trauma that resulted. Because connecting to “place,” its history, and ancestors is integral to being Hawaiian, and the connection often is invoked at the opening of facilitated processes, I felt it was crucial to provide a historical snapshot to ground my research in “place,” as it greatly affects the dynamics we experience in any given room.

Noenoe Silva explains,
On January 17th, 1893, with her palace surrounded by U.S. Marines, Queen Lili‘uokalani was forcibly deposed as Queen of the Hawaiian monarchy. They conspired with U.S. Minister John L. Stevens, who ordered soldiers on shore from the USS Boston to occupy a government building, Ali‘iōlani Hale, and declared themselves the Provisional government. As the minister of the United States, Stevens immediately recognized the usurpers as a legitimate government.189

Stevens soon after wrote to the US State Department the now infamous words: “The Hawaiian pear is now fully ripe and this is the golden hour for the United States to pluck it.”190 One month later on February 15, 1893, the fake provisional government submitted the first treaty of annexation to the US Senate in 1998, through a joint resolution to the US Congress. That resolution, an agreement between American politicians, had no legal or moral authority beyond US borders.

The invasion, annexation, and overthrow were outcomes of a systematic oppression that spanned over a century. The first group of American Protestant missionaries arrived in 1821, creating the cleavages for future dominance. Over time, they established boarding schools, which taught Christianity with the basics of western education and culture, denounced and banned cultural practices and the use of the native language, and brought diseases that eventually wiped out an estimated eighty percent191 of the native population. John Osorio explains how the colonialists from the United States were able to influence the implementation of Constitutional Law in 1839: “Law was confusing the once very distinct lines between ruler and ruled. Over the long run the legislature equalized Natives of high and low birth, especially after non-Hawaiians entered the House of Representatives in 1851.”192

Systematically, the colonialists developed:

- naturalization policies in the 1840s
- land ownership policies through the Māhele between 1845 and 1850
- ownership of the public media in the 1950s
- acts that segregated members of the community with leprosy to Kalawao, Moloka‘i
- treaties allowing the cessation of areas to be used for US military build-up, like Pearl Harbor in 1976 through the Reciprocity Treaty
- the establishment of the Hawaiian League, a constitutional representative government that was comprised of exclusively non-Hawaiian businessmen, attorneys, laborers, and artisans, which further resulted in the Bayonet Constitution of 1887, leading to the annexation of Hawai‘i to the United States
At the close of the nineteenth century, devastating social and cultural changes had all but annihilated the Hawaiian civilization. The sugar oligarchy systematically took natural resources, political voice, language, economic power, and cultural autonomy. It is estimated that anywhere from four hundred thousand to nearly a million people were living in the island chain before the haole arrived.\textsuperscript{193}

As Osorio concludes,

This is a story of violence, in which colonialism literally and figuratively dismembered the lāhui (the people) from their traditions, their lands, and ultimately their government. The mutilations were not physical only, but also psychological and spiritual. Death came not only through infection and disease, but through racial and legal discourse that crippled the will, confidence, and trust of the Kanaka Maoli as surely as leprosy and smallpox claimed their limbs and lives.\textsuperscript{194}

**Effects of Colonization Today**

In 1981, the US Senate instructed the Office of Education to submit a comprehensive report on Hawaiian education. According to the report, “Hawaiians scored below parity in education and … these low achievement levels were directly related to cultural factors.” With the systemic loss of language, culture, and identity and subsequent establishment of English schools with western pedagogies and worldviews and western economic systems, Hawaiians were inherently marginalized from the new systems, dramatically affecting educational success for Hawaiians. Still in 2012, Hawaiians score lower in all areas of standardized achievement scores than their non-Hawaiian peers. Hawaiians additionally have the lowest health statistics and highest rates of poverty, which are directly correlated to low academic performances in children.\textsuperscript{195} “Structural violence,” or “the ongoing violence of poverty and systems that make people unable to meet basic needs,”\textsuperscript{196} is a leading affect of colonization. It has been reported that “Hawaiians who remain at home in the islands have the worst statistics of health and education, the highest rates of alcohol and substance abuse and disproportionate numbers in prison.”\textsuperscript{197}

An article in the Honolulu Advertiser reported an interview with Gale Flynn, planning and evaluation manager for the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center:

“Hawaiians turn up overrepresented in all the poverty indicators,” she said. For example, 61 percent of Hawaiian children in the state’s public schools qualify for free or reduced lunch…. The situation may be worsening, as there has been a slight increase since 2000 in the number of Hawaiian children eligible for food stamps and other public assistance, Flynn said.\textsuperscript{198}
In my first case study, [AIEP] grantees were advocating not only for federal funding to support educational programs uniquely designed for Hawaiian children but for specific indicators that would more accurately evaluate educational success of Hawaiian children. The majority of Hawaiian programs appreciate the relationship between physical and economic health and educational achievement. Most programs strive to perpetuate Hawaiian language and culture, approach public education through a cultural pedagogy, and provide opportunities to enhance families’ economic resiliency and opportunity.

Similarly, HE‘E participants recognized that if their ultimate goal was to support fuller family engagement in the public education experiences of their children, other factors would need to be supported and the basic needs of children appropriately addressed. Other factors naturally influence the low achievement and poverty rates of children in Hawai‘i’s public education system, but for Hawaiians specifically, the effects of colonization are a leading factor. It is impossible to generalize about an entire community, as each Hawaiian has experienced colonization differently, often contingent on the different contexts within which they grew up. Although health and education indicators are low for Hawaiians, the Hawaiian community has made enormous efforts to heal from the effects of colonization. Kāwika Tengan talks about the ways Hawaiians have begun healing:

In response to a colonial discourse of death and disappearance, Kānaka Maoli have asserted a counterdiscourse of life and have engaged in projects of revitalization, revival, and healing. … I argue that healing the historic pains and memories of colonization on all levels represents the most fundamental principle of ‘Ōiwi decolonization and recovery of nation, for after the healing comes the rebuilding.\textsuperscript{199}

Tengan asserts, “The two primary pathways into the movement have been through universities, where young activist intellectuals are trained and new knowledge is developed, and in grassroots organizations, in which knowledgeable elders and community members take part in the struggle directly.”\textsuperscript{200} Most relevant to my research, one of the most influential accomplishments was the inception of the Center for Hawaiian Studies in 1987 at the University of Hawai‘i. Soon thereafter, in 1988, the Indigenous Education Act was passed into law and provides up to thirty-three million dollars to innovative educational programs for Hawaiians, which were eventually run through the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus ([AIEP]).

Grantees have come together over the last five years to collaboratively create culturally relevant measures of educational success. Another large-scale collaboration occurred over four years and...
included nearly three hundred and fifty people from diverse backgrounds. Named, “He Au Papa ʻŌlelo: A Time For Dialogue,” its focus was solely on conducting dialogue about what Hawaiian sovereignty would mean to Hawaiʻi as a whole.\textsuperscript{201} This enabled both sides to hear the hopes and fears behind what was being asserted in the media and to build trust among each other regarding intention. According to Foley, “One Hawaiian professor reported that it completely changed his views of the roles of non-Hawaiians and the way he taught about Hawaiian issues.”\textsuperscript{202} Such conversations and collaborations were facilitated and continue today as a form of deliberative dialogue. Forester suggests benefits of such dialogues when he says,

\begin{quote}
In speaking together in more or less dialogical or argumentative settings, we not only learn from what others say or do about what they claim, but we learn still more from the way they do it. From the reasons they give, we learn about what others want or believe. But from the way they talk and act, form their style, we learn about who they are, “what they are like” what sort of “character someone has (or is).”\textsuperscript{203}
\end{quote}

The Dialogues were meant to share perspectives and build relationships between Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians in imagining the future of Hawaiʻi. Facilitation teams were comprised of one Hawaiian and one non-Hawaiian, and if this requirement could not be met, the sessions were canceled. Whom the group will accept is a constant negotiation generally in the field. As a non-Hawaiian facilitator, I have found some Hawaiian groups to be much more accepting and trustful of my participation. It has proven to be an interesting and at times frustrating journey, replete with postcolonial realities. The reality, however, as demonstrated through the historical explanation, is that no matter what, in any facilitation addressing social issues such as education, public health, economic development, homelessness, and military relations, the history of the islands and the implications such history has had on Hawaiians are fully present and in need of redress and resolution.

**Effects of History on Democratic Participation**

There exists a fundamental resistance to participation in facilitated processes by some Hawaiians, especially when the processes involve non-Hawaiians. I feel the reason can best be explained as a fundamental distrust resulting from the effects of colonization. Foley highlights a 1998 discussion by Jonathan Kuttab, a Palestinian lawyer who saw a number of pitfalls of dialogue that keep oppressed groups from participating in dialogues:

\begin{quote}
He saw the reasons that made Palestinians reluctant to dialogue as applicable to oppressed groups in general. Some of the problems are that dialogues can be co-opted, that basic conflict issues are ignored, that there is a tendency to accept the status quo and that dialogue can be used as a substitute for action.\textsuperscript{204}
\end{quote}
The ways facilitators engage and the types of processes they design can have a transformative impact on how groups of people work with one another and feel empowered and confident that their voices are heard.

One of my Hawaiian interviewees spoke to this frustration. As she shared,

I’m just not sure what comes of these facilitation processes. We come up with hopeful goals and then nothing happens. No resources come until we see the next facilitator for the next process. And oftentimes the facilitation is a waste of time because decisions have already been made but their mandate says they need public input. (#24, 05.25.11)

Many Hawaiians have experienced processes that merely window-dressed for the State and/or Federal Government, meaning that despite their full participation and seemingly innovative outcomes, the processes were used merely to check the mandatory “public participation box” so government can say, “we checked with everyone.” Some Hawaiians may feel that if dialogue or deliberation on Hawaiian issues involves non-Hawaiians, they are not as effective for building the future for their communities and could potentially weaken efforts of self-determination. Regarding conversations on sovereignty, Foley expresses the apprehension among Hawaiians regarding non-Hawaiian participation by some and the lack of consensus on the issue overall.

For the most part, speeches and discussions on sovereignty are the exclusive territory of Hawaiians. Many non-Hawaiians respect that the Hawaiian community needs to formulate their own vision of sovereignty. But some non-Hawaiians feel excluded and argue that they have a stake in the future of Hawai’i and should be included in these discussions. Hawaiians are divided in the role non-Hawaiians should play in any discussion of Hawaiian sovereignty. Some think that non-Hawaiians should not participate in discussions about sovereignty while others believe that it should be a community wide discussion and that their efforts will not be successful without support from non-Hawaiians.205

It is important to note the lack of consensus on this issue within the Hawaiian community, as it is significant and unpredictable. However, the very fact that such feelings are present is critical, as facilitators and non-Hawaiians will inevitably experience this apprehension from time to time in different processes. Historically, Hawaiians have been severely manipulated under the guise of “democracy.” For example, the establishment of statehood in 1959 was conducted with “democratic intention.” Hawaiians were astute and active in using democratic processes to resist the overthrow.
However, even when Hawaiians used democratic processes successfully, the US government ignored their petitions to remain independent.

**Pluralistic Democracy**

The United States democracy is a “pluralistic democracy.” Christopher Simon explains,

In theory, the United States’ model of pluralist democracy is built on the founders’ desire to simultaneously promote the rights of citizens to organize into factional interests while also preventing individual citizen’s liberty from falling prey to factional influence; in essence, an attempt to find a middle ground between the absolutism of monarchy and what was seen as potentially deleterious and chaotic majoritarianism. Nevertheless, the existence of factions, and hence pluralist democracy, was seen as a natural and essential element in free society, consistent with human nature and the desire to express differences.  

In both case studies, the facilitator and the client felt that a pluralistic democratic process, rich in deliberation, would yield the best outcomes. Participants in both case studies similarly supported such processes. Where they diverge is in their views of the external democracies in which they were each engaging. Among [AIEP] participants, pluralism, or the attempt to provide equitable voice and opportunity to the diverse interests and positions of all people in the islands, was not necessarily supported. In fact, pluralism in the context of the “state democracy” challenges the very notion of sovereignty. Conversely, HE‘E participants, who were representing all children in public schools, deeply valued this notion of pluralism because their advocacy was more diversely focused.

In describing nation building, Will Kymlicka sheds light on what the colonizers successfully accomplished in the Hawaiian Islands. His description shares similarities to current Hawaiian efforts at nation-building, highlighting why pluralism inherently threatens nation-building goals:

In most countries, this ideal of national homogeneity had to be constructed by the state through a range of “nation-building” policies that encouraged the preferred national identity while suppressing alternative identities. The intended outcome of these policies is clear:

To centralize all political and legal power in forums dominated by the majority group;

To privilege that group’s language and culture in all public institutions, which are then diffused throughout the territory of the state; and

To make minority languages and culture invisible in public space.
In a pluralistic democracy, engaging in public deliberation is encouraged to (a) affect policy, (b) elevate voices, and (c) connect at a biological level with “others.”

The first two criteria resonate with the [AIEP] case study in that their goals involved affecting USDOE education policy through strengthening the voices of Hawaiians. However, the third criterion was not relevant. Their collective interest was to collaborate with Hawaiians for Hawaiians, not necessarily “with others,” and this was a strategic choice for achieving their goals and promoting self-determination. Such pluralistic collaboration could be perceived as a threat to the cultural purity many Hawaiians strive for, so to entertain any notion of compromise or consensus could be seen as challenging social and political positions of sovereignty. As Homi Bhabha explains,

Colonial authority requires modes of discrimination (cultural, racial, administrative…) that disallow a stable unitary assumption of collectivity. The part (which must be the colonialist foreign body) must be representative of the “whole” (conquered country), but the right of representation is based on its radical difference.

I would argue that through the process of de-colonizing, protocols for elevating the Hawaiian voice and/or interests might be necessary to “disallow a stable unitary assumption of collectivity,” particularly given the current disparities in economic, political, and social indicators. Otherwise, collaborative efforts could risk being viewed as reinforcing the colonial authority if not done mindfully. Catering more to Hawaiians’ needs in a process may be a pragmatic approach to resolving many of the issues of poverty, human rights, low health indicators, and education challenges that bring a facilitator to any given room. However, such attempts may be viewed as essentializing culture, depending on how they are done. The effects of colonization naturally challenge the expectation of a facilitator being “neutral.”

Will Kymlicka provides a robust set of criteria for a pluralistic state, which, reinforcing Geertz’s definition of a pluralistic democracy, he equates to a “multicultural state”:

Instead, the state must be seen as belonging equally to all citizens. Second, as a consequence, a multicultural state repudiates any nation-building policies that assimilate or exclude members of non-dominant groups. Instead, it accepts that individuals should be able to access state institutions, and to act as full and equal citizens in political life, without having to hide or deny their ethnocultural identity. The state accepts an obligation to accord recognition and accommodation to the history, language and culture of non-dominant groups, as it does for the dominant group. Third, a multicultural state acknowledges the historic injustice that was done to minority groups by these policies of assimilation and exclusion and manifests a willingness to offer some sort of rectification for them.
Generally, I believe that many people in Hawai‘i strive for Kymlicka’s idyllic vision of a multicultural state. However, facilitation does not operate in the “general,” but rather within the “specifics,” which are less than idyllic and depend on whose “Hawai‘i” we are speaking about. My two case studies provide “specifics” that complicate Kymlicka’s assertion. Within [AIEP], groups that focused on self-determination and even sovereignty resist what Kymlicka suggests for multiculturalism. However, the mandate from the USDOE to demonstrate the success of their investments did become, after some persuasion, more aligned with Kymlicka’s idea of multiculturalism. After encountering significant pushback, the USDOE moved toward a more multicultural approach by providing [AIEP] opportunities to create and introduce cultural indicators of success to accompany the federally mandated indicators. The fundamental tension is apparent and is situated within the confines of historical politics. [AIEP] grantees pushed back against a monocultural view of educational success and forced the USDOE to become more multicultural in its engagement. [Walsh] was very aware of this tension, but avoiding the very real consequences of not reaching the outcomes, such as (a) loss of substantial funding and programming for Hawaiians, (b) loss of [AIEP] credibility at the national level, and (c) loss of opportunity to institutionalize culture-based indicators of success, were prioritized over addressing the politics of history.

HE‘E participants, conversely, strived for a multicultural approach to decision-making, overtly condemning any attempt to elevate a particular group of people. The same politics of history existed, but because this group was highly multicultural (in ethnic terms), they valued it differently. Some participants were born and raised in the islands, some were of Hawaiian descent, many whose families journeyed to Hawai‘i during the plantation era were of mixed heritage, and others had moved to the islands from elsewhere. It is critical that facilitators understand how the politics of history manifest uniquely with each group in order to create an atmosphere ripe for deliberation and collaboration, that is safe, creative, honest, and forward thinking. However, when before processes even begin there exist established expected outcomes that are influenced by the politics of history, like in the [AIEP] case, the obstacles to effective deliberation are naturally greater.

Seyla Benhabib provides an umbrella conception of pluralism that encompasses Connolly’s three pillars, introduced in the previous chapter:

By plurality I mean that our embodied identity and the narrative history that constitute our selfhood give us each a perspective on the world, which can only be revealed in a community of interaction with others. … A common
shared perspective is one that we create insofar as in acting with others we discover our difference and identity, our distinctiveness from and unity with, others. The emergence of such unity-in-difference comes through a process of self-transformation and collective action.²¹¹

As facilitators engage with the complexities of history and relationships, they are tasked to create processes that use the complexities as strengths rather than hindrances to achieve sustainable outcomes. Furthermore, the complexities often demand more than what neutral engagement can support. Particularly in longer engagements with groups, facilitators will use more hybrid approaches to facilitation, both in terms of the approaches being culturally hybrid and of the facilitators’ roles being hybrid.

**Hybridized Approaches**

Facilitators in the islands have experimented with “hybridized approaches,” which include the incorporation of diverse cultural protocol, languages, ways of communicating, and so forth, to ensure processes are more comfortable and representative of those whom they are serving. Not only are processes hybridized, but also efforts are often made to create mixed gender, mixed ethnic, or mixed aged facilitation teams, hybrid teams, to more effectively represent participants. Blending conventional practices of facilitation with more indigenous styles of dialogue is successful in some rooms and perceived as favoring and/or mimicking in others. My two case studies will reveal this discrepancy.

Bhabha critiques hybridity by suggesting “the display of hybridity—its peculiar ‘replication’—terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery.”²¹² Many Hawaiians deeply feel and vehemently resist notions of “mimicry or mockery,” despite the best intentions of facilitator teams to deliver a process that purports to be inclusive, yet respectful of the diverse interests present. In the [AIEP] facilitation, [Walsh] was the one pushing for cultural relevance in process design. At one point, in an attempt to hybridize the process to make it more culturally responsive, she and the staff created a metaphor for the evaluation tool, using “fish and poi.” There was considerable pushback on this metaphor, perhaps because it was presented by [Walsh] and another non-Hawaiian evaluation contractor or because the attempt at hybridity didn’t feel right.

When processes involve diverse participants and integrative or hybrid processes, some Hawaiians may feel that cultural purity may be threatened in a way that dilutes self-determination. Benhabib addresses such issues:
Conservatives argue that cultures should be preserved in order to keep groups separate, because cultural hybridity generates conflict and instability: they hope to avoid the “clash of civilizations” by reinforcing political alliances that closely follow cultural-identity rifts (Huntington, 1996), lest attempts to bridge these rifts produce hybridity and confusion.214

Why this is relevant to my research is that it highlights the deep tension that may separate Hawaiians from non-Hawaiians. Although some Hawaiians may feel that efforts at cultural purity are preserving and perpetuating “culture,” other Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians may feel that too much emphasis on “purity” serves as a powerful obstacle to achieving improved outcomes for Hawaiians. In my case study analyses, interviewee feedback will speak specifically to this sensitivity and how it affects dynamics in the room. When we build processes that cater more to one “culture,” we risk enabling these divisions through certain protocol, process, design, or relationship building. Hawai‘i is one of the most “hybrid” places on the planet, identified as one of the most ethnically diverse places worldwide, which makes process design that much more rich and at times challenging.

In diverse rooms, whether the diversity is ethnic, positional, socioeconomic, or generational, the process demands hybridization, which means incorporating elements of process that will meet the menagerie of histories, identities, power dynamics, styles of communication, and personalities. A participant shared this with me:

To be culturally sensitive means that all of us are willing to admit that we are coming with the lens that we grew up with; and everyone else here is too. Understanding what each of us comes from; our families; what we walk, what we saw. Be aware of what conditions we have experienced and what we react to and why. Facilitators should be honest about their limited lenses, we are all people with different stories. And all the stories should be respected. (#16, 05.22.11)

The inherent diversity in the islands demands hybridized approaches to problem-solving, blending Asian, western, Hawaiian, and local norms. Navigating these fences, hopping over them, or tearing them down when necessary pose many challenges to facilitating in the islands. Edward Said concurs with Benhabib and Kraidy when he says,

My impression is that more effort is spent in sustaining the connection, bolstering the idea that to be Syrian, Iraqi, Egyptian, or Saudi is a sufficient end, rather than in thinking critically, even audaciously, about the national program itself.215
Benhabib discusses “the doctrine that ‘identity’ is singular, that color and culture go together, and that one can’t really choose one’s culture, because after all, one’s culture is indissolubly bound up with one’s color”\(^216\)—a doctrine that runs rampant in Hawai‘i. Said also says,

> Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about.\(^217\)

In Hawai‘i individuals and groups residing in cultural categories sometimes dance symbiotically and at times clash to the point of violence. An individual’s identity will indisputably transform when people connect in diverse facilitative environments based on (a) the goals, (b) who is in the room, and (c) who is facilitating.

Colonization created a deep tear in the social fabric of Hawaiian identity, so efforts to re-build, re-define, and re-imagine what it means to be Hawaiian are critically important, and ways to incorporate such needs should be further examined by practitioners in the field. As Forester expresses this need,

> It will be important in more pluralistic settings to begin to acknowledge (rather than continue to ignore or suppress) such identity-shaping traumas, if parties in those deliberations are not to feel ignored, dismissed, or even complicit in their own invisibility and silence.\(^218\)

Marwan Kraidy defines hybridity as “the fusion of two [in our case multiple] hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities, cross-cultural contact, which often occurs across national boundaries as well as across cultural boundaries.”\(^219\) Not only can facilitation processes be hybrid in their designs, but the roles a facilitator will play to ensure outcomes can be seen as similarly hybrid or multipartial, which will be evident in the following case study chapters.

**Hybrid Roles**

The expectation of a facilitator or third party being neutral is naturally couched in cultural values and expectations. Facilitators will find that many groups of people simply do not want or desire someone neutral. In many cultures around the world, someone trusted from within the community, not an outside third party, facilitates collaborative efforts. Frequently, the person selected knows the parties and issues well, is a friend, a leader, a coach, a planner, a consultant, or an elder, all of whom may naturally move beyond the bounds of neutrality. The Wheel of Facilitation graph in Chapter 8 indicates clearly how
diverse expectations of a facilitator can be. Historically in many indigenous cultures, the community problem-solver was an elder, a trusted neighbor, the eldest in the family, someone who had the best content knowledge on a conflict, and therefore the conventional assumption of “neutrality” simply doesn’t work for many cultures. Interviewees offered a variety of responses to the expectation of neutrality. A woman who works in an organization that serves the Hawaiian community said, “The one who facilitates is the one with the most connections, not the least, specially within the Hawaiian community. A facilitator is expected to be fair without being neutral or objective” (#24, 05.25.11). Another interviewee commented,

I really like when facilitators know the strengths of people in the room so they can yank the strengths out of them. It’s difficult to know the strengths when you are perceived as neutral and from the outside. Relationships trump neutrality for Hawaiians. (#26, 05.25.11)

Another participant shared that they value someone being “female over someone being “neutral” because they trust they will be more respected and heard. Conversely, someone else said that neutrality didn’t matter so much but that she preferred men because they “talk less” (#24, 05.25.11).

Hawaiians historically used a traditional method of problem-solving that is still utilized in modified forms today, called “ho’oponopono” or to “make right.” Ho’oponopono is a process for reconciliation and forgiveness within families and communities and is led by a designated “haku,” a facilitator, often a trusted elder. If the family cannot work through the problem, they turn to a trusted outsider who then serves as the haku. According to Mary Kawena Pukui,

The process begins with prayer. A statement of the problem is made, and the transgression discussed. Family members are expected to work problems through and cooperate, not “hold fast to the fault.” One or more periods of silence may be taken for reflection on the entanglement of emotions and injuries. Everyone’s feelings are acknowledged. Then confession, repentance and forgiveness take place. Everyone releases (kala) each other, letting go. They cut off the past (ʻoki), and together they close the event with a ceremonial feast, called pani, which often included eating limu kala or kala seaweed, symbolic of the release.

When Hawaiians refer to family or ‘ohana, they not only mean those related by blood, but the larger community that surrounds them. The haku is usually an elder in the family or an elder from the clergy and is trusted by all parties. Rather than the conversations flowing between parties, participants in ho’oponopono speak directly through the haku. The haku is expected to be fair but does wield quite a bit of influence in the process when needed. For example, a haku will engage fully in asking probing
questions when they are needed to get deeper issues on the table. He or she will also spend one-on-one
time with individuals who are having difficulty with their anger or emotionally having a difficult time
in a process to get them prepared to return to the group. A haku will at times even offer potential paths
to solutions if a family or group is struggling. Because he or she is from the community, known and
trusted by all parties, such movement beyond what western practice defines as neutrality is safe and
welcomed.

Facilitators trained in conventional facilitation are taught that neutrality is one of the key pillars to the
practice, but many participants suggested otherwise in my interviews. In postcolonial environments
where trust of the “other” is low, it is important to identify alternative methods of collaboration and
group problem-solving to ensure that negative power dynamics are not reinforced, but rather, that trust
is built and relationships advanced.

Conclusion
I have attempted to share the rich history and current norms of the islands to create the canvas upon
which facilitators continue to paint and influence, albeit with wide strokes. Not necessarily unique to
Hawai‘i, the history of colonization adds a thicker layer of complexity that needs careful consideration.

Edward Connors writes,

Attempts to destroy culture means that the means to cope with the traumas are removed. Imposition of western
culture means coping skills have been lost. As a result, destructive processes have been internalized because we do
not know how to express it. There is a feeling of powerlessness against the cultural system that one is being
indoctrinated into and of alienation from all. Disconnection from the past means that important events that shaped
society are forgotten. 221

In Hawai‘i, hybrid and plural are the norm, though that is unwelcomed by many Hawaiians. Facilitators
have the unique opportunity to participate in interesting and at times difficult conversations across
sectors, issues, and people. In one month, we may facilitate a strategic planning session with the State
Department of Health, addressing public health issues, design processes for a community engagement
forum to brainstorm environmental solutions, facilitate a board of directors’ retreat for an early
childhood organization, assist an organization in identifying culturally aligned practices, and conduct a
conflict resolution training for the staff of one of the five-star hotels downtown. In each “room,”
regardless of issue area or sector, exist the consequences of colonization and distribution of power.
Each room requires not only sensitivities to the historical experiences of the group but tailored designs to creatively redress what it means to truly work collaboratively.

As a result of colonization, one of the leading challenges is overcoming distrust of working across ethnicities and within existing politics. A second challenge includes ensuring participatory inclusion of all who are deemed necessary and relevant by all groups without jeopardizing the integrity of self-determination. The third challenge includes creating processes whereby everyone involved feels comfortable and confident to participate fully, regardless of western trainings in “neutral third-party engagement.” Reminded of what Mary Adams Trujillo shares, “A sizeable number of people of color feel largely invisible in the accepted training modalities and literature, perceiving their experience and insights to lie outside the boundaries of what is defined as pertinent knowledge,” it is our role to ensure that how we engage as facilitators is responsive to what the group desires and needs.

Forester suggests that rather than

sanitize deliberations which make a rehomogenized mockery of any supposed pluralist character they might have,

we should explore instead how the working through of historical trauma and processes of political deliberation might coexist, if not be closely intertwined.

What Forester is proposing speaks to the decisions facilitators make to connect to the people in the process and navigate the delicate balances between (a) addressing the history and (b) conducting deliberative processes framed by pluralistic democratic principles, yet still empower groups who are seeking cultural cohesion and healing.

The effects of colonization were felt and handled differently in each case study. In the first case study involving [AIEP] participants, nearly all participants were Hawaiian and were committed to protecting and perpetuating Hawaiian culture through educational programs that serve Hawaiian children. What colonization stripped from them, they were trying to recover and perpetuate. The USDOE system they were pushing back on was the system of the colonizer. In contrast, for HE‘E participants, the diversity of peoples that resulted from colonization was assumed as the norm for the Hawaiian Islands. The coalition was formed to serve all children, regardless of ethnicity, and there were sensitivities to raising one ethnicity above any other in decision-making and/or proposed priorities. The struggles within the
Hawaiian community could not be ignored, however, because Hawaiian children are disproportionately failing in Hawai‘i’s public schools. Participants identified family engagement, meeting basic needs, and policy reform as three key areas that they felt would help all children, including Hawaiian children.
Chapter 3 Methodology

Portraiture

“…participant and observer, self and other, subjectivity and objectivity, dichotomies that move in and out of focus, sometimes painfully sharp, sometimes so blurry and indistinct that the divisions become extremely difficult to sustain…”

– Hume and Mulcock

Through in-depth interviews with participants in community-based processes, I was able to glean their ideas about what they expected of facilitators, looking in particular at opinions about facilitator neutrality, especially as that is related to power imbalances, content knowledge, and relationship. I then compared their feedback with how we teach about and train community facilitators to ensure we are matching the needs of those whom we serve. Each interview lasted between one and three hours with follow-up questions and exchanges. Most interviewees did not feel comfortable with the conversation being recorded, so notes were taken as accurately as possible. I tried to record exactly what participants shared. I was able to interview a total of forty people: thirty-one participants between two case studies and nine facilitators with over twenty years of experience. Participants were ethnically very diverse, held varying levels of power in the room, had varying experiences with facilitation, and were all committed to education reform. Interviews were designed in a talk story format with open ended guiding questions, so no two interviews were exactly the same in structure. However, by the end of each interview, I had gotten the necessary feedback that allowed me to compare interview results with accuracy.

The two case studies are on the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus ([AIEP]) and Hui for Excellence in Education Coalition (HE‘E). I used Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s methodology of portraiture to research, present, and analyze my findings. Portraiture allowed me to unearth the complicated textures (i.e., political, socioeconomic, historical, relational) that exist within each portrait or case study. Lawrence-Lightfoot explains:

I was concerned about the general tendency of social scientists to focus their investigations on pathology and disease rather than on health and resilience. Portraiture resists this tradition-laden effort to document failure. It is an intentionally generous and eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections.

As a participant observer, I can to a certain degree separate myself from the approach, but I wouldn’t be using it myself if I didn’t advocate it. This methodology allows me to freely look at the successes.
Following any facilitation or contract with a client, we spend considerable time analyzing what worked and what did not. Naturally, dilemmas will emerge and limitations/challenges become obvious.

Lawrence-Lightfoot goes on to explain the richness of the interviews or “narratives” and relationships shared between the “portraitist” or researcher and the “subject”:

> The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences. The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. The encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece.\(^{226}\)

Lawrence-Lightfoot explains that through the narratives, a portrait will be painted that will reveal:

- a) Internal Context (the space and time of subject) placing an institution in the context of a larger environment that shapes it;
- b) Personal Context (researcher’s background, agenda, preference and place);
- c) Historical Context (ideological and cultural journey)—i.e. the institutional culture and history—the origins and evolution of the organization and the values that shape its structure and purpose.\(^{227}\)

The case studies were chosen because they inhabited diverse political, cultural, and economic landscapes of various scopes and sizes. Each one was a unique experience that exemplified many of the aforementioned tensions we experience in the field. As a participant observer, I will refrain from claiming objectivity, and reveal my partiality as a facilitator of a more multipartial, non-neutral approach. Elliot Eisner advises

> “Reject the idea of an objective reality, and instead try to grasp and take action on the implications of the ‘framework’ dependent character of perception in which “perception of the world is influenced by skill, point of view, focus, language and framework.”\(^{228}\) It is my intention to directly contribute to this work’s structural corroboration. “Structural corroboration” is the confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions.”\(^{229}\)

Although objectivity will be compromised, intimate skill, relationship, and knowledge regarding the case studies and points of view will be value added. My role as supporter and observer in the [AIEP] case study and subsequently lead facilitator in the HE’E case study kept me close to both studies. Lawrence-Lightfoot’s use of portraiture supports Eisner’s statements, it that it explicitly recognizes the use of the self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied.\(^{230}\)
Additional data were collected through direct participation in planning discussions, evaluation meetings, and formal facilitated processes. Secondary source data allowed me to examine process designs, evaluations of the designs, and written reports.

My approach recognizes that “meaning emerges through interaction and is not standardized from place to place or person to person. … it emphasizes the importance of understanding the overall text of a conversation and more broadly, the importance of seeing meaning in context.”\textsuperscript{231} By not only observing but fully participating and therefore immersing myself in case studies and “feeling” them, the contexts became more tangible, which I felt allowed me to more accurately record and analyze my experiences. It also allowed me the opportunity to ask more difficult questions of some of my interviewees because we shared a relationship.

Participant observation is described as

a qualitative method with roots in traditional ethnographic research, whose objective is to help researchers learn the perspective held by study populations. Qualitative researchers accomplish this through observation alone or by both observing and participating, to varying degrees, in the study of the community’s daily activities. The method is distinctive in that the researcher approaches participants in their own environment rather than having the participants come to the researcher. Generally speaking, the researcher engaged in participant observation tries to learn what life is like from an “insider” while remaining, inevitably, an “outsider.”\textsuperscript{232}

Participant observation research is useful for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, political, cultural, and economic milieu in which participants live and work. In order to gain access to environments that will allow a researcher to effectively observe, a level of trust needs to be established with those whom the researcher will be observing. One of the most effective ways of gaining such trust is through participating in processes or daily activities with respondents. Not only does this build trust, but it also provides the researcher with a wide-angle lens with which to look into the lives of her/his respondents. My participation in HE’E was significantly more involved than in [AIEP] where I was more of an “outsider.” Richard Fenno, in his participant observation of congressmen, suggests “participant observation sensitizes the researcher to matters of context and sequence.”\textsuperscript{233} This expanded view provides a unique lens through which to see the diverse contexts and sequences of respondents’ lives.

Another unique aspect of participant observation research is its fundamental openness to discovering new questions that can be revealed as interviews with respondents and observations unfold. Fenno
states, “Someone doing this type of research is quite likely to have no crystallized idea of what he or
she is looking for or what questions to ask when he or she starts.” This makes the data more
reflective of the respondents’ perspectives than the researcher’s, which in my opinion allows the
researcher to create a more relevant hypothesis. When I began this research, I thought I knew what I
was looking at: where democratic community-based processes intersect with histories of colonization.
However, through participant observation, particularly in my first case study of [AIEP], I began to
realize that balancing expectations of neutrality with the diverse roles a facilitator is expected to play
was really at the core of the disconnect between theory and practice. Not only was it an issue within
groups who have experienced colonization, but it is present within almost any group with which a
facilitator engages. My interview results confirmed this hypothesis.

Mary Trujillo introduces the opportunity in participant observation research to experience how theory
and practice interrelate with one another in the field: “As a methodology, critical ethnography offers a
‘remaking of social analysis’ by integrating theory and practice. The ethnographic method lends itself
to naturalistic contexts, such as community relationships where human interaction is messy and not
always easily categorized.” Trujillo continues, highlighting the opportunities that this research
method gives for discovering and problematizing the deep-rooted power structures in our society that
ultimately define conflict situations:

This method served as a starting point for interrogating and unraveling power relationships, social structures, and
assumptions operating in both the community and the task force. … the resulting data exposed the enmeshed
relationships between political structures and communicative microstructures, between organizational structure and
the discourse of community members.

If someone was doing this research from a neutral third-party outsider perspective, the unraveling
would not be possible. My approach to this research allowed me to explore deep-rooted power
structures, social structures, and assumptions. It also was an opportunity to identify where, if anywhere,
there existed a disconnect between theory and practice. Discovering that the expectations of
participants and the sociopolitical realities fundamentally challenge what we teach and how we train
regarding facilitator neutrality was significant.

One of the greatest challenges in conducting participant observation research is navigating the
“insider/outsider” lines of demarcation between researcher and respondent. Fenno articulates this
conundrum in the following statement:
The larger danger in the relationship of observer and observed is what anthropologists call “going native”—becoming so close to your respondents, so immersed in their world and so dependent on this close relationship that you lose all intellectual distance and scholarly objectivity……I recognize it, and I have tried to cope with it—again mainly by keeping relationships professional. The effort has had only partial success.  

This chapter will elaborate on the pitfalls of doing participation research. I will describe such pitfalls in my own research, reflecting on my close proximity to my respondents, and offer strategies for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the problems of close relationships.

How Close Is Too Close?

Each time I engage with participants as a conflict resolution practitioner, I face maintaining the balance between being a trusted insider and an objective outsider. As a practitioner, it is my professional expectation to be inquiring, to actively listen, to summarize, to document exchanges, and to build relationships with participants. It is interesting that participant observation demands a similar level of engagement, and the lines between closeness and separateness are as blurred.

Participant observation proves to be complicated in an island community where complete separateness is unlikely. Many times I will look out in a group I am facilitating and see my children’s friends’ parents, coaches, colleagues from other projects, and even students of mine. Clearly my proximity to my facilitator colleagues can be as close, as there are some with whom I share friendships, and others I have had as professors and participants. Hume and Mulcock explain this well.

Deliberately attempting to simultaneously position oneself as both insider and outsider is after all, socially disruptive. By resisting total integration and commitment to the social domains we are researching, by attempting to maintain our intellectual distance while also indicating our desire to “belong” we choose a socially anomalous identity that is fraught with inconsistency and ambiguity, both for ourselves and for our research participants. The personal and emotional costs of inhabiting such a space are often high.

In my research, this closeness had potential to allow for (a) genuine observation and fact finding through trusted relationships; (b) opportunities to ask hard questions that reveal interesting insights; (c) access, though not unfettered, to respondents and other informants and participant situations that strengthened the research that otherwise may not have been available; and (d) a window into the “backstage” of participants’ lives and its influences on “front stage” performances. However, this closeness was also replete with challenges, mainly to my ability to be fully objective and critically reflective for fear of jeopardizing either personal or professional relationships.
Objective and Critical Reflection

Relationship with [Walsh]

In reflecting on his own work, Fenno talks about relationships:

Sometimes a professional relationship threatens to slide into a personal friendship. I worried about it and tried to guard against it. I did not want them as friends, only respondents. … Some members became friends. But they remained business friends rather than personal friends, social friends or family friends.240

With [Walsh] in particular, I began with a professional relationship but that transformed into a personal friendship as well. My deep respect for our friendship and colleagueship presented some honest challenges to my ability to objectively and critically view both processes and criticisms that were revealed through participant interviews and through my own observations of the implementation of [Walsh]’s approach. I attempted to represent the voices from my case studies as accurately as possible I owe [Walsh], as a trusted colleague, to present the scope of feedback I gleaned from the interviews and I owed to the community an ethics of objectivity and honesty in the hopes of identifying best practices in policy deliberation. By participating in and observing [Walsh]’s work over time, I attempted to balance my perspectives, always keeping the “observer” lens fully present.

Relationship with Case Study Participants

With many case study participants as well, I ultimately shared a certain closeness, and stepping away from the case studies as a practitioner and objectively responding to what I saw and heard was inherently a challenge. This was particularly so when I was deciding how to present the interview results. The majority of my interviewees were so open, they would simply say, “Use my name, I’m fine with that,” while a handful were very concerned about how their ideas were to be shared. From those who expressed concern, I do not use any direct quotes. From those who were more open, I present more direct responses. Hyatt and Lyon-Calvo suggest that their ethnographic and activist practices with community members can contribute to the larger project that they describe as “ethnography from below.” By “ethnography from below,” they mean ethnographic work that “sheds light on the way that state-level processes shape social and economic realities at the level of the neighborhood and community.”241 For this particular research, it was inherently important to hear from participants in community-based processes in order to understand where the process was situated politically.
My activist stance toward public deliberation, which often brings with it a demand for empowerment of marginalized voices, can sometimes blind me from seeing and hearing the voices of those who hold power, and who often have very legitimate interests and valuable insights. During interviews, it was essential that I suspend any disbelief I might have felt when listening to participant narratives, at least long enough to gain an empathetic understanding of their position. Stuart Muir offers an example of such sympathies: “This is particularly the case when, like many anthropologists, my instinct was to support the (critical) indigenous position, against the interests of settler Australians. I tried hard not to let my political sympathies interfere with the study.”

These examples encapsulate my greatest challenges in engaging in participant observation. The following section will present how I engaged with and explored opportunities for overcoming such pitfalls.

**Overcoming Pitfalls**

Various writers on ethnography, qualitative research, and participant observation have offered strategies for dealing with the abovementioned pitfalls. As solutions to my own personal challenges, three possibilities emerged: (a) applying creative *methodology* that provides space for closeness and highlights the benefits of activism, (b) maintaining *rapport* with research participants both personally and professionally, thereby ensuring access, and (c) practicing *transparency* in both personal and professional relations with participants about the importance of critical reflection, even presenting ways they may gain from my research.

Both rapport and transparency could be realized if I moved forward with the intention of doing no harm. As Fenno expressed this view, “If I leave every relationship I have with a member of Congress in as good or better repair than when I started, then I will leave Congress more, rather than less, accessible to later generations of scholars.” My hope was that through utilizing the following strategies for avoiding pitfalls, I too would leave the doors open for future scholars of public deliberation as well as providing something of value to the field.

**Objectivity Denounced**

In Kū Kahakalau’s dissertation, “*Kanu o ka ‘Āina—Natives of the Land from Generations Back: A Pedagogy of Hawaiian Liberation,*” she expresses an alternative to a researcher’s position to her/his
work. Expressing a deep discomfort with assumptions of neutrality and unbiased engagement toward one’s research, she explained

I bring to every task my mana, my personal power, which includes all my strengths: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. I also bring with me my personal skills and experiences, my hopes, my dreams, my visions and my ancestral endowments, including the wisdom that my ancestors share with me.\textsuperscript{244}

She continues, “The fact that I could actually be part of my research, and actively participate in the process, immediately attracted me to heuristics as a research method.”\textsuperscript{245} I share Kahakalau’s discomfort with unbiased engagement toward research, particularly when she speaks about bringing her mana with her. I would not be a facilitator if I did not care deeply about the health of our communities, and my intention for this research is that it enhances our field so that we are able to serve more effectively. My closeness to the work and to the interviewees allowed for deeper and more honest conversation.

Heuristic inquiry was developed by Clark Moustakas,\textsuperscript{246} drawing heavily upon the ideas of Michael Polanyi.\textsuperscript{247} It is defined as follows:

Heuristic research is a search for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation.\textsuperscript{248}

The heuristic approach explicitly acknowledges the involvement of the researcher, to the extent that the lived experience of the researcher becomes the main focus of the research.

From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery. The research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration. My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness—to receive it, accept it, support it and dwell inside it.\textsuperscript{249}

What this offers my own research is a tool with which I can effectively evaluate my own position in the work and which provides me, if you will, permission to bring activism to my critical reflection on our roles in public deliberation. Heuristics is autobiographical, with the researcher at the center of the work, but if I apply such methods when reviewing my own lens, intention, and experience, I will have utilized a method that is true to my multi-dimensionality in the field and that allows my experiences to be used as a research tool.\textsuperscript{250} Although making a social impact was one of the Kahakalau’s requirements of her
research, she shares, “It is also something I, as an avid activist, felt is an absolutely essential component of a doctoral dissertation.”

**Rapport**

To maintain such closeness with participants, building rapport is essential. Rapport elicits trust, and trust allowed me to safely vacillate between personal and professional relations with my research participants. Fenno reflects on his own relationship with respondents:

> Rapport is increased, too, by the demonstration of loyalty. I took every opportunity, verbal and behavioral, to reassure them that I would not use my experience or my information to hurt them, that I was a person who could be trusted.

Fenno speaks to the concept of intention, and if I am able to keep my intention pono, or balanced and with integrity, I will be better able to navigate my relationships. Clearly, the interviewees who had engaged with me personally were much more willing to share an interview and deeper knowledge, but I needed to work more diligently for the other interviews with participants in [Walsh]’s projects. Not only was there expressed distrust of me as a non-Hawaiian writing about two Hawaiian organizations, but given the complexity of each case along with sensitive conflict material, people were reluctant to share at times, despite my assurances of my intentions to ensure anonymity.

Building rapport happens over time and is fueled by a myriad of practices, responses, silences, and commitments. Jonathan Telfer alludes to this idea: “Research participants need to be able to depend on the researcher’s consistency and reliability. Some suggested that my quiet, easygoing demeanor assisted my entry and acceptance into the field, along with my commitment to honesty and openness.” Because rapport is so inextricable to my work as a conflict resolution practitioner, and many of the participants who shared with me I will work with again professionally, ensuring integrity in my research was critical.

Fenno demonstrated loyalty and respect when he “agreed as a scholar, not to write and expose, not to kiss and tell, not to cause a member personal or political damage, not to quote a member when he or she wished not to be quoted.” This is just one example of how rapport and credibility can be established. As much as I agree with Fenno, there is a balance between protecting the integrity of case study participants and upholding academic rigor to ensure the story is told with accuracy and deep
reflection. With [AIEP] pulling out of my research, loyalty as Fenno describes became more difficult because I had to include the consequences to my research in my limitations section and was unable to incorporate their voices given their unwillingness to participate. My assumption is that many within [AIEP] will find that my research is quite critical of [AIEP].

**Transparency**

Honesty and transparency about such risks and challenges as I faced as a participant observer with [Walsh] and even with certain participants revealed my vulnerabilities as a researcher. I hope this vulnerability established respect and reinforced my commitment to doing no harm. Fenno’s way of resolving dichotomies in allegiance to the research and to participants is by maintaining professional credibility. He says, “For it is only within that community that we can put our experience to its most constructive purpose.”

Fenno was referring to the academic community. As a professional insider, my ability to maintain relationship with participants is just as important as my relationship with the academic community.

Another tangent of transparency that I find critical and that contributes to building rapport is establishing a strong relationship with decision-makers, despite my sympathies with those less privileged. Because the decision-makers are often the ones who bring conflict resolution practitioners into the project, I find it critical to warn them that regardless of their style, their likeability, the results of preliminary interviews, or the outcomes of a particular process, the journey might unfold differently than they imagined. I have grown to have a deep sympathy for decision-makers, as they tend to get fingers pointed at them when something fails despite best intentions and/or best design. Decision-makers are also expected to sometimes compromise what they think is best to honor the group’s wishes. This level of transparency sends the message to decision-makers that I am looking out for them too. I even go as far as sharing with them some of what I am hearing so that when they receive feedback, it is not as surprising to them. I attempted to share the same level of transparency in my relationship with [Walsh]. Unless otherwise specified by research participants, I shared selected feedback with [Walsh], so that she did not lose faith in me as a participant observer and fellow colleague.
**Distance**

In 2008, my family had to abruptly leave Hawai‘i for fifteen months to support my husband’s job. I cannot help but believe that spending that time out of the arena of conflict resolution, immersed in preparation for my comprehensive exams, provided me an opportunity to reflect on how to navigate the insider/outsider conundrum as well as to refine my commitment to participant observation. When I returned to Hawai‘i in 2009, I soon began working as a community facilitator again and teaching peace and conflict resolution courses at the University of Hawai‘i. My part-time status as a facilitator, graduate student, and lecturer allowed me space for reflection and separation, particularly as I moved in and out of diverse facilitation teams and projects. As Fenno explains,

> Your research is by nature, drop-in-drop out, drop-in again research. Your observations get made at irregular intervals and at numerous points in time. You are driven by that condition to an extra appreciation of time. You see not only “this person in this context” but also “this person at this time.”

Although Fenno was highlighting the narrow arena within which we as participant observers are provided access, he also addresses the distance I have mentioned. Perhaps the “dropping-in” rather than twenty-four hour immersion allowed me the time to reflect in as detached a way as possible.

**Conclusion**

Researchers are neither insiders nor outsiders, but are always participants in processes of change. Participant observation is replete with pitfalls, particularly when navigating insider/outsider relations. Given my professionally close proximity to members of my case studies, challenges unfolded that will be described more fully when I discuss the research’s limitations in Chapter 7. As Hume and Mulcock so clearly stated, “Uncomfortable fieldwork is often very good fieldwork.” My hope is that with researching through unique methodologies, I can allow space for such closeness and make it a strength, rather than a weakness. I felt that through continually building rapport and maintaining transparency, I was generally able to have direct access to my interviewees and build the necessary trust that allowed me to critically reflect without jeopardizing relationships. And finally, with the intermittent engagements and distance, I am confident that I had enough fresh air to effectively represent my interviewees’ narratives. Fenno provided eloquent advice to those of us embarking on participant observation research:
You need to be patient, come on slow, and feel your way along. Two handy hints: Go where you are driven; take what you are given; and, when in doubt, be quiet. Rapport is less a special talent than a special willingness to work hard—a special commitment. And one reason it is hard work is because of the many contexts and types of people you find yourself confronted with.  

I did my best to “go where I was driven, take what I was given, and be quiet when in doubt.” The following two chapters will present the two case studies.
Chapter 4 Case Study I:
The Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus ([AIEP])

“Ethics is always at play in this kind of work; is it my duty to do something about it? How do I do this without doing harm?”

– Community facilitator

[The Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus’s] mission is to assess, evaluate, coordinate, report, and make recommendations on the effectiveness of existing education programs for Hawaiians, the state of present Hawaiian education efforts, and improvements that could be made to existing programs, policies, and procedures to improve the educational attainment of Hawaiians. Below is a concise history of why money was earmarked for Hawaiian education and the subsequent formation of [AIEP] according to the organization’s website.

In 1981, the Senate instructed the Office of Education to submit a comprehensive report on Hawaiian education. It found that Hawaiians scored below parity in education and that these low achievement levels were directly related to cultural factors. In 1988, [an Act] was passed, which recognized the unique educational needs of the Hawaiian people and the role of the federal government in empowering Hawaiian organizations to address those needs.

Furthermore, the Act was amended to provide for the establishment of [the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus] to: “coordinate the educational and related services and programs available to Hawaiians … assess the extent to which such services and programs meet the needs of Hawaiians; and provide direction and guidance, through the issuance of reports and recommendations, to appropriate Federal, State and local agencies in order to focus and improve the use of resources … on Hawaiian education.”

The organization’s website mentions the impending retirements of the two key senators who have historically lobbied for federal support for investment in the health of the Hawaiian community. Their retirements do pose a threat to continued funding for [AIEP], primarily because, according to a local newspaper, the Hawai‘i Star Bulletin, “A report by the Government Accountability Office blamed the US Department of Education for failing to evaluate the [Indigenous Education Act] and criticized [the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus] and [Councils] for its implementation.”

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, citing a lack of data, said that “it could not attribute recent gains in preschool enrollment and high school and college graduation rates among Hawaiians to more than 100 grants awarded through the act to more than 30 organizations in the state from 2002 to 2007.” The report also said, “We did not find any impact evaluations, studies, or other types of research linking activities to changes in Hawaiian educational outcomes.” Although most if not all [AIEP] grantees are confident that they are making positive impacts on the health and education of...
Hawaiian children, most grantees do not have the necessary evaluation systems or reporting mechanisms in place to demonstrate their successes. In addition, many grantees did not feel that the federal indicators of educational success were necessarily relevant to Hawaiian children.

The need to gather grantees to collaboratively create culturally relevant indicators and get buy-in on evaluation and reporting procedures to ensure the thirty-three million dollars of federal funds would continue to flow to Hawaiian programs prompted [AIEP] to seek a third-party facilitator to assist. In 2006, [Tamara] [Walsh] was hired as a facilitator by [AIEP] staff to design and run a series of large and small group meetings within a three-year time frame.

I initially selected [AIEP] as a case study because I was impressed with the [AIEP] group of grantees who came together and their tenacity in convincing the United States Department of Education (USDOE) that the additional indicators were critical for Hawaiian children to succeed within the confines of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates. I felt my research would highlight an organization and a community that was making great strides in realizing its self-determination.

Furthermore, it seemed the process would be complex enough to provide enough diverse data, as well as being an appropriate story for introducing a unique facilitative approach that demanded multipartial engagement. Not only did this case study provide stellar outcomes to share, but it also included innovative community process designs along the way. Most attractive, the relationships [Walsh] had with [AIEP] staff as her client and the groups she was serving felt well beyond the conventional expectation of a facilitator being “neutral.” Her multipartial engagement challenged many assumptions held in the field of conflict resolution regarding the role of a facilitator. I felt this was a critical factor in the success of their efforts. Interestingly, it was [Walsh]’s multipartial engagement that contributed greatly to the premature termination of her contract, providing a stronger justification for this research. However, [Walsh]’s termination naturally presented limitations to my work.

In 2008, I received support from the Executive Director (ED) to use [AIEP] as a case study. During my contractual engagement, my participation with [AIEP] was very minor, as I served as a small group facilitator, recorder, and report writer, and was able to participate in a handful of process design meetings. I followed [AIEP]’s progress over a two-year period, speaking frequently with [Walsh] and with the Executive Director. I collected as much data as I could before I had to abruptly leave the island.
for fifteen months during my husband’s short-term job transfer. During my absence, I remained in touch with [Walsh]. When I returned at the end of 2009, I re-engaged with [AIEP] to discuss coordination of the interviews. Their Executive Director was still supportive, and we were moving toward finalizing how the interviews were going to be conducted. At this time, there was deep discontentment among Committee members of the State Council, led by one particularly respected elder, or kūpuna, about [Walsh]’s sustained involvement. I will refer to her as the “Emeritus Council Member,” as she was elevated to this status, which gave her carte blanche access to all meetings. They were growing increasingly uncomfortable with [Walsh]’s influence on not only the processes but also the outcomes, particularly because the outcomes involved potential restructuring of the organization, which would jeopardize the current Executive Committee’s power of influence.

The ED, [Walsh], one [AIEP] staff member, and I had one last meeting in March 2010 to check in about launching the interviews. I was encouraged by the ED to obtain endorsements from professionals at the University of Hawai‘i in the facilitation field as well as in Hawaiian studies, as he felt that they would be beneficial when I went to speak with the Executive Committee. He acknowledged potential sensitivities that might emerge, such as the recent stresses with [Walsh] and [AIEP] staff, me being a non-Hawaiian researcher, and apprehensions about the [AIEP] story being shared, to name a few. He did not perceive the endorsements to be necessary for the grantees, and also mentioned that they could potentially be viewed as pretentious. I met with a handful of potential endorsees and received endorsements from Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, associate professor in political science and one of my committee members, Neal Milner, chair of my committee, professor in political science and former University ombudsman; Maenette Behnam, dean of the Hawai‘inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge; and Karen Cross, former director of the Spark Matsunaga Institute for Peace and co-director for the Center for Global Nonkilling at the time. I officially began interviews in May 2010, meeting with one grantee visiting from a neighbor island. At that point, I had interviewed [Walsh] and the ED several times, taken observation notes, reviewed reports, and read evaluations, [AIEP]’s historical documents, and news briefings.

Despite positive community reaction to the various meetings the common indicators that emerged, and the community’s recognition of the need for capacity building to support the needed changes as indicated in all facilitation evaluations, [Walsh] was removed from the project at the beginning of 2010.
Despite [Walsh]’s removal, I was relatively confident that my research would continue. However [AIEP] leadership abruptly changed in July 2010, when the ED took a position in President Barack Obama’s administration and left before the summer’s end. Most challenging, the new leadership now included members who were highly critical of the ED’s performance and [Walsh]’s involvement. I wanted to allow the new ED and Executive Committee members to get settled, and I approached the new leadership for continued support in early November.

I shared a three-hour meeting with the former Emeritus Council Member, who had become the interim Executive Committee Chair, the new ED, and one staff member. The Chair had very little knowledge of my research, which resulted in suspicion and low trust. In the end, they said they did not think they would continue to support the research, explaining that they did not want a non-Hawaiian publishing anything on their organization. I discovered that the Chair was very angry about not being included in the initial research discussion, and felt [Walsh] held too much power in decision-making in her facilitation role. Also, she did not want [Walsh] getting any credit for the successes of [AIEP]. [Walsh] had designed an evaluation matrix in collaboration with another contractor to be used by [AIEP] for identifying culturally appropriate indicators for success in education. The matrix was informed by participants’ feedback, but the design came primarily from [Walsh]. There was sustained disagreement about whose name should be on the matrix. Because the only clear reason she provided for not allowing my research was that I was “non-Hawaiian,” I proposed to the Chair that she write the story on [AIEP], allowing the story to come from her voice. I also suggested we co-author an article following the defense of my dissertation so that they could move into fuller storytelling and share what has been accomplished since [Walsh]’s departure. I even suggested adding an addendum to my research that fills in the gaps between when [Walsh] left the project and today, highlighting all that has been accomplished. She was not interested or willing to consider any of these options.

I asked if I could have the opportunity to present my research to the full Executive Committee. The request was initially granted, but the day of the meeting I received a call from the Executive Director uninviting me. Evidently, the Chair decided to present my research from her perspective, and the Committee voted in favor of withdrawing support. One person who attended this meeting shared with me later that it “certainly wasn’t a vote. We were highly encouraged to withdraw and I am confident that what she presented was not at all the intention of your research. She alluded to you intending to
exploit the Hawaiian community” (#22, 06. 15.10). Needless to say, I was devastated, particularly because of my integrity being unfairly questioned and dismissed.

Had [AIEP] supported my research, I could have continued interviewing Executive Committee members and been able to present perhaps more balanced perspectives. Their withdrawal and subsequent silence rather left the impression that they were fearful my work would present a negative story of [AIEP]. Instead, their withdrawal and silence left a much stronger sense of dysfunction and abuse of power and silenced any voices that would have countered opinions suggested by [Walsh], [AIEP] staff, or my own observations. The ED stated in an email to [Walsh] in the fall of 2009, when [Walsh] learned that her contract was going to potentially end,

“You were the first rock down the mountain in the avalanche—yet to really begin in earnest. Is just a matter of time before gravity and the laws of nature kick in. Pat yourself on the back when you start to hear the rumble and feel the earth move. All good” (ED email to T. [Walsh], November 2009).

The ED fully supported [Walsh]’s work and felt confident that they had done their best in building grantees’ capacity to measure their successes and tell their stories to ensure federal monies would continue. He also felt the proposed leadership change was needed to ensure [AIEP]’s mission could be more fully achieved.

As facilitators intimately know, there are numerous sides and perspectives to a conflict. Regarding my research, it is very clear to me why [AIEP]’s new leadership felt betrayed by the former ED because he chose to not divulge his support of my research. Although the ED supported my research, he did not feel comfortable publicly advocating for it because he was sensitive to the Executive Committee’s growing discomfort with [Walsh]’ s deeper engagement. He was fearful they would not allow me to interview grantees. Rather than seek approval of Executive Committee members first, he advised me to go one-by-one to interview folks then go to the Executive Committee once I had endorsements in hand. I knew their voices were absolutely critical and fully intended to interview them.

Not surprisingly, when they learned of my research after letting go of [Walsh] and after the ED left the organization, they withdrew support. After consultation with my committee chair, I decided to continue my [AIEP] interviews with anyone who was willing to share with me. It became very difficult to
continue interviews with [AIEP] grantees because the Executive Committee Chair discouraged members from sharing with me. The logistical obstacles resulted in a time gap of one to two years, so participants had to reach back far in their memories to recall their experiences, and I had great trepidation about upsetting too many people because I work with many of the grantees on other projects in the community. I was only able to secure ten interviews from [AIEP] participants.

Although I had not been comfortable with the former ED’s decision to refrain from publicly announcing my research, I did fully respect his intentions and I had trusted that speaking with grantees first and then approaching Executive Committee members was the most strategic route. I would have preferred a full endorsement from [AIEP]’s staff and Executive Committee, but I deferred to the ED as he knew his organization much more intimately than I did. I assured him that my intention was not to critique [AIEP] as an organization, but rather to explore the processes that were used, highlighting that much of the critique would fall on the facilitation team. He valued the research and he thought it would be a nice opportunity to tell their story, providing them with materials that they could use to broadcast the group’s accomplishments. I had also hoped the Executive Committee would view this as an opportunity to share the enormous successes they had experienced over three years, particularly highlighting that through effective community processes, they were able to create groundbreaking strategies for pushing back against USDOE pressure and to support the Hawaiian community in developing culturally relevant indicators of success in education.

Ultimately, my research became a comparative study rather than a sole case study, and I believe it became a richer piece of work. The fallout with [AIEP] actually provided me with a viable example of how non-neutral, multipartial engagement can have exemplary impacts on outcomes but devastating and rippling consequences to facilitators. The fallout also allowed me to look elsewhere for one other successful “multipartial” facilitation case study to compare and contrast. It is important to present a brief history of the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus before delving any further into analysis.

**History of [AIEP]**

An Act was established in 1988 to assist Hawaiians in boosting academic performance, thereby improving opportunities for higher education and viable employment. Organizations serving Hawaiian communities across the islands received portions of the thirty-three million dollars, but grantees had
very little overlap and there was no central body to assist in monitoring and evaluation of programs. Furthermore, no resources were allocated to help build capacities for these organizations to document and evaluate impact. In 1994, the act was amended to provide for the establishment of the [Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus] to:

coordinate the educational and related services and programs available to Hawaiians … assess the extent to which such services and programs meet the needs of Hawaiians; and provide direction and guidance, through the issuance of reports and recommendation, to appropriate Federal, State and local agencies in order to focus and improve the use of resources … on Hawaiian education.265

It was reauthorized as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110, Title VII Part B.

The Act required [AIEP] to be made up of not more than twenty-five members from federal, state, and private educational organizations serving Hawaiians. In order to ensure adequate representation of island and community interests within the organization, the law authorized the Office of Hawaiian Affairs to facilitate the establishment of island organizations for the following islands: Hawaiʻi, Maui, Molokaʻi, Lānaʻi, Oʻahu, Kauaʻi, and Niʻihau, and it guaranteed each organization one seat on the state level. These island organizations were to be made up of parents, students, and other community members who had an interest in the education of Hawaiians. In January of 1997, the [Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus] ([AIEP]) was officially formed. As of August 2011, [AIEP] had three staff members, one intern, an Executive Committee, and eighteen specialists serving on the State Council.

Members gathered to develop the Council’s vision and mission statements and outline a strategic plan. Most island organizations met at least once a month to develop resource inventories of education programs serving their communities and identify the unique educational needs and concerns of their individual islands.266 It is important to note that State Council members did not receive resources to oversee grantees or conduct evaluations and assessments. Rather, they were initially provided the monies to disperse to their island organizations, which would in turn disperse to grantees on their respective islands. However, there were no accountability measures put in place, nor resources allocated to train organizations in monitoring and evaluating programs. How monies were allocated at
the island organization level was left to organization members to decide. Certain organizations gave funds away to fund programs, others hired half-time facilitators/staff to support and help keep the organizations going, others held events. The ED ultimately blocked all such use of funds and was planning on re-prioritizing the use of [AIEP] funds to support activities on each island to enhance accountability. [Walsh] suggested, “This was a point of contention and played a role in the resistance to the changes that we experienced” (T. [Walsh] telephone interview, 04.26.11). Until staff was hired, the State Council was comprised of volunteers who were committed to other lines of work. Without funding, it was difficult for Council members to commit time to overseeing disbursements and evaluation procedures and it made it nearly impossible for the Council to build capacity for grantees to document and evaluate program outcomes.

When federal money was reauthorized under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, grantees were under greater pressure to demonstrate improvements in academic performance by Hawaiian children under NCLB guidelines to secure sustained funding. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) audit on [AIEP] was completed in 2007 and determined that the Federal Government could not attribute changes in Hawaiian educational outcomes to federal investments due to lack of data.267

The Executive Director of the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus applauded the report, suggesting, according to a newspaper article, that

> the Council, which has long complained about being ignored by the Education Department, asked Hawaii Senators to push for the GAO review. The Education Department has not evaluated the act because of its relatively small cost, according to the GAO report.268

The Executive Director was also reported as saying that federal support for data collection and evaluation would be critical to ensure accurate reporting. The article went on to say that although the ED “understands the Education Department has larger federal programs to manage, he contends the department has not shared data compiled by grant-winning organizations, preventing the council from prioritizing needs in the Hawaiian community,”269 and that, further, that explains why the Council was unable to make recommendations for future use of grants and only recently filed required annual reports, as noted in the audit. The article quoted the ED concluding thus: “‘We’ve been telling them,
“Look, we want to do our job, and we need the data,’” he said. “I do believe that this report will change that.” In its reply to the report, the Education Department said it would improve how it tracks and rates grants, and work more closely with the council. The ED felt confident that now that [AIEP] was on the federal radar, they would receive more institutional support in fully evaluating their programs, which had been a fundamental challenge from the inception of the organization. The responsibility for the failure to collect relevant data and design evaluation systems was shared by the Federal Government and local organizations, yet they were blaming each other. It was not until the audit and potential loss of funding that [AIEP] mobilized to set up the necessary systems.

In 2006, [Walsh] encouraged [AIEP] to propose a “Resilience Initiative” for its grantees, steeped in cultural metaphor, formalities, and context. The initiative launched a series of meetings that involved large groups of recipients and smaller groups of island organization members. This initiative sought to increase grantees’ capacity for greater accountability and transparency by finding common ground from which to design evaluations, collect data, quantify accomplishments, and communicate successes. The initiative was also designed to define the education needs of Hawaiian communities, and to aggregate those needs into a set of funding priorities that would be used to better align the kinds of grants awarded by the ED with the Hawaiian community’s most pressing educational needs. The ED’s response to the GAO report made it evident that, prior to the audit, [AIEP] had not obtained sufficient support from the Federal Government to reach these goals.

There was general support from the majority of grantees for this process and an appreciation for how much work was ahead. Many made comments such as, “It’s about time!” and “We realize that the paradigms are changing and if we cannot tell our story of success in a compelling way, we will not continue to get funding,” and “This is the best step [AIEP] has taken. We jumpstart this and we will get all the wheels moving in the same direction.” Evaluations revealed three areas of resistance to the Resilience Initiative, which are important to highlight because it was on these areas of resistance that [Walsh] and [AIEP] staff needed to focus in order to obtain full buy-in on the need to collect data and share stories of success and to identify new indicators specific to Hawaiian children. The three major impediments included (a) lack of financial and training support from the Federal Government to meet their monitoring and evaluation mandates; (b) lack of clarity about what cultural indicators were most...
relevant and who was going to decide what indicators to use, and (c) distrust and anger toward the Federal Government and [AIEP].

First, the ED responded to the GAO report by slamming the Federal Government for not providing the necessary financial and training support that would be needed for [AIEP] to collect the necessary data. With such a small staff, it was nearly impossible to build capacity for all the grantees receiving portions of the thirty-three million dollars in grant funds. According to [AIEP]’s fiscal year report for 2008,

In broad terms, the Act was contained as a Title in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and created the [Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus ([AIEP]). The enabling legislation charged the [AIEP] with the responsibility to “assess, evaluate, coordinate and report, and make recommendations” on the state of Hawaiian education, and the programs and grants necessary to accomplish the purposes of the act. However, the Act did not define the processes, performance measurement metrics, or give the [AIEP] the authority to collect the data necessary to accomplish its mission.

Second, there was general consensus by all grantees that what the DOE was using as indicators to measure academic success was not sufficient for Hawaiian children who have endured the multi-generational effects of colonization. Grantees felt that Hawaiian children needed to feel connected to their communities and their histories through learning Hawaiian language and cultural practices to gain the self-esteem and confidence to carry them through school. During walkabout interviews where [Walsh] and others on the team interviewed grantees informally, a member of the evaluation team cited multiple people suggesting, “Culture based education is a venue and best approach to increase academic achievement for Hawaiians. ... We need to build passion especially in public schools where children are not given the connection to their culture through hands on activities” (from the Resilience Initiative evaluation, 2008). But consensus on what indicators to use did not exist.

The third reason was the inherent distrust in anything “federal” by many in the Hawaiian community. Some of the leading issues involved the group’s distrust in [AIEP] as the Fed’s puppet. Some Hawaiians felt [AIEP] was in cahoots with the Federal Government and that the upcoming processes and whatever recommendations were made would not be considered. One of the grantees stood up in the first meeting and said, “Who are they to demand accountability from us?” and another neighbor island grantee commented,

I don’t believe that the Resilience Initiative is a good fit for our island. We have tried to do what the State Council has asked. We don’t want to be exploited any further on this island. We have brought over 100 people through this Council. We would always have 25–40 people at these meetings. When this program first came out what was
explained to us about our job was very different than what you are telling us now. This is when the program was under the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. But the whole time we wanted to make sure that we do not forget our ties. Moloka‘i does not want to do what many of the other islands want us to do, in the way of modernizing and developing. People expect us, they want us, to be bureaucrats. If that’s what you want, then go get them. If the state wants to go down this route, I will not support the State Council. I will support the leaders looking to help coordinate the Native Indian Education Conference, but no more than that. We don’t want the development. We have already said that we don’t want your development, your money, and your obligations that come with that money.²⁷²

This resistance stemmed from what one grantee from O‘ahu expressed, “They put us in this situation and now they are asking for measurements of success?” All three reasons are common residual effects in post-colonial societies working to heal the past, perpetuate culture, and build the future.²⁷³ The first reasons cited as major impediments—insufficient funding and training support and lack of culturally relevant academic indicators of success for Hawaiian children—were items that could be negotiated, whereas the latter reason of simply not reporting because the government “owes us” was not negotiable. The need to gather grantees to create culturally relevant indicators and get buy-in on evaluation and reporting procedures prompted [AIEP] to seek a third-party facilitator to assist.

According to [AIEP]’s 2009–2010 Annual Report,

Through a direct grant of the Council for Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA), 14 community meetings were offered throughout the state and across islands, to gather information on Act Reauthorization from community members. Each meeting was two hours and was facilitated by a CNHA staff member. At least one staff from [AIEP] attended all of the community meetings, although many meetings included multiple Education Council members.²⁷⁴

It is important to note that this annual report cites a CNHA staff member as the facilitator, not [Walsh], yet it was [Walsh] who did the facilitating. [Walsh] is not referenced at all in any of the annual reports during the years she participated.

Executive Committee members were somewhat resistant to this process from the beginning—not necessarily apprehensive about [Walsh] per se, but resentful of having to go through it all, especially given that it was mandated by the USDOE. The scope of [Walsh]’s contract included, first, building consensus on the need for indicators that demonstrate educational successes for Hawaiian children; second, identifying and building consensus on culturally and linguistically aligned indicators that were reflective of Hawaiian values; and third, facilitating the design of a data collection and evaluation system [AIEP] could support and lead for their grantees. [Walsh] facilitated two big tent meetings, with approximately a hundred people in attendance at the first meeting in October 2006 and nearly two
hundred at the second meeting in January 2008. In between the two tent meetings, “island huddles” were conducted on each neighbor island with island organization members and other community members to determine key stakeholders on each island.

One final evaluation meeting was conducted with participants and professionals in evaluation. Multiple planning meetings with [AIEP] staff and, less frequently, with [AIEP]’s State Council and its Executive Committee were held throughout the three years. I participated in the planning of the initial Resilience Initiative tent meeting, served as a small group facilitator, wrote the final report, and participated in a handful of subsequent design meetings. According to the ED, [Walsh] was hired not only for her expertise in facilitation but her professional and academic backgrounds in education and evaluation (Executive Director interview, 03.22.2010). When I sat in on the few planning meetings I attended, the [AIEP] staff’s passion was palpable, with the ED in particular expressing himself with robust nonverbal gesturing and loud, exuberant speech about how important it is to get everyone on board to ensure funds continue to be provided for the Hawaiian community. It seemed the more [Walsh] provided different strategies, the more excited the ED would become. He was noticeably frustrated with the State Council continually “holding the organization back” and not understanding how to fully negotiate with the Feds.

Planning meetings involved primarily [AIEP] staff and [Walsh]. State Council members were rarely part of planning, although they were routinely briefed on planning notes and agendas. Participants in the processes included [AIEP] staff, responsible for the dissemination of grant money; the [AIEP] Education Council, responsible for overseeing [AIEP]; its Executive Committee; island organizations comprised of identified leaders; outside evaluation contractors; US Department of Education representatives; and over two hundred grantees from various organizations serving the Hawaiian community.

**Growing Tension**

Tension began building between Executive Committee members, [AIEP] staff, and [Walsh] due to the inevitability of leadership changes. [Walsh] was being asked by staff to do more substantive work, not only providing political strategy but also participating in negotiations and drafting content-specific materials. Subsequently, [Walsh] was asked by the ED to accompany the [AIEP] delegation to
Washington, D.C. to meet with the Deputy Director of Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs at the USDOE (hereafter “the Director”) to discuss the incorporation of culturally aligned indicators. Meetings were held November 1–4 in 2009. The Director had been in Hawai‘i the previous year to meet grantees and reinforce what the USDOE was expecting in terms of reporting and evaluation. She was initially met with great resistance, with participants voicing fundamental challenges such as these:

Our children need a frame of reference, a place to connect their learning and so we are asking you to accept our place based curriculum and indicators, which will allow our children to connect to the land, their genealogies, and ultimately themselves, which is foundational in indigenous learning. (#29, 02.20.11)

There is nothing in the USDOE indicators that measures a child’s self-esteem, resiliency, land stewardship, connection to place and family and spirit, all critical for Hawaiian children. (#29, 02.20.11)

The director learned about the need for culturally relevant indicators although she was not wholly convinced. However, her visit did build understanding and she tasked the group with creating such indicators, ensuring alignment with No Child Left Behind mandates and strategies for evaluating these new indicators. In an email response to the ED, she confirmed her commitment to try to support the group:

In the media as well as in the emails that I receive from you, you reflect often on the past and how the Department has not supported the program. While I am in this position, I will work with the EC to continue forward to improve the program, identifying the resources that are needed to provide high-quality education programs and services for Hawaiian children. We have required grantees to provide the EC with reports and other official documents. At the recent training of grant reviewers, we included a representative nominated by the EC to brief reviewers on Hawaiian life, culture, and education. We recently held a conference call with the EC that sets the stage for us working together to share ideas and information about the program. As I look forward to the future, I know that the Report to Congress will add knowledge to the positive aspects of your program. (T. [Walsh] email to ED, March 29th, 2008 with EC plus interim Chair cc’d. I later received a copy.)

According to [Walsh] and [AIEP]’s ED, the trip to D.C. the following year was meant to introduce the proposed indicators and convince the Director to accept them as part of the USDOE’s evaluation of outcomes. Before leaving for D.C., the ED was very candid with his EC, sharing why he felt [Walsh]’s participation in D.C. was essential. The night before the official meeting with the Director, the State Council representatives, the ED, and [Walsh] met in what [Walsh] identified as a “team huddle.” The ED shared what goals they had for their meeting and what he thought could realistically be accomplished during this visit. He delegated everyone’s roles: he and [Walsh] would engage in the negotiation while State Council members and Office of Hawaiian Affairs staff would be available for questions and initiate questions as needed. He highlighted the need for everyone to speak from the
same place, to demonstrate a collective voice. [Walsh]’s and the ED’s perceptions were that everyone felt confident about the strategies they were going to use in the meeting. [Walsh] coached the ED in how to navigate and shape the conversation, selling the Director on why the proposed indicators were necessary to most accurately measure academic success for Hawaiian students. The ED continually looked to [Walsh] for strategic advice. [AIEP] was seeking buy-in from the Federal Government, so skills in negotiation were critical for this meeting; the ED did not feel fully prepared and relied on “the facilitator” to assist (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011).

Goals of the meeting included:

1) buy-in from the Director on the revised set of indicators to measure student achievement for Hawaiian children;
2) for the Director to advocate to the USDOE on [AIEP]’s behalf; and
3) time and resources to develop assessments tied to the new indicators for effective evaluation.

According to [Walsh],

The most important was the symbolic shift that had been accomplished. We showed that we were up, engaged, on it, advocating solutions to our problems and asking for and expecting support and assistance in becoming more successful. This was new and it changed the direction of influence and the energy. USDOE had ignored [AIEP] for a long time and it was perceived that killing the funding was a likely development. The ED was trying to change that trajectory. We were trying to eliminate any possibility of pulling the plug on [AIEP] due to claims that Hawai‘i lacked effort or insight about needed changes. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

The meeting was respectful, if at times tense, but never did anyone raise his or her voice, according to the ED and [Walsh]. Council members and the OHA constituent’s involvement in the discussion were minimal. [Walsh] felt that their reluctance was because either (a) nobody felt masterful enough on content to jump in or (b) they were uncomfortable with the tension (T. [Walsh], telephone interview, 04.26.12).

According to [Walsh] and the ED, most of their goals were met. The Director said she could agree with the argument about the need for a revised set of indicators and she saw value in the ones that were drafted. When she was asked to advocate on behalf of [AIEP], she waffled and claimed that she really couldn’t control the decision, which caused tension in the room. The ED and [Walsh] reminded the Director that this was her job, to advocate for programs on their behalf. She acquiesced and said she would do what she could. The conversation became more difficult when the Director said that the deal was off to accept the indicators without an assessment tool attached and that she did not see how they
would be able to get an extension. The ED was getting flustered. [Walsh] wrote on a post-it note, “This is a social justice issue,” and passed it to the ED, who then shared this perspective with the Director. He expressed that the community wanted to do this right, which meant linking the appropriate assessment tool to the new indicators; that additional resources were needed; and that the traditional mechanisms for measuring outcomes were not relevant to the Hawaiian community. He reiterated, “We need new indicators, we need time to assess, and we need money to help support the transition” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12, and ED interview, 03.17.08).

The Director encouraged [AIEP] to move quickly on developing an assessment tool and said that she would get back to them regarding any additional resources the USDOE would be willing to provide. She said, “I will advocate for you and get back to you”. Before gathering for a shared meal later that evening, the ED called [Walsh] and exclaimed, “You hit a homerun today, [Walsh]!” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12).

Two weeks later, while still on the East Coast for the Thanksgiving holiday, [Walsh] received a call from the ED. He told her that the Executive Committee was no longer interested in [Walsh]’s engagement, saying, “We have a little problem going forward—they hate you. They want you to disappear at this point. They won’t approve any more work with you,” and she was essentially let go from the project (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). Although there was no specific letter ending the contract, the ED told her that certain Council members felt that [Walsh] had become too involved. A member of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs accompanied the group to D.C. This was the first time he had been engaged with any [AIEP] efforts facilitated by [Walsh]. [Walsh] assumes that he questioned why a facilitator was advocating on their behalf to the USDOE as well. He, along with the Emeritus Council Member, expressed anger and frustration for how involved [Walsh] had become and how she appeared to be “representing” [AIEP] in Washington, advocating on their behalf alongside the ED. In a meeting with me in January 2011 the Emeritus Council Member told me, “[Tamara] sat there filling the ED’s mouth with words and this was not what her role was supposed to be.” According to [Walsh], this is exactly what she was asked to do by the ED. When I interviewed the ED, he gave me his perspective: “[Tamara] was critical to that conversation. We needed her there.” I believe that the disconnect between the ED’s opinion of [Walsh]’s intended role and the Executive Committee’s, along with her advocating as a non-Hawaiian, was the poisoned concoction that resulted in [Walsh]’s departure. Again, [Walsh]
was in a position well beyond neutrality. She later shared her thoughts about the situation with me (T. [Walsh] email, 09.19.12):

So there I was, with the ED needing support; with the community saying clearly that they wanted to go in this direction, with the continued funding of this effort on the line, and with a board that was out legally of compliance and now passively resisting all that was in motion. What, ethically, was I supposed to do? So I went to DC and gave it my best.

Despite the Executive Committee’s recommendation to terminate [Walsh]’s contract, the ED pleaded with [Walsh] to stay on, if even behind the scenes. [Walsh] continued to simultaneously (a) provide the ED with needed support and (b) design and co-facilitate the Evaluation Hui meeting of professional evaluators who met to assist in the creation of the indicator assessment tool. The outcomes of the meetings in D.C. were shared with all grantees, and the immediate need to reach consensus on an assessment tool was highlighted. In January 2010, efforts began to pull the Evaluation Hui together, to restructure the State Council, and to repurpose the Island Councils. [AIEP] leadership was fully aware that the community would be suspicious about such quick and immediate developments. A plan was presented to the Executive Committee by the ED, which included strategies for redesigning the governance structures and then presented again to the State Council on October 29, 2009, just before the D.C. trip.275 The Executive Committee decided they would (1) begin seeking qualified board members, (2) plan a celebration for outgoing members and a welcome for new board members, and (3) help people move into the positions, maybe through a participating mechanism. They also decided that they would not open up the selection process for new board members to the grantees, but rather make the recommendations themselves.

They would also bring [AIEP]’s story to the media to share successes to date and garner support from the larger community around the potential impacts of culture- and place-based education, highlighting [AIEP]’s statewide leadership role. In doing so, the hope was that with enough public support, the naysayers would be quieted and potential leaders would step forward, thereby replacing existing leadership. They had a wedge, which would allow them to relatively easily implement the necessary governance changes. According to [Walsh],

Nearly all the documentation suggests that those to be served by this felt we were doing the right work in the right way at the right time and for the right reasons. Even if they also didn’t really want to do it. It was seen as necessary. (T. [Walsh] email, 09.19.12)
They were confident they would be able to create a new governance structure with far-reaching buy-in.

After the return from D.C., it was obvious the changes were going to have to happen immediately. The Executive Committee was hesitant to push the State Council. The ED tried to get the EC to lead the meeting. EC members kept saying, “We just can’t do it.” They failed to implement the new plan over a three-month period. [Walsh] felt strongly that the Chair had the strength and respect to do it and could make it happen successfully. But she concluded “because of her dignity and pride she failed to execute” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). Plan B was to contact the office of one of the state senators to explain the plan of repurposing the Island Councils, as well as that the State Council members were serving beyond their term limits and had numerous issues of conflict of interest. Then the restructuring recommendation would come from the senator’s office rather than their peers.

In the meantime, the evaluation group was being pulled together, and they held their first meeting in the spring of 2011. [Walsh] participated in identifying who would serve in the group and was asked by the ED to co-facilitate with him. Days before the evaluation meeting, the ED was pulled away for another meeting in D.C. and [Walsh] became the lead facilitator, much to the Emeritus Council Member’s chagrin. [Walsh] later told me that the Emeritus Council Member was less than supportive and publicly disrespectful, dismissing [Walsh]’s agenda and redirecting the group. My interview results from three participants in the meeting provided interesting feedback. They all sensed the tension and felt frustrated by (a) the lack of clarity on the agenda, (b) the imposition of the Emeritus Council Member in interrupting the planned agenda, and (c) the inefficient efforts to get consensus rather than moving forward and making decisions. One interviewee who attended two evaluation meetings told me,

The meetings felt strange. There were other dynamics happening in the room between the facilitator and some participants as well as between organizations. I know they have long histories, but I couldn’t understand what was holding us back. At one particular moment, a [AIEP] Council member publicly disagreed with the agenda and I felt bad for the facilitator. (#26, 03.03.11)

Another interviewee supported these observations by saying, “The facilitator and one of [AIEP]’s Council members went around and around which held us back and made us apprehensive to share” (#27, 03.03.11). Another participant expressed that the evaluation meetings were really “slow and without the ED, who is closer to the group, there was some tension” (#23, 02.22.11).
In an interview with me, [Walsh] remembered that at that meeting, for the first time since beginning the [AIEP] project, she was ready to step away, and she pulled the [AIEP] staff aside to say that was considering leaving the meeting at lunch and allowing the Emeritus Council Member to run the afternoon. The staff begged her to stay and she uncomfortably obliged. [Walsh] recollected, “At the end of the meeting, there was what seemed like a formal receiving line for me as I exited the room. Participants had bowed heads, purposeful eye contact, double hand shake, expressing ‘thank you so much’ numerous times” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). She thought it felt apologetic but nothing was directly mentioned about the tense ambiance of the meeting. When everyone left, the [AIEP] staff told her, “People appreciated that you were being mistreated and you did nothing about it. You kept your cool” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). As [Walsh] expressed to me, “I won respect that day, in some convoluted way by putting up with the Emeritus Council Member’s abuse. How backwards is that!” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). This was the last meeting [Walsh] attended and the last engagement she had with [AIEP].

As plans stalled for implementing the needed restructuring plans, the disgruntled Emeritus Council Member took advantage of the group’s wavering and contacted the senator’s office herself, expressing that the Board needed immediate action. She proposed to the senator that she become the interim chair; she would ensure that existing members signed conflict of interest waivers, and term limits would be reinstated and respected. She ensured the senator she could turn the Board around. The ED left [AIEP] to serve in President Obama’s administration within months of the Emeritus Council Member taking over authority in the organization, although he was gearing up to leave [AIEP] well before this event. The Emeritus Council Member became the Interim Chair and she hired as the new Executive Director a non-confrontational but respected leader in the Hawaiian community, who took clear direction from the State Council. Her new position is documented in [AIEP]’s 2009–2010 Annual Report.276

While [Walsh] maintained her participation at the request of the ED in early 2010, she also inquired about the legality of ending the contract. The ED told her that he did not know what else to do. According to [Walsh], he said, “I don’t know if I can advocate—I’m perceived as a coconut myself and have a hard enough time!” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). His reference to a coconut is a local description of someone who is white (western) on the inside but brown (local) on the outside. [Walsh]
felt that he did not understand his authority, and that as he had a contract that the Board had approved that was only half fulfilled, he should be able to advocate for [Walsh]. [Walsh] felt he had a lot of insecurity about his “ethnic authority,” which compromised his organizational authority (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12). There was still a significant amount of money owed to [Walsh] when she was let go.

Unfulfilled outcomes described in [Walsh]’s contract included:

- Identifying, recruiting, and orienting new Board members to drive the implementation of the reform.
- Re-tasking previous board members to key roles in development teams to help the reform effort. A schema was created that identified four standing work groups that previous kūpuna/board members would head up.
- Partnering with other education leaders/funders to coordinate efforts and achieve economies of scale in terms of supporting community capacity building for grant writing, evaluation design, report writing/story telling.
- Supporting the evaluation group to develop credible measures of broader student outcomes of concern to the Hawaiian community. Seeking funds for development and testing of new measures.
- Developing a resource bank of program descriptions, evaluation tools, curricular materials, training tools, etcetera, found to be effective that can be shared and modified for other locations across Hawai‘i.
- Redefining role of island groups. Mobilize and train new members to their new role.
- Advocating for an influx of one-time funds to support the development of the human and technology systems needed to drive this new process of priority setting, recommendation making, grant making aligned with the priorities and knowledge creation based upon sound evaluation practices. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

[Walsh] did not receive a termination letter or income owed, which was estimated to be about $30,000, but she received multiple apologies from the ED. [Walsh] heard through the grapevine that the ED had left [AIEP] and that was the last contact she had with the organization.

**Proposed Reasons for Termination**

Had I been given the opportunity to interview Executive Committee members, I would have had the chance to develop a more comprehensive perspective on the issues that led to [Walsh]’s termination. The assumptions that I have developed on the matter are based on interview feedback, observations, and secondary data materials. It appears that [Walsh]’s termination occurred for numerous reasons, related primarily to the notion of neutrality and secondarily to her being non-Hawaiian. First, had she been introduced from the launch of the project as a strategic advisor or a facilitator wearing multiple hats and received buy-in from State Council members for this role, I believe her termination and the subsequent detour of [AIEP] efforts could have been avoided. Second, her leading role in the
restructuring of leadership challenged many, but in particular the Emeritus Council Member, who had enjoyed a high level of authority since 1999. Third, she was thwarting the Emeritus Council Member’s political agenda, and fourth, as a non-Hawaiian, people became uncomfortable with her advocating on behalf of the community and stepping beyond the bounds of neutrality.

**Multipartial versus Neutral Engagement**

Despite [Walsh] being introduced solely as a “facilitator” to grantees and the Executive Committee, [AIEP] staff routinely requested coaching on collaboration, political strategy, evaluation, and planning, which teetered on the boundary that some identify as “consulting” versus “facilitating.” Because the Executive Director needed to obtain community consensus on culturally relevant indicators and to convince the community that this had to happen in order to ensure that federal funds would continue to be earmarked for Hawaiian children, he relied on [Walsh] to figure out how to get consensus, how to present the community outcomes to the USDOE, and how to restructure [AIEP] so that it could more effectively serve the grantees of the federal monies. He relied heavily on [Walsh] to provide these strategies and answers as well as provide him with “talking points” when he represented [AIEP] in front of grantees and/or federal audiences.

Both the ED and [Walsh] knew that grantees would respond more positively to proposals if they came from either him or another Hawaiian rather than from a non-Hawaiian facilitator. At that time, he was having some issues with the Council complaining about the cultural responsiveness of a group of non-Hawaiian evaluators they had hired. On May 2, 2008, he sent an email to [Walsh] to share the Council’s apprehensions about this particular evaluation team, asking for advice on how to handle it—one of many times he requested strategic advice from [Walsh]. The email, which [Walsh] later shared with me, said,

> I like the work they (evaluation contractor) are doing, but the cultural lens seems to be missing sometimes in the way they present things. There is a call by some on my board to put more effort into building the cultural lens, after they upset some of the attendees with their not well received cultural metaphor and other gaffes. This cultural lens thing is a big hurdle that I will have to clear if we want this event to be successful. (ED email to [Walsh], 05.02.08)

How much the Board’s discontent with the evaluator’s cultural metaphor was truly because of a cultural gaffe or merely a strategic playing of the cultural card because they were not satisfied with
what the evaluators were suggesting is impossible for me to know. [Walsh] responded to the ED the following day:

I know where you are coming from and that you don’t necessarily share the judgments of your board. So I will play past my annoyance to try and offer something constructive here.

[thanks for acknowledging, and then muddling through, nonetheless]

1) Ask the evaluation team, which (Hawaiian researcher) could best help them present the ideas and info in a way that will gain audience confidence about the cultural relevance. Then, when they name that person, have you and your board invite and secure their commitment and involvement. Pay them or twist their arms or whatever it takes so that the eval team isn’t left in the front of the room, alone.

OR

2) Ask your board members, those who are raising these concerns with you, to be the cultural mouthpiece for the session. Have them work with the eval team to understand enough of what has to be done, conveyed, communicated to do it WELL and let them sell it themselves. (T. [Walsh] email to ED, 05.03.08, and later shared with me)

[Walsh] then asked,

Is it really that the work lacks a cultural lens or is it that the evaluators aren’t Hawaiian? How you answer that has much to do with finding a solution that will work. I would hope that the work they have been doing has the cultural lens all through it. It would be nice if good work could stand on its own. No guarantee that a Hawaiian presenting the info will be any more culturally relevant that would depend on the Hawaiian, no? However, it is fair to say that the audience will be more generous with whatever a Hawaiian does, so … I say your only real solution is to find a Hawaiian. (T. [Walsh] email to ED, 05.03.08, and later shared with me)

The ED did not respond to [Walsh]’s suggestions.

This is but one example out of many where [Walsh] was asked by the ED how to handle issues of cultural relevance, political strategy, organizational capacity, and evaluation that went beyond how she was introduced to grantees. I feel that this glaring disparity in how [Walsh] was introduced versus what she was really being asked to do caused the greatest problems for [Walsh]. The more involved [Walsh] became, the more the Executive Committee pushed back, particularly the Emeritus Council Member who ultimately became the Interim Chair.

Ikevoli Leadership Changes

After two years of meeting with grantees in a large group format and meeting with Island Councils and communities on the neighbor islands, [AIEP] felt confident that they had the necessary buy-in from the community to move forward with the new set of indicators that had been created and to present them to
the USDOE for support. They were also clear that they did not have the appropriate leadership in place that could effectively manage the significant changes that would be needed to achieve their goal of creating new educational indicators. According to [Walsh], those least happy were Island Council members because they had been in charge of their island budgets and were now being asked to give up authority of those funds to [AIEP]. They needed clarity about their roles and they did not know how to articulate to their communities that they no longer had control over funds (T. [Walsh] telephone interview, 04.26.12). New [AIEP] leadership was essential to helping strategize through this transition.

When the Executive Committee began to learn that a restructuring of Committee leadership was being encouraged and their power usurped, they let go of [Walsh], which provided them more influence over the ED. When I interviewed him, the ED expressed some regret.

I should have pushed back a lot harder, a lot sooner. I feel like I spent the first two years getting “them” to feel like they were in charge of this … the community consensus but I should have pushed back harder. It was part of my responsibility. It comes down to needing to change the people inside the box or change the box entirely. (ED interview, 05.22.2010)

[Walsh] had a similar view: “The Executive Committee needed to get behind him, to free him up to do what he needed to do” (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011). According to [Walsh],

As the focus of effort shifted from getting common indicators and winning community support to messing with power structures, with the USDOE and within the Councils themselves, we see no resistance from anywhere but the Executive Committee—first stalling tactics, then obstructionist tactics and then raw power moves to remove me and seize formal control of the organization. (T. [Walsh] email, 09.19.12)

Although [Walsh] refers to the Executive Committee in general, my perception is that the decision boiled down mainly to one person, the Emeritus Council Member.

**Jeopardizing Political Agendas**

[Walsh] strongly believed that the Emeritus Council Member had ulterior motives for maintaining her leadership roles within [AIEP]. The Emeritus Council Member held a Ph.D. in education and had been working to establish a Tribal College in Hawai‘i with the goal of serving as the College’s president. She relied on the USDOE to advocate for this effort and did not want the ED to ruffle feathers because it would jeopardize her agenda. The [Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus] provided her access, credibility, and face time with USDOE folks, and she could parlay this work into opportunities to make
connections for her efforts at establishing a Tribal College. While in D.C., the ED set up numerous meetings with congressional leaders to share her vision of a Hawai‘i-based Tribal College. According to [Walsh], the Emeritus Council Member

needed a supportive unchallenged relationship with DOE—using opportunities at [AIEP] to advance other professional and cultural agendas. While the ED was working to elevate [AIEP]’s voice as a co-leader of this effort to the USDOE, a tense, but professional dialogue ensued. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

[Walsh] felt that this particular person was afraid the tension was going to escalate, where she would have preferred the delegation to share cultural practices to make friends rather than advocate on behalf of the community. [Walsh] shared, “it was a formidable back and forth about these real issues and I think it frightened some of the Council members or at least made them uncomfortable, feeling that perhaps we were being uppity, nonhierarchical and not sharing aloha” (T. [Walsh] telephone interview, 04.26,12).

Clearly, [Walsh] has the perspective that the Emeritus Council Member singlehandedly caused her termination, although I feel it was problematic from the beginning because of the way [Walsh]’s role was introduced and explained to leadership and participants. I believe there was a perception on [Walsh]’s and the ED’s part that if they explained how involved [Walsh] actually was, there would be resistance from participants, which would jeopardize buy-in. When I met with the Emeritus Council Member, she gave the following reasons for the termination: (a) [Walsh] had become too involved in the content and strategy and was not in a position to be designing evaluation matrices, (b) [Walsh] was too involved in Washington, D.C. during the federal negotiations, (c) personality differences were becoming an obstacle, and (d) [Walsh] was wanting to receive credit on the matrix even though it was perceived to be [AIEP]’s work.

When I checked with [Walsh], she added,

Maybe my confidence when speaking truth to power is what upset her most. It’s not a common practice here. Or maybe my conviction that reason and rationality and the greater common good should trump tradition, habit, comfort, pettiness or politics. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

[Walsh]’s response highlights how culture can be used as a political weapon when clashes erupt. Stating that “reason and rationality should trump tradition” silences a conversation in a similar way as
when Hawaiians use the non-Hawaiian card. [Walsh], like all of us, can inadvertently play the culture card to maintain power. She further responded to the matrix issue by saying that she didn’t necessarily need recognition or authority on the matrix. She said, “It’s a resource that is needed by the community.” However, she proceeded to say, “I built it. It now has my name on it with a ‘use with permission’ clause attached” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12).

Reflecting on what transpired, [Walsh] shared,

It was amazing how we were all taking direction from someone who had no position, this Emeritus Council Member. She had a hat trick there. She went from having no official role to becoming a Board Chair and reinstating all of her friends and being in charge of [AIEP], while booting the ED and me as the facilitator. It was Machiavellian and very strategic. I feel she threw down the race card when her petty politics was behind it. The ED said repeatedly how doggedly she was advocating for her Tribal College. She was using [AIEP] as a tool for getting her where she needed to go. Even getting in the way of community. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

[Walsh] clearly saw her role in a way that allowed her to speak truth to power and to do a lot more than what you learn in facilitation class. This particular relationship between the Emeritus Council Member and the facilitator truly highlights the fundamental challenges for a facilitator when a need exists to shift power to achieve the outcomes desired by the group.

**Ethnicity and Race**

Issues about [Walsh] being non-Hawaiian were expressed from time to time as a concern throughout her engagement, through comments she received in her “safety bowl.” How directly [Walsh]’s race played into the termination of the contract is unknown.

About three weeks before the second big tent meeting, [AIEP]’s ED shared a candid conversation with [Walsh] about its Board Chair’s apprehension about a haole being up in front of the room and seemingly “leading” the process forward. For staff, [Walsh]’s ethnicity was not seen as an issue, although they were fully aware that it would be an issue for some grantees and Executive Council members. The ED felt [Walsh]’s skills trumped anyone’s concerns about her being non-Hawaiian. I believe [Walsh] being non-Hawaiian was an issue for the Executive Committee from the beginning, but the ED had hired [Walsh], confident that her skills would alleviate any concerns about her being non-Hawaiian. It is also something the ED had little patience for, yet he did little if anything to address the issue. In response to his Executive Council’s complaints about cultural relevancy, he shared with [Walsh], “We collectively can be provincial, narrow, ethnocentric and racist sometimes. Is definitely
NOT the lesson of my ancestors who came to this place from Scotland, Portugal, Germany, China, Hawaii, and other parts of Polynesia. Wish it weren’t so” (ED email to T. [Walsh], November 2011; later shared with me by [Walsh]). Throughout my own engagement with [AIEP] State Council members, I felt this tension more through the nonverbal than the verbal. For example, I came early to help set up for our first tent meeting and upon entering the room, I smiled and greeted everyone and nobody responded with a “good morning” or introduction. I proceeded to introduce myself and ask how I could help. I was minimally provided an opportunity to help and then I waited for others to show up. My small groups were very welcoming but I was reminded through the safety bowl that our facilitation team makeup was in question. You do your best and hope that your intentions and skills are more important that your ethnicity, but if things get at all difficult, culture and ethnicity is an easily identifiable point of blame. It is also convenient because many people do not know how to discuss issues of race and ethnicity safely, so they avoid it. In the [AIEP] case, I think it was an issue from the beginning, but was exacerbated when [Walsh] became more involved in strategy and design.

As far as ethnicity is concerned, it is difficult to determine if there was strictly a discomfort with her being non-Hawaiian, or more realistically, if there was a discomfort with her being non-Hawaiian and advocating for and seemingly leading Hawaiian self-determination efforts. For example, if she had just served as a process “facilitator” as she was initially introduced, refraining from representing [AIEP] in D.C., contributing to content, constructing assessment tools, and partaking in governance changes, her ethnicity, I believe, would have been less of an issue. But because she engaged in non-neutral ways and her work became central to the effort rather than ancillary, it seems her ethnicity became the target, particularly for the Emeritus Council Member whose position of authority was being reconsidered and who, in addition, had a good friend and colleague whose assessment tool [Walsh]’s was gaining popularity over. Playing the ethnicity card was convenient and silenced any further conversation.

The bigger test would have been if a Hawaiian facilitator, who was engaged in the same ways as [Walsh] and also pressed for a restructuring of governance, had been as challenged in his/her role. If a Hawaiian facilitator were so challenged, the arrow would point toward the issues being centered on non-neutral engagement combined with the threat of leadership changes. A non-Hawaiian evaluation expert had been engaged for almost the same time as [Walsh]. She was deeply engaged in the evaluation process and had significantly fewer struggles. However, her participation role as an
evaluation expert was clearly articulated and subsequently respected. Her “cultural responsiveness” was questioned from time to time, but she remains on contract today.

[Walsh] felt that perhaps some of the Council members were not comfortable with her advocating on their behalf. In an interview with me, [Walsh] shared, “I was the only researcher, only Ph.D. there and the ED needed me there.” [Walsh] felt that the race issue was merely a red herring. She felt the Emeritus Council Member desired to be the mouthpiece of Hawaiian education and she got really uncomfortable when everyone was buying in to the efforts and she wasn’t at the helm. According to [Walsh], “It was her petty politics of power, not race that was the greatest issue” (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12).

**Staying in the Game**

Given these obvious challenges, it is important to understand what kept [Walsh] in the game. When I asked her, she explained it thus:

The sheer importance of the project—it could have developed long legs if it had worked. I happened to be present for a rare moment of opportunity. The community felt poised to move. The necessary skills were mapped for this task. The ED was really alive and an engaged learner. Although I anticipated some of these things were issues, I did not anticipate the power a small few would have on the majority. It was an offensive group overall, but I felt like I had a private trusted relationship with the ED to get things moving forward. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

She continued,

The only reason this type of group is allowed to behave badly is because of their oversensitivity to historical trauma. It almost gives the group permission to behave this way. I wouldn’t have tolerated it from a non-oppressed community. I don’t shy away from a fight when it’s about justice if it’s on behalf of someone else. I can get pretty dogged and fearless. Perhaps if I had understood more clearly the toxicity of the Emeritus Council Member and how far her power reached from the get-go, I would have reconsidered my extended participation. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

[Walsh]’s explanation of the role of trauma nearly lets the ED off the hook for not having the courage to take a stronger leadership role and implement the needed changes according to the grantees themselves.

[Walsh] concluded that the following convictions kept her engaged:

- Ethics—deep conviction to do the right thing.
- Willingness to sacrifice “right treatment” for myself to assist in this important work getting done.
Abundant sensitivity (perhaps excessive) to in-group/out-group dynamics and the impacts of historic trauma that might allow some folks to do such things. Belief that others would rise to the occasion and move beyond self-interest, given all that was at stake. Belief that my hard work and good intentions would protect me and garner me the support I needed to be safe, even while taking some risks. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

[Walsh]’s termination embodies the core of my inquiry by highlighting the risks we take as facilitators when we decide or are asked to move beyond neutrality. The termination was emotional for many involved, including [Walsh], who had committed three years to [AIEP] and was genuinely committed to their success. The project stalled for some time. I had asked an Executive Committee member to provide me with an epilogue but she declined. Had [Walsh] entered this project as a “neutral third-party,” she would have risked reinforcing the status quo, which was insufficient for meeting the needs of the USDOE. She also would have refrained from helping the ED strategize, brainstorm, and design, which the ED felt he needed in order to succeed. By engaging in a multipartial way, working more closely with others to build capacity, wearing different hats, and so forth, she was responding to what was identified as needed during the intake process that she had conducted at the beginning of her engagement. To most effectively evaluate how [Walsh]’s assumptions and commitments affected the [AIEP] facilitation, it is important to revisit her assumptions.

Checking Assumptions
In Chapter 2, I introduced the individual working assumptions of both [Walsh]’s approach and my own. Based on what I have learned from participants during the interview process, it is critical to test each set of working assumptions. Our two sets of assumptions have been informed by our own unique academic backgrounds and experiences working in the community. The following section will test [Walsh]’s assumptions vis-à-vis the [AIEP] case study, and I will do the same in the following chapter, exploring my own assumptions relative to the Hui for Excellence in Education (HE’E) case study.

The voice that is often missing when we define our approaches and methodologies is the voice of the participant or the one receiving our services. I am grateful to those who provided their honest opinions about how they desire facilitators to engage and to what degree they should address power and political imbalances, contribute to content, and practice beyond the bounds of neutrality.
Deliberative Democratic Processes Produce the Most Sustainable Outcomes

I discovered three inherent challenges that exist with this assumption relative to the [AIEP] case study. First, a democratic process assumes a relatively level playing field for all participants to participate fully or, at a minimum, the opportunity to create a level playing field. Second, it assumes that those in positions of decision-making are comfortable with full participation. Third, it may be considered western in its assumptions and may not resonate with communities who have hierarchical structures of decision-making and high-context communication patterns.

Within [AIEP], the playing field for grantees was relatively level in the sense of how it impacted outcomes. Every tent meeting was open for all grantees to attend, and process designs ensured that all grantees would have their voices heard, documented, and considered. However, within the leadership structure, a clear hierarchy of decision-making existed and only seemed to become more pronounced as the project unfolded. The Executive Committee’s attempts at centralizing power were evident when they continually requested that Council members be the ones to present during the meetings, to lead small groups, and so forth, despite [AIEP]’s efforts to build capacity for the grantees. Ultimately, when the Executive Committee learned that many grantees were not confident in [AIEP]’s leadership, they pushed to centralize even further. Rather than acknowledging this lack of confidence and responding accordingly, the Emeritus Council Member persuaded the leadership to resist and ultimately to let go of the facilitator to quell the conversation. Deliberative democratic processes demand that the outcomes of the deliberation will be duly considered by decision-makers, and in [AIEP], this is where the threads of democracy unraveled. The political interests of a few prevented true deliberation from being realized.

This suggests that within the [AIEP] network, the Power Distance Index was quite high, which is a natural challenge to achieving full and effective deliberation. A report from the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota that looks at how cultural norms affect social hierarchies began looking first at how decisions are made within families in more collectivistic cultures. They found,

Culture influences how decisions are made within a family. In traditional collectivistic cultures, there is likely to be a social hierarchy based on gender, birth order, and/or age. Family elders may be highly respected, and they often have roles of authority with responsibility to make sure family members do what is best for the family rather than what is best for themselves as individuals. Elders may have final say about how far their children go in school, who
they marry, or where they work. Decisions by authority figures in collectivist cultures are likely to be obeyed with less questioning than is typical in individualistic cultures.

Leake and Black are explaining dynamics within a family within collectivist cultures. Their explanation accurately describes what I observed within and between grantees, specifically in who held decision-making privileges (elders), and in particular the power the Emeritus Council Member wielded over the group. If the facilitator does not advocate for more inclusivity, social hierarchies remain and decision-making is situated within a small group. This dynamic was reinforced by the ED’s inability to effectively push back and implement needed changes. This does not mean that successful outcomes cannot emerge but it does preclude opportunities for full deliberation by a wider pool of stakeholders.

At a leadership level, [Walsh] and [AIEP] staff seemed to value the elements of critical and deliberative democracy that [Walsh] felt were necessary to achieve [AIEP]’s goals. [Walsh] adds to her aspirational definition of a facilitator by suggesting,

In practical terms, if taken seriously, this aspect of facilitation—promoting consciousness in the process’s design—asks a facilitator to coach clients to an honest assessment of their situation, sometimes to a point of discomfort. Working from consciousness requires intellectual honesty, the weighing of moral issues, the confrontation of “un-discussables,” etcetera—this may depart from the clients’ expectations re: the facilitator’s role or a facilitated process. However, it is my belief that part of my role is to support capacity building by expanding client understanding of the significant variables at play, the critical aspects of the context in which the work will take place, and their likely impact on the process and the outcome. It is, in the end, little more than doing one’s homework as a facilitator, but doing it transparently and collaboratively, with clients. This creates teachable moments for example, how to assess a context as part of collaboration and problem-solving; and then custom-design a process for those considerations. (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011)

[Walsh] did not use this exact language when she was hired, although she did share candid conversations with the Executive Director about the roles she mentioned above. In the same interview, [Walsh] said, “The ED was an eager learner, which made the work rewarding.” Her rich extrapolation of the role of a facilitator assumes a level of safe deliberation between facilitator and client as well as between participants. “Honest assessments,” “the confrontation of ‘un-discussables’ that may depart from the clients’ expectations,” and “collaboratively competent leaders,” all assume comfort and competency with explicit low-context verbal deliberation.

In [AIEP]’s case, [Walsh] was working closely with the second tier leadership, the [AIEP] staff that felt collaborative leadership was important. Yet the first tier leadership, the Executive Committee, was not always on board, particularly when they realized that their leadership abilities were being questioned.
Rather than addressing the Executive Committee and risk disrespecting their honor, it became an avoidance situation in which the staff and [Walsh] would meet and design without the Committee’s input. They did share the outcomes of each meeting with the Committee, but I imagine it was strictly to “report” rather than to invite feedback. This caused great resentment over time. The ED expressed, “I created a lot of instability in the organization and I really did not honor the existing power structures” (ED interview, 05.22.10). From my observer perspective, the ED incited the instability, feeling confident about how community consensus was going to be obtained and what was really needed in order to ensure federal funding would continue under the grant, regardless of his Executive Committee’s resistance. He also had a lot of faith and trust in [Walsh]’s guidance and relied on her heavily for strategy. He knew the Executive Committee felt he should be going to them for that strategy but he didn’t have confidence in their leadership. I believe he felt that if he honored the “existing power structures,” [AIEP] was not going to achieve what it needed to achieve.

Low-Context Communication Is Essential for Healthy Deliberation

[Walsh] holds the belief that healthy deliberation demands open, honest, and safe communication. In working with Hawaiian groups, we find a tendency toward higher context communication patterns, where meaning is often widely shared and assumed, and often articulated nonverbally. Those who express themselves more explicitly are more often than not in positions of authority or leadership. Gary Huang offers a view:

Cross-cultural communication is a fundamental issue in education for APIs, since they have distinct communication norms that are significantly different from those of native-born Americans and other immigrants. ... Like other high-context cultures (Hall, 1977), APIs, particularly East Asian Americans, are typically polite and even submissive in social encounters. APIs, used to their high-context communication and, thus, constantly “tuned” to the moods of the other conversants during interaction, expect the others to be similarly sensitive. Westerners, who only pay attention to what is explicitly said, however, often ignore nonverbal cues.

To achieve a full “deliberative democratic” environment for participation as well as decision-making, [Walsh] had to make considerable efforts at balancing power, which I believe contradicted “cultural norms” and made some people in positions of power uncomfortable. One of the frustrations [Walsh] has reiterated when working with non-western communities is the frequency of silence, inferred meanings, and lack of honest dialogue, frequently expressing that so much goes “unsaid.” In the large tent meetings, questions would be posed to the group and frequently it would be the community leaders, either the elders or participants from the university’s Hawaiian Studies program—those in...
perceived positions of authority—that would respond. The majority of others who were present were very quiet. [Walsh] used small groups to provide safer environments for more people to participate in the conversation. If they expressed opinions in the small groups, their opinions were shared anonymously, which helped in getting more people to participate and to have their ideas considered. Yet when it came to decision-making, the deliberation seemed to occur only among those few in positions of authority, whether or not they were the most informed. For example, the majority of people deferred to the Executive Committee, particularly the Emeritus Council Member, for decision-making, rather than to [AIEP] staff, yet many grantees expressed their lack of faith in the Committee Members being the best informed.

This could not have been more evident than when [Walsh] met with [AIEP] staff and the Executive Committee about how to build the necessary leadership to support what [AIEP] was trying to accomplish. Prior to the meeting, [AIEP] staff felt very confident about how they were going to present to the Executive Committee their plans for restructuring the Council. The staff was younger than all of the Executive Council members. In the discussion, Council members dominated the conversation, despite [Walsh]’s attempts to keep to the agenda, and when it came time for [AIEP] staff to express themselves, they fell silent and submissive. Although the ED presented a partial argument, he retracted it and catered specifically to the kūpuna who were questioning him. According to [Walsh], “He had the perfect opportunity and rather than fully express himself, he bowed to the pressure in the room!” (T. [Walsh] interview, 01.08.11). Other examples could be seen in the large group meetings. Those who engaged in storytelling were generally elders from the community or staff from the Hawaiian Studies Department, and when given the opportunity, nobody else shared. In small groups, elders facilitated the conversation, often with quiet and short contributions from the majority of members. Of course, there were examples here and there of someone who was not an elder or in a decision-making position who would freely comment, but this was more the exception than the norm.

[Walsh] inherently values and encourages overt expression and high verbal exchange, which does not always resonate with the groups she is serving. In [Walsh]’s opinion, “high-context cultural norms are counter to the skills needed for true deliberation to be successful” (T. [Walsh] interview, 01.08.11). To respond to these challenges, [Walsh] often incorporates alternative designs to provide safer and more comfortable opportunities for participants to share their thoughts in order to meet her expectation of
healthy deliberation. Small group breakouts, personal interviews after which she will share participants’ opinions with the room without naming the source, and opportunities to present written ideas anonymously are all strategies for eliciting more robust feedback.

While working in Hawai‘i and bridging cultures, many facilitators have observed the importance of low-context communication; sharing safely and honestly, brainstorming freely, respectfully disagreeing, confidently presenting information, and overtly clarifying can be critical for transcending cultural differences in group processes because it is nearly impossible to infer what people mean by their body language and high-context cues when multiple cultural identities are present. This often holds true even in environments where multiple “high-context cultures” are engaged. [Walsh] has been criticized for being too direct and expecting participants to be more explicit, but she aligns with the assumption that with more diversity, a greater need for low-context, explicit language exists. Yet this assumption can sometimes be perceived as culturally insensitive. The conundrum is obvious. One of the interviewees expressed the view that “[Walsh] has a really direct personality and this doesn’t always translate in the Hawaiian community. A lot can go unsaid to keep it safe” (#15, 03.11.11). This interviewee’s perception highlights the tensions between low- and high-context communication patterns.

The Executive Committee in particular seemed to employ high-context communication patterns. For example, despite having worked with them for three years, [Walsh] felt the D.C. meeting with the Director was successful and her participation valued by State Council members, yet merely two days later she was released from the contract. Cues must have been sent, but if a facilitator has the expectation of honesty and overt verbal articulation patterns, he/she will misunderstand the cues.

Given that deliberative or critical democratic processes encourage honest, open, and frequent verbal exchanges, such processes might not be comfortable for groups with high-context communication styles, or rather, they may be structured differently. Where high-context communication is the norm and historically reinforced hierarchies are present, deliberative democratic processes may be challenging.
Correction of Power Imbalances Is Necessary When Abuse of Power Is Hindering Participation and Collaboration

In order to facilitate a full deliberative process whereby participants feel safe to share, [Walsh] feels it is necessary to address any power imbalances that may hinder full participation or sustainable outcomes. To be responsive to cultural norms, [Walsh] incorporated ways leaders in the Hawaiian community could take leads and be perceived as championing the work. For example, kūpuna in the Executive Committee were tasked with coming up with the cultural metaphor for the Resilience Initiative, and they subsequently created supporting centerpieces, pule, oli (chants), and stories to ground the process. She also provided them opportunities to share up in front of the room along the way. However, when it came to the difficult decisions that needed to be made, [Walsh] and [AIEP] staff took the path of avoidance of conflict, working to usurp what they deemed to be detrimental power structures rather than addressing them head on. She knew the balance needed to be tipped, but chose to deal with it indirectly. In the room, she was able to ensure the majority of voices were heard, but struggled more when trying to get the Executive Committee, especially the Emeritus Council Member, to support what they had heard. For example, many grantees expressed that they supported the efforts and felt a need to move forward more quickly, yet the Executive Committee intentionally slowed the processes, most likely to bide their time while they figured out how they were going to maintain their leadership roles.

In the [AIEP] case study, the goal of engaging in democratic processes proved to be challenging with the existing distribution of power. As mentioned, in engaging with communities with established and accepted hierarchical structures, whether they are based on position, gender, age, or experience, it is critical to obtain the leadership’s buy-in on process design and proposed outcomes. Power was perceived by the grantees to be situated within the [AIEP] staff, yet realistically, a handful of members within the Executive Committee held the greatest power.

Rather than addressing the issue of imbalance in decision-making with the Executive Committee members, [Walsh] and the [AIEP] staff collaborated exclusively to resolve the issues. During the initial planning stages, Executive Committee members were uninvolved in design, but it felt like they still held considerable power in decision-making. Often the comments in our design meetings would be, “Will this fly with kūpuna? What will the Executive Committee think?” Although they felt that if the
Executive Committee was brought into the leadership and design meetings, the entire process would be derailed, their exclusion led to distrust and resentment, which was only compounded by what Committee members perceived as [Walsh]’s deep involvement in the process and outcomes. Despite the lack of inclusiveness, [Walsh]’s partiality toward the staff enabled the process to reflect the needs of the grantees and provided a strategic approach to negotiating with the USDOE. The ED expressed his perspective: “I couldn’t have done it without [Walsh]. She was invaluable in D.C. and all along throughout every process” (ED interview, 12.14.10).

In [Walsh]’s work on democratic education reform, she refers to critical democracy, rooted in social justice theory, as an ideology of problematizing who and how people engage in democratic processes, being particularly cognizant of those who may have a marginalized voice for political or socioeconomic reasons. Within [AIEP], [Walsh] and the staff wanted to ensure that the “dominant ordering” that had conceivably been hindering the organization be reordered to most effectively achieve the outcomes outlined by grantees. Ironically, this entire process was responding to an effort to achieve social justice for Hawaiians by reordering what the USDOE considers indicators of academic achievement and to make permanent the Hawaiian voice on this issue in Washington. Yet the power dynamics were hurdles in reaching both internal and external goals.

It is important to note that a year after [Walsh]’s termination, the group wielding the most power within the Executive Committee was elevated to top officer positions within the State Council and a new ED was hired but had a shorter reign than the previous ED. For a facilitator to make suggestions about reordering power structures to better serve constituents, or to actively take part in that reordering, naturally poses a challenge to notions of neutrality and is fundamental to more progressive approaches to facilitation.

A participant familiar with [Walsh]’s approach shared her own feelings about a facilitator’s responsibility to address power imbalances:

A facilitator needs to anticipate there will be casualties. [Tamara] does this exceptionally well. Does strategic planning and facilitation in the same stroke; she has confidence in the outcomes she wants and is comfortable with the casualties. Fairness is not a natural phenomenon; it’s generated from humans and sometimes we need help to be fair. (#3, 04.22.11)
**Investment in Intake Is Critical for Fully Understanding the Context a Facilitator Is Entering**

[Walsh] believes that sufficient time and resources should be allocated to conducting an adequate intake, which includes learning the history of the project; its goals and outcomes; individual perspectives; political, social, and economic influences; building relationships; and gaining trust. Intake also provides a rich context for understanding where power is situated and how it is perceived in order to create processes that will fully meet the needs of each group. In comparison, one of the facilitators I interviewed held the opposite opinion, suggesting that

> the less I know the better. I ask very few questions going in and do not have contact with participants beforehand. In fact, if I am asked to engage more than two days, I decline the job because I start to care and I worry that it will affect my neutrality. (#36, 02.22.11)

Generally, participants responded favorably to intake processes because it provided them an opportunity to connect with the facilitator, ask questions, and express any concerns about the upcoming process.

Another reason [Walsh] values the intake process is that it provides for safe deliberation with the client. [Walsh] makes the assumption that clients are, first, open to receiving such information and, second, would be willing to make the necessary changes. Clients and/or leaders in the organization may not always share her belief that transparency is a catalyst for organizational growth, as leaders may find transparency threatening. During this intake process, she also suggests elements of “coaching,” which is an element in the empowerment approaches along the continuum. With a commitment to critical democracy, [Walsh] believes coaching on collaborative leadership is critical to set the tone for the upcoming meetings. Again, this assumption may not always be shared by leadership. One of the participants I interviewed said that “democracy is not always in the best interest of leadership.” She went on to say that “collaboration can at times impede on efficiency and does not always guarantee that the best knowledge and expertise are considered” (#2, 04.22.11). Her comment addresses the balance between efficiency and deliberation, which leadership and groups are continually navigating.

[Walsh] was able to spend considerable time with the ED and Executive Committee members to learn and ask questions before engaging in interaction with the grantees. Because there were nearly two
hundred participants, [Walsh] could not connect with everyone individually, but she ensured that she was able to connect with at least one person from each grantee organization. One fundamental assumption is that participants will be willing to participate in intake opportunities and find value in it. If participants are expecting the facilitator to be somewhat neutral, they may be uncomfortable with the perceived “closeness” of the facilitator. The following exchange highlights this potential discomfort. In a preliminary meeting with the State Council, [Walsh] was probing about how the affects of colonization and trauma may impact grantees’ approaches to the USDOE demands. She made reference to multi-generational trauma with the intention of demonstrating empathy and gaining trust. One of the elders on the Council quickly responded with, “Who are you to talk about trauma as a non-Hawaiian? We are not victims.” Despite [Walsh]’s intention of validating how history naturally affects current realities and demonstrating that she understands this dynamic, the deep sensitivities to post-colonial realities and notions of victimization trumped [Walsh]’s intentions. Perhaps a more neutral facilitator would not acknowledge historical injustices, but rather brush over such influences.

This highlights one critical risk in trying to connect closely to a group. Given different individuals, perhaps [Walsh]’s intentions would have been more respected, but with those few who reacted negatively, she may have lost some initial trust and buy-in. Such an intake process could jeopardize neutrality (a) when a facilitator is perceived to be spending more time with one individual and/or group or if the process design looks to favor particular parties based on intake feedback or (b) if a facilitator attempts to connect too closely to any one group and/or individual in a process.

**Each Process Design Should Be Tailored to the Specific Needs and Contexts of Each Group** One of [Walsh]’s practicing principles is that processes are customized to each unique setting. Processes should be tailored to that group’s specific needs, contexts, culture, and desired outcomes. [Walsh] and the [AIEP] staff felt that they took great care in designing each meeting around participants’ needs and larger project goals, incorporating the cultural components necessary to build trust and relationships. For example, the comprehensive assessment and planning initiative was named in Hawaiian, the process was informed by the kūpuna as a symbol of resiliency. According to the meeting documentation report, kūpuna opened the two-day gathering by talking about the story of resilience using cultural metaphors.
As a community, we need that message of hope, of strength and of resilience. To do that, [AIEP] needs all evaluative data to be shared— in order to paint a picture about the positive things we have accomplished, the things we have learned, the successful strategies we have discovered, and the information we have amassed to demonstrate that this program is worthwhile and that it has made a difference in the lives of Hawaiians. The federal Government’s job is not to paint this big picture. That is our job, our kuleana, And we don’t want to just paint one picture—we want to paint a mural.279

The message was rooted in Hawaiian cultural history, informed and presented by respected elders with the use of storytelling and metaphor, and framed in a way that promoted self-determination, which appealed to the majority of grantees. This is an example of tailoring design for the unique participants of each project.

Especially when groups of people have suffered historically from economic, social, and/or psychological oppression, some feel there is a responsibility to alter current societal arrangements to redress previous inequalities, whether these are based upon class, race, religion, ethnic heritage, gender, or sexual preference. Such situations evoke a strong sense of equality and social justice. Based on my observations, the work that [Walsh] was guiding with the grantees was consistent with what her approach advocates in terms of creating tailored designs to meet unique needs, rooted in empowerment and social justice. Grantees’ feedback directly informed process design, indicator identification, evaluation matrices, and negotiations with the federal representatives. Every effort was made to ensure that grantees had multiple opportunities to contribute to decision-making, express needs and/or frustrations, shape processes to make them culturally relevant, and be empowered where necessary. The commitment to empowerment and redressing inequalities fundamentally challenges more neutral engagement by facilitators.

**Having a Set of Practicing Principles Helps Guide Facilitators**

[Walsh] believes it is important for facilitators to identify a core set of practicing principles to allow them to vet projects, ensuring that the facilitator and the client and participants are a good match. Given [Walsh]’s five practicing principles, [AIEP] did meet the criteria. For review, her principles include (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011):

1) Participation needs to be voluntary in training/planning
2) Processes [are] customized for each unique setting
3) Build processes for sustainability
4) Processes are data informed
5) Processes and outcomes are in the best interest of the “community.”

**Detailed Contracts Are Critical to Ensure Everyone Understands Roles, Responsibilities, and Expected Outcomes**

[Walsh] believes it is essential to ensure the initial contract reflects as clearly as possible the scope, roles, responsibilities, and expected outcomes before a project begins. This also provides an opportunity to reinforce and clarify her other assumptions. Not only does this benefit the facilitator, but it makes clear for everyone involved what is expected. Despite [Walsh]’s assumptions, she did not revisit [AIEP]’s contract to make sure it better reflected what the staff was asking her to do, and she neglected to do so with every new contract. [Walsh] and the other facilitators I interviewed all stated the importance of outlining expectations, defining roles and responsibilities, and so on, at the very beginning of a contract. Of the nine facilitators I interviewed, eight said this step is critical, while one facilitator explained that she “rarely has a contract but that it is probably a good idea to have one” (#31, 05.10.11). It is in the contract that facilitators can explicitly identify the multiple roles they will be playing, either reinforcing a neutral position or clarifying any non-neutral roles they will be playing.

**Relevant Content Knowledge on the Part of a Facilitator Is Expected and Critical**

[Walsh]’s experience has taught her that facilitators are consistently asked about their content expertise in particular areas of facilitation. “In what areas have you worked?” is a leading question by many clients when interviewing potential facilitators. [Walsh] has found that when she has content knowledge in the area she is facilitating, the role of her facilitation naturally expands. She and others find that when opportunities arise where a facilitator’s content knowledge or field experience will advance a conversation and/or outcome, it is acceptable to share. [Walsh]’s background in education and evaluation was essential for her being hired by [AIEP] as a facilitator, and as already described, the staff frequently asked her to contribute to content, give strategic advice, and provide coaching. Without the content knowledge, [Walsh] would have had a difficult time serving in the role she was expected to play. According to the ED, it was because of her expertise that the project was propelled forward and they experienced such success at the national level. He also said, “[Tamara] was my go to person. She always had the big picture in mind and was so strategic” (ED interview, 12.14.10). Others felt her content knowledge got in the way and jeopardized her position of neutrality, even though she was not in fact hired to be neutral.
There are discrepancies in opinion about whether or not content knowledge in the area that one is facilitating is necessary and/or desired. Many interviewees were clear that content knowledge was very valuable as long as facilitators shared only when asked and did not impede on the process. Given the strong reactions by interviewees to this question, I believe that for many within [AIEP], [Walsh]’s content knowledge was value added, but for those who did not appreciate or agree with what she was saying, it was considered an imposition. As the Emeritus Council Member expressed, “she was too involved with the strategies and outcomes. Our ED always looked to her for the answer. Even in D.C., the Director asked who ‘that lady’ was” (Emeritus Council Member meeting, January 2011). [Walsh] denies this was asked because the Director remembered her from meetings in Hawai‘i. An inherent challenge exists with maintaining a level of neutrality when it is expected that a facilitator will contribute content expertise and/or opinions.

Incorporation of Training Is Essential for Sustained Success in Process Design and Implementation

When facilitators leave a project, particularly after a long-term engagement, there is often a lull in momentum. One of the ways [Walsh] has found to rectify this is by incorporating training opportunities for groups on collaborative leadership, consensus building, facilitation, conflict resolution, and other such topics to build institutional capacity to keep momentum. As she cites in her definition of facilitation “In turn, this [training] creates more collaboratively competent leaders—a critical need if the achievements gained from a facilitated process are to be sustained and built upon over time, beyond the facilitator’s direct involvement” (T. [Walsh] interview, 02.03.2011). [Walsh] spent considerable time training the ED, who was fully receptive to the opportunity to learn. Clearly, if someone is engaging in training, she/he is stepping out of the role of a facilitator and into a trainer position, and is therefore expected to have content expertise.

Lessons Learned

I had watched from a distance what was being asked of [Walsh] from [AIEP] staff; in addition to facilitating the various meetings, she was asked to coach and advise the ED and design frameworks where needed. I witnessed the pivotal moment when the group was ready to make a ninety-degree turn because they had reached a critical mass of supporters. I watched the Executive Committee grow more and more uncomfortable with [Walsh]’s involvement, particularly given a potential restructuring of...
leadership that could fulfill the goals put forward by the multiple grantees who had been involved for over two years. I watched how [Walsh] championed what needed to happen at that pivotal moment and how the ED continued to hesitate to make the necessary turn, knowing it was going to cause stress. I watched the ED, the staff, and [Walsh] increasingly avoiding the Executive Committee for fear that they would disrupt the momentum. And then I witnessed the fallout.

My hope was that if [AIEP] grantees and Executive Committee members would be willing to share with me their perceptions and experiences with facilitation, I could paint a highly reflective and responsive mosaic, which would, first, reveal the inherent social, political, and cultural complexities we often experience in the room. [Walsh] was willing to receive the feedback, as was the [AIEP]’s Executive Director. Second, it could have served as a snapshot for organizations to consider when they bring in facilitation teams, helping such groups to identify what it is they are asking for and to then be transparent with their participants about the potentially diverse roles the team may play. Third, it would have challenged facilitators to be explicitly clear about how they want to be represented and to clearly articulate in contracts or charters with a client the nature of their engagement. Fourth, and most importantly, the opportunity to interview multiple [AIEP] participants would have provided more shades to the political hues surrounding the case study.

I believe the difficulties surrounding this particular case study came about primarily through the Emeritus Council Member’s realization that the leadership was changing and she was going to lose her direct influence. From that stemmed her strong reaction to the successes that [Walsh] and the [AIEP] staff were achieving without her. The Emeritus Council Member’s reflections on (a) not wanting a non-Hawaiian publishing anything for a Hawaiian organization and (b) [Walsh] getting too involved in [AIEP] matters were convenient and powerful tools to rally people behind her opinion and subsequently release [Walsh] from the contract, which allowed the Emeritus Council Member to not only keep her position of power but appoint herself as Chair with the senator’s support. It is true that there were cultural and personality clashes that ensued over these few years, but they were secondary, I believe, to the power and politics affecting this case study.

With access to more diverse perspectives, I could have shown more of the texture of opinions among the grantees themselves. I covet “trust” and “transparency” as a facilitator when I am working with
groups, yet when it came to my research, I went against my gut feeling by going along with the proposal that I seek interviews one-by-one to avoid the Executive Committee’s criticism and suspicion. I am not confident at all that, even if I had been fully transparent, they would have supported the research. Yet if we as facilitators assume transparency builds trust and trust builds greater outcomes, then I should have stuck to my principles. I would like to believe that their anger about feeling somewhat deceived is what ultimately influenced their Chair to drop my research, but I sense the outcome may not have been much different had I been fully transparent.

This work is really messy and complex, and although long-term engagement often yields positive and more sustainable outcomes, it can also risk relationships because of the inherent tendency for facilitators to have a higher stake in the outcomes and to be asked by clients to engage more deeply in the work. Unless a facilitator is fully transparent about the diverse roles she is playing and, more importantly, unless the client advocates for the facilitator, it could be a slippery slope to distrust. A facilitator’s approach to her work is not only influenced by professional training in conflict resolution modalities but also by his/her work experiences, cultural assumptions, personality, and the unique qualities of each group. Some facilitators will feel comfortable with only applying certain approaches along the facilitator continuum while others adapt to the distinctive needs of each group. With such diversity, it is not surprising that ethical expectations of “neutrality” would be desired by some and questioned by others.

The following chapter will present my second case study, which is steeped in a politics of public education that provides an alternative example of power dynamics. Hui for Excellence in Education (HE‘E) is a statewide coalition designed to “promote a child-centered and strength-based educational system in which families, communities and schools are valued and empowered to help every student succeed. HE‘E brings diverse stakeholders together to harness collective energy.” The fundamental influences that brought participants together for the HE‘E project were quite distinct from the impetus of [AIEP]’s efforts. The formation of HE‘E was truly grassroots, not mandated. Participants engaged willingly, coming off of a recent public policy win, and it was a brand new collaboration with no institutional history. The other significant difference was the focus and goals of participants. [AIEP] grantees were all serving Hawaiian children specifically and shared that common goal, whereas HE‘E participants were congregating to serve all children in Hawai‘i in the public education system. The
scope was quite different, and therefore the power and culture dynamics, along with relationships with the facilitator, were also quite different.
Chapter 5 Case Study II:

Hui for Excellence in Education (HE‘E)

“Nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.”

– Oscar Wilde

I was hired for the statewide coalition project at about the same time that [Walsh]’s contract with [AIEP] was being terminated, mid-2010. Issues that emerged in the [AIEP] project were fresh on my mind, particularly the perceived diversity of roles [Walsh] was expected to play as a facilitator and subsequent sensitivities that emerged, the challenges with key participants in leadership positions, the high stakes of failure, and perceived race and ethnicity issues, to name a few. Although [Walsh] did not participate in the building of the coalition, the shadows of [AIEP] were ever-present for me. The outcomes of [AIEP] did not affect my assumptions of facilitation and community building per se, but they did affect the nuances of the strategies I used to address power imbalances that could impede progress, my decisions about interjecting my own opinions and ideas, and the methods I used to balance the tensions between client and group.

The impetus for hiring me as a facilitator of the coalition was similar to the reasons [Walsh] was hired to facilitate [AIEP]’s efforts. I had content knowledge and experiences in education and public policy, and I had experiences in coalition building and community mobilization efforts in particular. So I felt from the beginning that I was teetering on the facilitation/consultant border and was very sensitive to how my role was perceived both by my client and the group. My initial contracts clearly stated that I was “facilitating,” whereas my latter contracts included “providing strategic guidance.” I would not have been so deliberate about clearly identifying my diverse roles had I not been witness to [Walsh]’s experiences with [AIEP]. Not only was I explicit in the contracts, but I was explicit in the room as well about the diverse roles I was being asked to play, asking permission to “take off my facilitator hat.” I was also very sensitive to ensuring the group owned the process, particularly since it would be the group who would be implementing the outcomes. Within [AIEP], the staff and State Council were responsible for implementation, so there was more sensitivity to ensuring that those in leadership positions had full buy-in on what was being developed. Within HE‘E, the client was providing the funds and infrastructure but was not responsible for implementation.
In both case studies, a multipartial versus a neutral facilitation approach was used and effective deliberation and consensus building prioritized. However, as will be revealed in this chapter, context matters greatly in how successfully outcomes are reached. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will highlight how the disparate contexts affected not only how successful each project was but how multipartial facilitation was received relative to a neutral engagement.

**Case Study Background**

In October of 2009, the State of Hawai‘i responded to its budget crisis by furloughing public school employees, which resulted in students missing seventeen days of instruction during the 2009–2010 school year with a proposed increase to twenty-four days of missed instruction the following school year. With an education system that was already struggling to demonstrate at-level school achievement in all subjects, the community responded forcefully to ensure children were not denied instruction days, further compromising their education. Many organizations provided services and programming for children on the furloughed days to help families with not only childcare but also providing supplemental instruction. Diverse parent groups organized to figure out how to overturn furloughs and become part of the solution. I was asked by a friend to help facilitate the conversation and assist in strategizing with the parent groups about how to work most effectively together with the goal of overturning furloughs. The two most influential parent groups were Hawai‘i Education Matters (HEM) and Save Our Schools (SOS), the former skilled in behind-the-scenes negotiating and the latter successful at gaining the public relations and media attention necessary to force the governor to reconsider her decision. Through that experience, a funder approached me and we discussed the viability of a statewide coalition, but we wanted to ensure we would have committed leaders on such an effort.

The “furlough crisis” ended in April 2010 after the parent groups effectively mobilized thousands of families through public protests and effective behind-the-scenes negotiating with the Department of Education, Governor Linda Lingle, and the governor’s staff. The State reinstated instructional days for the following school year, securing funds from the Hurricane Relief Fund. Further efforts were made to create a mandatory instruction day policy that would prevent the State from ever furloughing teachers again. The bill failed two years in a row and will be up again during the 2013 legislative session. In
May 2010, the Learning Coalition, Hawai‘i Education Matters, and the University Of Hawai‘i College of Education organized an ‘Ohana Engagement Forum to focus on how key stakeholders involved with pre-school through post secondary education (P–20) might work together with schools, families, and communities to support one another more effectively. I attended the forum and listened to feedback. Participants overwhelmingly supported the formation of an education coalition to coordinate member efforts and leverage existing resources in support of transformational change within Hawai‘i’s public school system. I was then hired to facilitate a strategic planning process to lay the groundwork for the coalition.

Organizers of the ‘Ohana Forum, along with participants, extended invitations to their extensive networks, inviting participants to attend strategic planning sessions during the summer. We embarked on the planning process with a visioning session on June 7, 2010 with approximately forty participants from a variety of community organizations, the Department of Education, parent groups, the Teachers’ Union, policy-makers, and funders. Planning continued over the next nine months. Two participants from the [AIEP] process were intimately involved with the building of the coalition, while a handful of others participated sparingly.

I had three contracts over the nine-month period. With each new contract, my involvement became more entrenched in the process and content, reflective of what was being asked of me from the client and the group. In the initial contract, it was clear that I was “facilitating” the group’s strategic plan with an implied expectation of serving as a relatively neutral facilitator. However, as my client expressed, “I hired you for your experiences with community mobilization and coalition building” (#2, 05.06.11), and those experiences and the lessons I had learned from them were often shared in strategy meetings with the client. The second and third contracts included other roles beyond facilitation that included “drafting roles and responsibilities of the Planning Team” (Work Plan II), “drafting the policy platform,” “turnover and training with Coalition Director,” and “meetings to discuss recommended strategies and next steps” (Work Plan III).

Even with this clarity about my diverse roles, I was surprised by interviewee responses. I was probably the most shocked by my client’s. When I inquired, “What criteria do you use when hiring facilitators?” her response was, “Well, you weren’t a facilitator.” Quite surprised, I said, “Oh, what was I?” and she
responded that I was a “‘consultant,’ meant to facilitate their desired outcomes” (#2, 05.06.11). When I asked what outcomes they had desired, she shared that she “refrained from explicitly sharing their desired outcomes because she soon realized that the group had a strong sense of where they wanted to go and she didn’t want to interrupt the momentum” (#2, 05.06.11). I was relieved when I heard her response, but in retrospect would have liked to have been informed of their ultimate vision for the coalition so that I had a full view of the project. Not to mention that it would have given me some insight about why, from time to time, we fell off the same page about the direction the coalition was taking. I was able to interview nineteen participants who were engaged in almost every meeting over a nine-month period. Eight of the interviewees also served on the Planning Team, and therefore took part in many of the design meetings.

My Role
Originally, I was hired to facilitate the formation of a strategic plan involving between thirty and fifty participants representing a diverse array of key stakeholders in public education, which included DOE employees, union representatives, key policy makers, community organizations, and parent groups. Participation was open to anyone who wished to attend. Initial key outcomes included:

- Identifying a vision and mission for the coalition
- Reaching consensus on priorities, strategies, and action plans
- Reaching consensus on monitoring and evaluating procedures

Upon completion of these goals, I was asked to stay on and help reach consensus on the coalition’s governance structure along with its membership procedures. My final contract included the goals of:

- Reaching consensus on governance structures
- Reaching consensus on membership and voting procedures
- Reaching consensus on a policy platform
- Preparing the coalition for its public launch
- Transitioning from facilitator leadership to coalition staff leadership

Between May 2010 and February 2011, I was responsible for designing, facilitating, and recording six large group meetings, and facilitating and participating in numerous Planning Team meetings involving ten members; these members included my client and nominated representatives from each priority group. Additionally, multiple advisory meetings with my client were held along the way. Attendance
was larger at the beginning of the effort and decreased as time went on, but a core of twenty-eight to thirty-five participants remained throughout. The challenge was that we began the effort over the summer, when DOE is on summer break and other folks were traveling, including my client. When people missed meetings they were reluctant to rejoin for fear of disrupting momentum (#19, 10.12.12).

I began the process by conducting one-on-one interviews with people who expressed an interest in contributing to the formation of the coalition. I spoke with policy makers, members of a diverse array of community groups, parents, union members, and Department of Education personnel. It was clear that distrust ran rampant and that significant time would need to be spent on building relationships and trust in order to assist the group in moving forward together. Multiple tensions existed between participants about who was to blame for the failing public education system that went back decades. For example, considerable frustrations existed between the community organizations and the state Department of Education, with the community feeling intentionally stifled when they desired to get involved and help students. Participants were generally angry with the teacher’s union for backing furloughs, and everyone was coming off the furlough crisis energized but exhausted. Parents were angry about low school achievement and lack of accountability. According to the US Department of Education’s National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Hawai‘i’s student outcomes have remained among the worst in the US in both math and reading. In 2000, Hawai‘i’s eighth graders ranked forty-fifth in the nation in mathematics. In 2009, they ranked forty-fourth. In reading, they went from dead last to forty-fourth place.\textsuperscript{281} Not only was the community reacting with deep frustration about the state’s decision to furlough personnel in its already struggling public school system, participants joined the effort with rooted distrust and opinions about who is to blame. And in addition, participants were not only working professionally for organizations that support education, but were also parents of children who were either in the system currently or who had graduated.

Along with the distrust between participants, there was distrust in the person paying for the process and concern about whether there would be a conflict of interest. Intake results provided me with very helpful information on past efforts and highlighted the overall concerns about apathy in mobilizing people to really get involved in public education issues, maintaining the coalition’s momentum, building trust among folks who normally do not work well with one another, breaking through the
political constraints, and particularly, addressing the very powerful teacher’s union. A participant expressed,

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\text{I was very reluctant to participate at first because so many efforts have been made to get people involved in public education but they don’t sustain. People fight. When I learned that there was funding for the Coalition, I was more committed and I was shocked at how respectful everyone was. (\#17, 06.13.11)}
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My client routinely emphasized that this was “the group’s process” and she would support what they created, which quelled distrust. Not only was my client investing in the creation of the coalition, but she had committed resources to staff the coalition once the process was completed. Participants all lauded this commitment, citing multiple efforts at coalition building where burnout is high because the coalition leadership is volunteering their time while also working full-time elsewhere. However, distrust among participants remained, quite respectfully but still fully present. Trust was such a leading obstacle that the group identified “Building Trust” as one their top five priorities for the next three years. One of the interviewees expressed,

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\text{I was really apprehensive to join and then I took a look at the strategic plan. The simple fact that they acknowledged the importance of trust building much less identified it as one of their top five priorities had me committed that very same day. People underestimate this important foundational piece to community building. (\#1, 05.14.11)}
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Throughout the effort, I would estimate that ninety-five percent of the concerns that were brought to my attention involved distrust, reinforcing my initial assessment during the intake process. Even when the Planning Team was nominated, there was a robust discussion about what to call the group. Initially it was to be called the “Leadership Team,” but there was great sensitivity to leadership being “shared” and questions about what “leadership” really meant, how much decision-making power this team would have, and other such matters. Hence it was named the Planning Team and decisions would remain at the membership level. The effort had multiple highlights and some challenges. Participants shared the following highlights:

- First of its kind in the islands
- Succeeded in meeting outcomes within an eight-month time frame using a fist of five modified consensus decision-making procedure. If a participant held up five fingers, they were fully on
board and if they held up zero, they were fully in disagreement. The goal was to get everyone to at least a three (“I can live with it”) or above.

- Secured support publicly from Superintendent Kathy Matayoshi, Governor Neil Abercrombie, and a number of senators
- Information and resource sharing is happening
- Relationships have been strengthened between people and agencies who have historically shared little trust
- Parent participation is finally on the map
- We are affecting public policy
- Long term facilitation was paid for and supported
- The facilitator had a background in community mobilization which helped a lot
- Union members are participating
- Funder putting the group’s needs first
- Funding for the coalition was allocated

From my perspective, highlights also included the deep respect with which everyone treated one another despite the distrust, the efficient planning that took place in such a short amount of time, the committed core of participants, the skill sets and talent in the room, and the hope that enabled them all to continue to collaborate. It was a highly functional, respectful, and skilled group to work with.

Conversely, participants shared the following challenges:

- Attending all the meetings
- Lack of teacher participation
- Trust
- Momentum and being able to really make an impact
- Trusting the union
- Sustainability of the coalition
- The transition from facilitator to staff
- Implementing priorities
- Patience
- Leadership of the coalition
• Trying to shift a very old and dogmatic system
• The fifth priority of meeting basic needs being too big

Through a facilitator’s lens, the greatest challenge was balancing the client’s needs of efficiency with the group’s needs of building trust and relationships among members. Although never articulated, I would imagine some of the discontent with “how long it was taking” was partially reflective of the deeper financial investment that was needed. Originally the client thought the coalition could be formed in a two-day planning session but with the number of stakeholders, the diversity of participants, historical distrust, and what it truly takes to get a coalition off the ground, I had suggested that this was not realistic but I would take the group as far as they needed me to. An advisory group was formed to help guide the planning and consisted of my client, its team members, and me. We met frequently and I continually felt my client wished efforts were moving faster. In my experience, I was confident this was as fast as a coalition could realistically coalesce, but I do not think my client had previous experience with community mobilization at this level. I felt that any imposition or coerced decision-making would risk crumbling the entire effort. This balancing act put a mild strain on my client and me from time to time and put me often in a position of advocating for the group.

Similar to [AIEP], there were numerous situations and expectations that emerged that fundamentally challenged any notion of facilitator neutrality. They were identified both in my own reflections and through interview responses. I will present eight scenarios in chronological order of when they occurred.

**Efficiency versus Outcomes**

The first situation involved balancing the perceived need of efficiency by the client with the group’s need to build and establish relationships. This was an ongoing tension, and I often felt we weren’t moving fast enough for the client. In addition to a possible concern about having to invest further in planning, I think there existed a sense of pressure to be fully up and running by the next legislative session beginning in January 2011, as my client was integrally involved in the Race to the Top application process and local governance issues. When the project began in the summer of 2010, my client was overseas and in areas where communication was difficult. I sent updates, but I think it was difficult for my client, without being present for the meetings, to fully understand the context and
nuances of the relationships in particular. We were hitting our benchmarks but additional meetings were required to fully create not only a strategic plan but a governance structure, membership guidelines, and a policy platform. Because every meeting was open to the public, it took us time to ensure that newcomers were sufficiently updated on what had transpired and to protect the work that was already accomplished from being altered by new voices. I felt I continually had to advocate for the group and honor where they were in the process. My client clearly took note of this. When asked “What role does a facilitator play in the room?” my client succinctly responded, “They are clearly advocates for the group” (#2, 05.06.11).

One of the participants expressed the challenge of getting this group to coalesce:

HE‘E was a group of very passionate people and everyone had an opinion. It started out as an amorphous group with a shared passion for education; they were in search of a solution. The sense I got was that everyone had different solutions; what leadership needed to do was to coalesce this group into a functioning entity. I felt that the sponsors kind of knew what they wanted, but wanted to hear what the group wanted. They wanted to see what came out of the discussions and then only if they felt uncomfortable with the outcome would they have said something. I really appreciated this sensitivity. (#5, 06.26.11)

**Missing Voices**

The second challenge that moved me to the edges of neutrality existed from the beginning of the coalition’s inception. It became clear very early on that critical voices were missing, primarily teachers’ voices. Under the teacher’s union rules, teachers are not allowed to participate in coalitions that lobby policy makers, yet the priorities we had identified were contingent on teacher buy-in. I continually reiterated this need and strategized with folks about how to get teachers to attend. At the complex level, which is the top level of governance within a particular school district, School Community Councils (SCCs) exist that are made up of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. If we could get SCCs to join the coalition, then teachers could participate through their SCC membership. However, we felt that teachers were very reluctant to create any waves within their union. Their lack of participation was evident until I stepped off the contract.

Hawaiian groups also needed fuller representation. We had two key participants from the Hawaiian community who contributed great leadership. Given that Hawaiian children are struggling similarly to our immigrant communities within the public education system, diverse representatives from their community were essential to the conversation. In addition, some Hawaiian organizations were
experiencing great success in providing comprehensive services, and their expertise and knowledge would have been helpful. I was pushing hard for outreach to these groups to elicit broader participation. I believe many Hawaiian organizations feel that their needs are exclusively met through their unique funding sources that support culture-based education and they do not need “partners.” I also think their reluctance stems from a history of distrust and a fundamental belief that alternative DOE programs, particularly immersion charter schools, are more successful in meeting the needs of their children. One Hawaiian woman I spoke with about getting involved works in early childhood programs shared her hesitation with the coalition during intake. She explained, “I am less interested for our Hawaiian children in improving existing DOE schools but rather creating culture-based learning and Hawaiian immersion schools for our children. I’m not sure the coalition shares this vision.” The coalition did not share this vision, as the coalition was forming to serve all students, regardless of ethnic background. Although I believe greater participation by Hawaiians would have put culture-based education on the coalition’s table, it may not have been prioritized because the window of influence is narrow if the targeted students are required to be of Hawaiian descent. It is estimated that twenty-six percent of students within the DOE are considered Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian. The coalition needed to ensure they served the other seventy-four percent. This potential participant was an Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus grantee, and the majority of her efforts and interests were in advocating strictly for culture-based education versus State Department of Education policy issues. They were more heavily involved in the Hawaiian charter school movement. It was very clear, based on coalition participation, that Hawaiian leaders involved in public education tend to be more inclined to desire and support the culture-based, immersion, and charter school formats and they view themselves as separate from the rest of the state’s efforts to improve public education.

Being involved with [AIEP] highlighted this divide. There has been a significant increase in Hawaiian charter schools over the last decade. Such efforts are supported by federal monies, but also by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Kamehameha Schools, both deeply endowed entities. Similar to DOE schools, some of the charter schools have experienced great success while others have struggled, yet culture-based learning has proven to be an overall positive strategy for reaching Hawaiian children. According to Medeiros and Tibbets,

there is a strong correlation between students who experience strong Hawaiian cultural connectedness and the likelihood of experiencing developmental assets that potentially lead to greater school achievement and life
success. Hence, the relationship between Hawaiian cultural connectedness and other developmental assets has promising implications concerning the relevance of Hawaiian culture-based education (CBE) and its role in enhancing academic and successful life skills for Hawaiian youth.

Even though the coalition desired to advocate for all DOE students, the divide between charter school students and others is quite pronounced, particularly within the Hawaiian charter movement.

The third set of stakeholders that I felt was essential to have in the room were Micronesian and other immigrant groups, given their difficulties with not only achievement but language barriers, poverty, lack of resources, truancy, and significant unfamiliarity with the public school system. We had community organizations that represented some of these groups but we did not have individuals. I met with folks familiar with these communities to try to elicit broader participation by Micronesians themselves, but it did not happen. These efforts felt beyond neutrality in that I was advocating for participation by a particular group of people, feeling that their participation would contribute to the coalition’s ability to address the needs of those most challenged within the DOE system.

**Priority Setting**

The third experience that I felt placed me outside of the bounds of neutrality was during the discussion on priorities. The group had come together following the ‘Ohana Forum, which specifically explored family and community engagement in public education to create a vision for the coalition and set priorities. I felt that many of the priorities expressed were naturally congregated around family and community engagement, given that this was the impetus for getting people together for the ‘Ohana Forum, and I pushed the group to broaden their thinking about improvements as a whole, given that the coalition was broadly focused on improving public education. A handful of individuals who work primarily with children living in poverty, surrounded by drugs and violence and with unmet basic needs, would consistently remind us that their families could not “even feed or keep their children safe, how are they supposed to volunteer or engage with the schools?” (#15, 06.02.11) Another participant shared, “My families cannot even read the paperwork necessary to enroll their children in school. We need to remove these types of barriers before we can even begin looking at family engagement (#7, 05.24.11). But these voices were a minority in the room. As a facilitator and someone observing the broader view, I felt their voices were really important to consider, particularly given that we were forming a state-wide education coalition. If we didn’t highlight meeting basic needs in our priorities, how effective were we going to be in achieving our family and community engagement goals?
I created opportunities for those participants to share more about why they felt a priority that focused on collaborating with schools to meet basic needs, enabling children to learn more effectively, was important. There was a lot of pushback, with people saying that the priority was too large, it was impossible, schools have enough to do, programs already exist, and similar comments. The tension reverberated off the walls and clearly had history. Yet the logic was sound. If children do not have their basic needs met and they are living in abusive and neglectful situations, then how could they learn successfully? And how would a coalition be able to mobilize those types of families? There was no other statewide initiative looking at this need for comprehensive services in collaboration with the school system. Two of the participants quietly expressed to me that they would no longer participate if the group did not embrace this as a priority. Their voices were critical to this conversation.

After the visioning meeting and before everyone voted on the priorities, I engaged in numerous phone calls in which people, particularly those who supported this priority, expressed concern over this discussion. I encouraged them to prepare a one-to-two page document to share with the group the importance of meeting basic needs for school achievement and to come to the next meeting prepared to persuade the group with current statistics, trends, and possible models we could emulate in the islands. In the end, the group voted to include the priority, but many still remained unconvinced as to whether or not it was achievable. I felt my actions in this situation bordered on advocating for a priority, coaching participant groups on negotiation strategies, influencing outcomes, and providing strategic advice. My intention was not to side with any one position but to help support the best outcomes for this coalition. Simply because those voices were fewer did not mean that they were less important, and I needed to ensure that I provided a space for them to be fully heard and their expertise acknowledged. But the entire time, I was saying to myself, “Wow, this is well beyond a ‘neutral’ position.”

Soon after the visioning was completed, the group worked to name the coalition. It interested me to learn from one participant that she felt I had a huge influence on the naming of the coalition. When the group voted on the name, I was publicly enthusiastic and pointed out how ironic it was that they created an acronym (HE‘E) that meant “octopus” in Hawaiian. Six months earlier, in my very first meeting with my client, I drew a picture of an octopus to demonstrate the power of a coalition, which can be thought of as using one shared head for thinking while using all eight legs to propel itself forward as
needed. My expressed enthusiasm sparked her assumption that I somehow had a role in the naming. This really highlighted for me the sensitivities that groups have to what we say, how we say it, what our body language emits, and the deep-rooted apprehension of facilitators and/or clients being too involved in group processes.

**Governance, Decision-making, and Membership**

The fourth situation emerged during the conversation on governance, one of the most sensitive topics. Not only was there distrust, but there also existed a significant imbalance between who historically had the opportunity to make decisions and who did not within the realm of public education. The conversation took longer than the client anticipated and pushed me to honor the group’s wishes of full deliberation and democratic decision-making. During strategic planning over the summer, there was a lot of enthusiasm and support for what was happening, especially coming off of the ending of furloughs. The discussion was forward-thinking, about developing a vision for change, and the positive energy was palpable. I knew through the intake process that trust issues existed, but it really felt like people were in the same canoe. Naturally, when we moved to the discussion of how the coalition was going to operate, who was going to vet public policies, who would do the hiring, and so forth, the conversation became more strained. In particular, one of the participants, a leader in a Hawaiian organization, was very reluctant to buy in to the smaller Planning Team design. For efficiency’s sake, the group at large felt that a smaller body of members needed to be established to assist coalition staff, lead priority implementation, and vet policies. This one participant was very vocal about her opposition to calling the team a “Leadership Team,” as she felt leadership should be shared among members, particularly when it came to vetting policies. From the beginning, she was very reluctant to participate, expressing that the needs of her community might not be reflected in the coalition, and she continually questioned if participation was in her best interest, particularly given how busy she was. Her contributions to the conversation were very helpful, and I feel they represented the opinions of others in the room who were not willing to come forward.

The group honored her concerns and provided what I felt was a safe space for her to share honestly. Members of the group did push back on compromising efficiency and effectiveness by not having a smaller team, but worked with her on identifying what to call this smaller body and what they would be responsible for. In the end, it was named the Planning Team, and it was meant to strictly be a support to
the HE‘E staff and to organize the policy recommendations for coalition members to consider. Coalition members would be responsible for determining, based on HE‘E’s mission, whether any matter was something HE‘E should vote upon and then holding direct votes of members. During this process, I felt I provided her more speaking opportunities than others in the room, but that doing so was essential to ensure she felt heard and respected.

This participant had other concerns in addition to her governance concerns; she pulled me aside to express her apprehensions that some HE‘E participants were merely present to appeal for funding from the Learning Coalition. She was referring specifically to an organization that competes for funding for programs that also serve Hawaiian children. Her distrust was great and was present at multiple levels. I had several phone conversations with her trying to work through some of these concerns, but she eventually stepped out of HE‘E and did not attend another meeting, despite the group’s collective decision to form the Planning Team based on her recommendations. Her voice was critical to the conversation and her decision to depart left a gaping hole in the space of “speak from your mana‘o,” or from your gut/soul, which is so greatly needed in community-based processes. I also felt it hurt our efforts to bring groups that serve Hawaiian children along in the process.

Membership guidelines were another area of tension. When participants were tasked with creating guidelines, there were disparate opinions about whether or not an “individual” could vote on behalf of him/herself. Not only were people participating as themselves—individuals who were interested in improving public education—but some even had a conflict of interest if they were meant to represent a group with which they were currently affiliated. For example, it is a breach of their contract for Department of Education professionals to vote on public policy as a DOE representative. Similarly, members of the teacher’s union were barred from voting as well. This conversation had multiple iterations, and ultimately it was decided that the coalition would remain a representative organization. The caveat was that each participant to the process felt that they had an organization they could join that would represent their interests. For example, one DOE staff member was a member of one of the parents’ groups that helped overturn the furloughs, so he was comfortable in being represented by this organization. One of the Complex Area Superintendents felt that she could be represented under her School Community Council or SCC. There was an additional addendum that articulated that any
individual could participate in the planning of the coalition at any time, but in order to vote would have to be represented by an organization.

The conversation raised existing concerns about trust building, with the group wanting to ensure that people were equitably treated and that this representative policy would in no way allow groups to silence the voices of individuals. This proved to be a really rich conversation, both with the large group of participants and within our smaller planning meetings. Had they decided to go with the right of individuals to vote, it would have bucked the national norm on how coalitions function. What this proved to me was the importance of ensuring that the group owned the decision they came up with; I could point out how other coalitions operate, but on this particular topic, I was torn. I was fascinated by this idea of an individually supported coalition and the potential for including more voices. My client pointed out her concern that if individuals could vote, then their votes would be weighted similarly as the votes of representatives from an organization. This was clearly an issue, given that the votes of all the individuals within an organization would be filtered through one person. I had multiple conversations with participants outside of our meeting times about this issue. Several people expressed that establishing a representative membership defeated the intention of mobilizing parents and the community to engage more fully in public education but despite this concern, the group voted on a representative model, mainly because they could not figure out how to establish an alternative model and they felt that every individual would have an opportunity to identify an organization that represented their interests, given the diversity of the membership.

**Platform Building**

A fifth example of when I moved beyond the bounds of neutrality was during the design of the policy platform. I facilitated a thorough conversation about what should be included. While facilitating, I would explicitly state that I was “taking off my facilitation hat” and putting on a “strategic advising hat.” I would then introduce some ideas to consider about how to design the platform, align with the priorities of the coalition, or other such matters. In the interviews, two participants expressed opinions on this: “You were clearly not neutral during our platform discussion but we appreciated your insight, especially for those of us who were doing this for the first time” (#4, 05.12.11) and “I appreciated that you took your facilitator hat off and asked if it was ok to offer some ideas. I felt this was respectful” (#12, 05.26.11). At the end of the meeting, one of the participants asked if I would take a stab at writing
up the platform based on what the group had discussed that day. I created a draft platform and sent it out to everyone for feedback.

Despite how smoothly the building of the platform went, there was underlying tension about whether or not the platform was going to be shared during the launch in January. Most people in the group felt that the platform was not detailed enough, and if we were going to go public with it, we would need to align certain bills and policies we were advocating for during the next session. We discussed these options as a group. Generally, they did not feel that they were in a position at that point to get consensus on which specific policies they would collectively influence, again returning to the familiar place of distrust, and they wished to spend 2011 preparing for the 2012 legislative session. Behind the scenes, I was pushing for the advertisement of the platform, despite the broader group’s feeling, because I wanted to ensure that the public and policymakers knew that it was HE‘E’s intention to be a viable voice to influence policy. However, the fervent pushback on this made me aware of the deep sensitivities to ensuring the relationships were firmly formed and the systems in place to support true consensus on particular policies.

Coalition Launch
The sixth beyond-neutral engagement occurred just after the platform design in preparation for the launch. My client expressed her impatient enthusiasm for launching the coalition quickly, while I sensed that coalition members wanted to take their time and wait until after the session to launch it. My client wanted HE‘E to be out front during the 2011 legislative session. Her organization was particularly involved with the decision to mandate an appointed Board of Education and overturn the existing policy of an elected Board of Education. I believe she thought the coalition could take on some of these leading issues. The expectation of a coalition being able to affect policies at this level was realistic, but the group just was not ready to rally around particular policies at that time. They actually felt strongly that “affecting policy” was merely one of the top five priorities for the coalition and desired to focus initially on the other four, as they were lower hanging fruit and had greater buy-in. At this point, I felt strongly that risking the trust of participants to push through the launch and be present for the legislative session would have rippling consequences for the coalition’s ability to move forward. There ensued a clunky dance between my client, the new HE’E staff members, and me as we proceeded during the last month. I do not believe that my client’s intention was to manipulate or sway
participants. Rather, I think she was taking the human component out of the structure and viewing the coalition as a tool for mobilizing support around the vital public education policies that were on the table.

Upon reflection, I should have been more vocal at this point about what I thought was most strategic. Although I raised a caution several times in meetings about honoring the wishes of the group, I was not persistent enough and felt the sense of betraying coalition members by my silence in several meetings when my client was describing how the coalition was going to launch.

**Hiring Staff**

A seventh non-neutral experience occurred when we were making the transition to hiring staff for the coalition. Because my client was so focused on getting the coalition launched by January, she unilaterally hired two people without the coalition’s input. I had expressed disagreement on hiring this way and encouraged them to take their time and put coalition members in charge of hiring, especially because the staff would be their voices in public. I advocated for the group in our Planning Team meetings and attempted to dissuade them from pushing through the launch and transition for fear that it would dismantle the trust we had intentionally built among participants and between participants and funders. The client felt it was critical to launch and moved forward in preparation, in which I apprehensively participated.

The new staff members were hastily hired without the consultation of coalition members, which caused many members to feel betrayed and somewhat manipulated. Almost every interviewee expressed frustration about the decision to hire staff without the participation of coalition members. It also put unnecessary stress on the new staff to have to build credibility before leading effectively. Both people they hired were fully capable and experienced, but the way they were hired put up unnecessary obstacles for them. I could feel the tension in the Planning Team meeting when the new staff came on, and I was frustrated with my client’s attitude of “they’ll get used to it” rather than perhaps acknowledging that the hiring should have been handled more gracefully and inclusively. In our final Planning Team meeting before the launch, my client introduced the new staff to the Planning Team. I sat there quietly while the air became thicker and thicker. There was an uncomfortable silence by Planning Team members with diverted eyes. Participants responded consistently in interviews about
this pivotal moment being the most challenging, with the majority responding, “How was a coalition ‘spokesperson’ hired to speak for us without our input? (#12, 05.26.11). And “why the focus on policy when we said this wasn’t the direction we wanted to go?” (#8, 04.19.11). After nine months of collaboration and trust and consensus building, the client making the decisions for the group at this point unraveled some of the trust we had spent so much time building. She and I had a positive working relationship with the natural challenges of balancing diverse needs, but when a facilitator is positioned between the client who is signing the paycheck and the group she is meant to serve, natural conflicts of interest arise, highlighting again the importance of clarifying roles and boundaries from the get-go.

**Stepping off Contract**

A final challenge involved transitional issues when I stepped off the contract immediately following the launch. When facilitators work so closely with a group over a longer period of time, relationships naturally form. The relationship was positive, and so when “leadership” was shifting with the hiring of a Coalition Director and a Communications Coordinator, there was hesitation and a slew of questions, which highlights the natural challenges of (a) stepping out of the neutrality box and really building relationships, contributing to the content of the work, championing outcomes, etc.—efforts that create a fuzzy demarcation between the facilitator and the group with which she or he is working; (b) articulating clearly the scope of a facilitator’s contract and the plan for transition; and (c) building leadership capacity along the way, clarifying when, how, and why the facilitator will be stepping off.

Having identified these eight significant areas of non-neutral engagement, I was surprised by the majority of responses to the broad question, “Would you view my facilitation style to be neutral? Please explain.” The majority said something along the lines of: “Oh yes, you were neutral. You were fair, open, took time for everyone. You didn’t favor anyone in the group.” Yet when I asked them to describe my involvement, they would cite as important my content expertise, how my commitment to the cause elicited trust, and that I ensured everyone had a voice. My assumption is that the interpretation of what it means to be “neutral” varies and is integrated with feelings of trust, respect, and fairness. I also believe that participants felt that saying I was neutral was the “right” response, and they did not want to offend me. For those familiar with mediation and facilitation, the question elicited almost a knee-jerk reaction of “Yes, you were neutral!”
Multiple responses to questions revealed that in actuality, participants do not feel that facilitators are necessarily neutral. A probing question I asked all participants was “Do you think a facilitator can be neutral?” In answer, the majority expressed that neutrality probably isn’t a realistic expectation, for who is truly neutral? Responses included:

- “Nobody is neutral and nobody can pretend to be neutral. Otherwise we don’t trust them.” (#8, 04.19.11)

- “No. It’s not humanly possible. You were advocate biased; your bias was advocacy; to advocate for community voice and if possible, the smallest one. A feminine bias to ensure voice for all and to put an intrinsic value on consensus, sometimes at expense of efficiency.” (#6, 05.06.11)

- “You can’t be neutral about something you care a lot about.” (#7, 05.24.11)

- “It might be possible to be neutral in the room, but you weren’t neutral outside of the room. I felt like you were my advisor, which I appreciated.” (#13, 04.15.11)

- “No, nobody is neutral. Rather it is best to be empathetic, organized and structured. And intuitive, that’s important. I often see a tension for facilitators between intuition and organized structure. I would feel it if I were in their shoes and reconciling that would be quite hard.” (#2, 05.06.11)

- “I think it’s impossible for someone to be neutral. I think you always clarified that you were stepping out of a neutral role. I think facilitators have to in order to be effective. They need to advocate for those who can’t. They need to provide content when content is needed. They need to understand the history of the place and the group and the justice issues involved. They need to constantly push the group to move toward the outcomes they created for themselves and you can’t be neutral to do this well. The only challenge is then the facilitator is perceived as a leader and that can get complicated.” (#1, 05.14.11)
• “I don’t think it’s possible; I think every decision is made with a filter, based on what you know, who you know to be in the room and you are structuring the experience accordingly.” (#9, 05.29.11)

• “Neutrality isn’t possible. Facilitators are coming in with their own opinions, you see it in how they enter into discussion, either explicitly or implicitly, it’s not as if they can divorce themselves from those opinions.” (#4, 05.12.11)

• “I expect that facilitators will come with their own biases and perspectives, it is human nature. If you think facilitators are going to be objective you are fooling yourself—that comes from white male academia from the 1900s. So some are still stuck back in that century.” (#15, 06.02.11)

• “There is a big difference between western knowledge systems and indigenous knowledge systems and participant observation methodologies in research. Western systems are considered highly objective, researchers don’t necessarily know the subject matter well, study for a short time so you don’t get married to an outcome or know too much about it, avoid judgment and beliefs in the research, etcetera. I think it’s the same for facilitation through a western lens. In an indigenous environment, the closer the facilitator is to the group, the greater trust usually and therefore the greater outcomes. We want someone we know, who is deeply committed and intimately related to the material, who shares our vision and knows a lot about the subject. Someone who will participate in the outcomes. I don’t understand this neutrality business.” (#29, 02.20.11)

• “Particularly working with long term clients, I think it’s impossible and doesn’t serve the group well. We need to be able to try on different hats the more complex situations become.” (#23, 02.23.11)

• “There is often a social justice strand that runs through any group dynamic. Facilitators have to pay attention to this and address injustices as needed. This isn’t neutral in my opinion.” (#23, 02.23.11)
• “The facilitator role does change over time because the facilitator and participants start off with not knowing each other often, so it feels more neutral; but the longer the facilitator stays the relationship becomes less neutral; judgments start to build up. I think this is more of a good thing than a bad thing.” (#10, 05.03.11)

• “If a group gets stuck figuring out options or outcomes, I always find it helpful if a facilitator can offer ideas, especially if they are familiar with the field or issue. Having an outside perspective can be really helpful.” (#3, 05.06.11)

• “Facilitators don’t put as much weight on leadership as they do the group, so no, I don’t think they are neutral.” (#2, 05.06.11)

• “To be completely objective, you are an idiot. Nobody is completely objective and it wouldn’t help the group if you were.” (#15, 06.02.11)

• “I’m not neutral so I can’t expect others to be neutral. If I felt something isn’t working I need to share it and so should facilitators. If a facilitator’s heart is in it, that’s a good thing but that doesn’t mean they are neutral.” (#8, 04.19.11)

• “I don’t really care. I figure, whatever it takes to get a group moving forward together. As long as it feels safe, is trusted, and people are having fun, I could care less if a facilitator is neutral. I don’t know how anyone can be, anyway.” (#26, 05.25.11)

For the few who felt that, yes, neutrality is possible, they made the following comments:

• “For three quarters of it, it is important, but the other one quarter, it is really helpful to have a facilitator who will get involved, especially when groups get stuck. They can provide expertise, can challenge those who are dominating, etcetera. I see it as part of their role.” (#10, 05.03.11)
• “Yes. If it is a discussion that has multiple perspectives, in order to move the process along, the facilitator won’t make any kind of judgment or have an opinion of the content that is on the table.” (#16 05.22.11)

• “Just use techniques to either get consensus or table differences in opinion so that the process moves along.” (#5, 05.26.11)

• “I think they should be neutral. They need to be good listeners, someone who can recognize and synthesize and listen for key ideas. It’s hard to do that if you have strong opinions about something.” (#11, 01.17.12)

• “Yes. Neutral means that they are not pushing their own agenda or anyone else’s agenda. Pushing agenda that comes from the group; not from client or whomever. I think it’s really important.” (#3, 05.06.11)

For those that expressed that neutrality is not possible and suggested the array of ways they expect facilitators to engage with groups, there is clearly the need to advocate for safe deliberation and democratic decision-making. It is in this space of advocating where power imbalances are addressed, content knowledge infused, and capacity building for particular participants occurs. Based on feedback, these actions are appreciated and expected by the majority of participants.

Checking Assumptions

Again, given how HE‘E evolved, it is important to revisit my own practicing assumptions. Despite the moments of conflict and unclear boundaries, the formation of the coalition was successful. Checking assumptions with a successful project is naturally much easier and will most likely validate a facilitator’s assumptions. My assumptions will not always resonate in more challenging and complex facilitations.

Neutrality is a myth

Feedback presented from my interviews supports this assumption. I was introduced to the group as a professional facilitator, similar to the way [Walsh] was introduced at the onset of her [AIEP] contract.
However, as expectations of my role shifted, I would ask permission from the group to step out of my “facilitator” role and serve as a strategist, advocate, or platform writer, to name a few alternative roles I played. Having witnessed [Walsh]’s experiences, I attempted to ensure that everyone was (a) aware of what I was being asked to do and (b) comfortable with my non-neutral roles. One general comment I received frequently was, “Nobody is neutral and nobody can pretend to be neutral” (#7, 05.24.11). It was interesting that they responded so quickly with an affirmative when I asked about their perception of my neutrality, but as conversations deepened and I asked more targeted questions about power imbalances, content knowledge, and consultant versus facilitator roles, participants generally confirmed that in fact facilitators can’t really be neutral. Many of the participants were aware of my informal mediation and strategist role during the state education furlough crisis and my involvement and advocacy for public education. I think this was a strength rather than a hindrance, but they knew I was not necessarily neutral on the issue. The majority of interviewees also expressed that oftentimes outcomes cannot be reached if a facilitator doesn’t push a bit.

Four out of seven facilitators expressed that what they have learned over the years was that the initial negotiation of roles and expectations of the facilitator was absolutely critical and that they now share even the contracts with the full group so as to enhance transparency on (a) who is paying the facilitator, (b) what role the facilitator will play, and (c) the client’s expected outcomes if they are predetermined.

*Facilitations do not happen in a vacuum*

I believe this assumption held true for HE’E as participants entered the room with long unique histories with each other and with the DOE system. That history was the elephant in the room, or the greatest obstacle to obtaining trust, particularly when we discussed decision-making. Historically, the voices of the community have rarely been heard and/or considered, many DOE representatives were feeling beaten up after the furlough crisis, the union representatives were defensive, and many felt impatient with the pace of changes to improve public education. Had we ignored the history and been impatient with the distrust, I do not think we would have reached the outcomes that we did. If facilitation is treated as a formula or assumed to be in a vacuum, the texture, color, and complexity of a group can easily complicate the process. Within HEE, not only was historical distrust kept front and center but also the current political conditions were frequently discussed. A new governor had been elected who was highly critical of the furlough decision of the former governor, Hawai’i was being considered for
Race to the Top federal funds, the Advancement of Indigenous Education Plus was experiencing successes at the federal level, and the most controversial education policy on the table during the legislative session was switching from an elected Board of Education to an appointed Board of Education. The landscape was prime for the formation of a coalition, but the political overhauls were threatening to some, particularly some DOE personnel and the teachers’ union.

**Empowered facilitation that is fair and rightly intended can be more successful than neutral facilitation because it is willing to disrupt negative power structures**

As my client expressed during her interview, “Facilitators are frequently advocates for the group, relative to the client.” (#2, 05.06.11) I am not certain she could have expressed any more directly the tension we each felt on this issue. Within HE‘E, I do not believe there were “negative power structures” in the room per se; rather the context outside of the room was fraught with negative power structures. This coalition was forming to influence and redefine those power structures. Fundamentally, a coalition is meant to advocate, so not only did I engage in “empowered facilitation” but also the group itself was empowered and it advocated on behalf of the students. Participants frequently reminded the group why we were gathering and organizing. Relative to, say, organizational structures that are often steeped in hierarchical structures that often need revisiting, the coalition was forming from a place of empowerment.

My approach with HE‘E could have been viewed as “empowered” in the sense that I fully supported their work, served as a cheering squad along the way, empowered those who I felt were most affected by the public education system’s challenges, and would push back against my client when she felt a need to move faster than the group was willing. All of these efforts were cited in the interview feedback. We may not have pushed back against the DOE system or the teacher’s union as heavily as some would have liked, but many did not feel that that would be the most strategic at this point; they wanted to ensure that we first tried to work with the DOE and the teacher’s union rather than against them.

**Trust, safety, kindness, relationship, and personality are more important than the perception of being a neutral third party**
All of the HE’E interviewees said they felt safe to participate fully and trusted the facilitator’s intention. As participants reflected on the question, “Do you think facilitators can be neutral” and identified times when, for instance, power was perceivably being abused, folks were being left out of the conversation, or conversely, dominating the conversation, or content knowledge was requested, they shied away from their original position of neutrality being a prerequisite and would often share that trust, safety, kindness, fairness, personality, and relationship were actually more important.

**If the people most affected by a process are included in decision-making, successful outcomes are more realistic**

HE’E was at a disadvantage in this area. First, those most affected by the coalition’s efforts, in my opinion, were the students, and we did not have student participation at any stage. Those most affected are also the ones failing within the system, who I feel did not have needed representation. Second, teachers did not feel they could participate under their union’s regulations. They were critical in ensuring the coalition was on target and setting priorities that support not only the children but also those who teach them. This challenge was cited throughout the interviews and prioritized for the upcoming year.

**Having decision-makers available**

HE’E members were the decision-makers, and when decisions needed to be made for funding or strategy, the client was always available. This helped this process tremendously.

**Democratic principles of representation and participation in decision-making can transform groups, build commitment from participants, and actually support leaders in what they envision**

HE’E planning remained open to the public at every stage. This caused some stress in terms of having to get newcomers caught up. However, the coalition could not be criticized for being a closed process. The group decided on a modified consensus decision-making structure and clear guidelines for voting criteria. Governance and representation were discussed in great detail and consensus was reached on both. Deliberative democracy was valued and respected throughout the process, which I believe was integral to the success of the project. Not only did participants respect the values of both deliberation and democracy, but my client did as well. If anything challenged deliberative democracy, it was impatience on the part of my client at the end of the contract; otherwise, these shared values provided a consistent framework throughout the nine months.
Committing to transparency, even when it may risk exposing imperfections, results in greater trust than trying to manipulate who has access to information

I felt that the only hiccup in transparency occurred at the end of the contract when decisions were made quickly to launch and hire staff with minimal participant input. It had obvious consequences. Otherwise, the client and those in leadership positions prioritized transparency throughout the process. I, on the other hand, was less transparent about my championing of the fifth identified priority of the coalition, “Meeting the Basic Needs of Every Child.” Those who expressed this as a priority were in the minority, but they were the few participants representing communities in poverty and fraught with multiple challenges of drug abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, and low literacy. From a strategic perspective, I could not understand how we would achieve the other priorities of family engagement without advocating for basic needs being met. It is a behemoth of a goal, but with shifting political priorities and a new focus on early childhood and comprehensive services, it felt like an opportune time to prioritize the need. I had many phone conversations with participants desiring this priority and encouraged them to prepare themselves with statistics and potential models to emulate in order to sell their point.

Everyone has a truth yet not everyone’s truth is entirely respectful of others

It is important to find space for everyone to share his or her truth. Generally, I think everyone had the opportunities to share their truths when they felt it was necessary, and this particular group was very respectful of other viewpoints. There were moments when some had more time to express their perspectives, and as a facilitator I allowed this to happen, particularly if the voice was coming from a disadvantaged position, hoping it would level the playing field a bit. Respect was the group’s greatest asset. Not only did they respect each other and the unique perspectives each person brought to the conversation, but they respected the process and advocated for open deliberation and democratic decision-making structures throughout.

Taking the time to build trust with a group, which may compromise efficiency in the short run, can determine whether or not a process succeeds or fails

This was another leading strength of the effort. Trust building was a leading priority, and I was obligated to try to ensure it stayed in that position. In the end, efficiency was the priority, and I do believe it jeopardized some of the trust that was built. We find that in an island community where
people will interface in multiple arenas, it is often better to focus on building relationships at the expense of efficiency. Once the trust is built, greater opportunities for efficient processes and decision-making will result in future collaborations. On an island, relationships are critical because people’s paths can cross frequently, people are connected in multiple ways, and you are almost guaranteed to know members of others’ circles.

**Do no harm**

I believe it is our ethical obligation as facilitators to ensure that the processes we are helping to design will not harm those in the room, politically, socially, and/or economically, nor do harm to the community at large. For this particular project, this was an easy commitment to meet. The community was responding to an obvious need, and the ways participants engaged from the get-go ensured the group “did no harm.” As a facilitator, it was an easy sell. If I as a facilitator did harm to the group or what the group was designing did harm to the community, they would have jeopardized their opportunities for being effective in the political arena as well as within the community.

**Client confusion about his own needs is common**

The person or group requesting facilitation doesn’t always know what they want. A thorough conversation is necessary to determine that facilitation is truly desired. Clearly, my client had expected or desired a consultant, but she got a community facilitator who had a background in the content area and had been involved in advocacy on the issues. We failed to clearly articulate this difference, although it was stated in the contract that I was serving as a facilitator. I think the client, as well as the group, knew what they wanted in terms of outcomes. I don’t think their strategies for getting there necessarily matched. The client’s interests were strictly in policy. She wanted to leverage coalition membership to impact the 2011 legislative session. She also wanted to centralize decision-making to make it move faster and be more effective, in her perception. The needs of the group were quite different. The group wanted to focus primarily on family engagement, feeling that the topic was finally on the political agenda and they would have opportunities to impact decisions. They preferred and advocated for a decentralized decision-making structure. They also wanted to impact the DOE system by finding allies from within and making contributions to improve the system as a whole.

**The group generally knows what is best for them in terms of outcomes**
Had teachers and students participated, I would feel confident in saying that this group knew what was best for them and the cause. I think these voices were missing and critical to the conversation. However, for those who participated and brought a diversity of skills and knowledge, they certainly knew better than me and my client what would work and what was needed because they came from within the system and beyond the system, which provided very diverse but relevant perspectives. Fundamentally, the outcomes a group decides upon usually need to be designed and implemented by participants themselves. For HE‘E participants, they knew they would need to lead the efforts—and who best to evaluate feasibility than participants themselves? Facilitators or clients can always make recommendations, as I did throughout the process, but as far as implementation and understanding the intricacies of any system, participants usually are more intimately familiar with what is needed.

**Content knowledge of the facilitator is important**

For this project, this was explicitly stated in the discussion of the job. The client wanted someone with experiences in coalition building, education policy, and community mobilization.

**Empathy for and trust with clients**

My relationship with the client was really important for me throughout the project. The client generously invests in public education throughout the islands, so I knew she was committed for the right reasons. I felt her discomfort with the time it was taking to build trust, her desire to get things moving and make an impact, her focus on policy, and her effort to give up the reins to the group. This is never easy, but she supported the group throughout. I often felt reluctant to clearly indicate to the client that the group did not share her perspective, but I felt it was important to be transparent. This was less of an issue in this particular case study, but often a facilitator is placed between “the group” and “management,” and the majority of unrest and dissatisfaction among “the group” is targeted toward “management.” It is never easy to hear criticism or bear the brunt of responsibility, and facilitators need to be sensitive to the client’s perceptions and reactions to what emerges from deliberative democratic processes.

Because HE‘E participants were coming off of a win and motivated to come together, the process was smoother than [AIEP]’s. Trust was the participants’ greatest barrier to fully collaborating. Naturally, governance of the coalition was one of the most difficult conversations, which the group had over a
series of meetings. Although trust issues persist, the group has identified decision-making processes that will continue to build trust and hold people accountable. Up until the client’s unilateral hiring of coalition staff, conversations and decisions were rich, and though difficult at times were always respectful. It took coalition members a good year to fully embrace the coalition’s new leadership as a result of the client’s decision to break from democratic decision-making. The following chapter will review similarities and differences of the two case studies, highlighting where participant feedback aligned or diverged from facilitation literature, observation, and experience.
Chapter 6 Complexities Revealed

Comparisons in Expectations

“Democracy is not always in the best interest of leadership.”

– Client

Although the two case studies shared content area in education, required long-term facilitation contracts, highlighted diverse issues of politics, had unique trust issues in each, and had a facilitator who interacted with the group in multipartial versus neutral ways, the disparate contexts presented radically different outcomes. In both case studies, designing the processes so that they were deliberative and honored democratic principles of participation and decision-making were priorities for the clients, the facilitators, and the groups at large.

One way of meeting these needs was to include as many voices as possible. For example, within [AIEP], efforts were made to ensure that all grantees participated in the process, on all islands. How they were to participate needed a lot of coaching. The ED was more inclined to leave the structures, like the Island Councils, in place to avoid conflict. Another approach could have designed processes open to all grantees that would eventually highlight the need to restructure the Councils and seek new leadership, so the change in leadership would be encouraged from inside rather than from the [AIEP] management and/or the facilitator. [Walsh] knew that if the Councils ran the meetings, only Council leadership voices would be respected, so she encouraged her client to build in facilitative processes on each island. The most glaring multipartial role [Walsh] took was being an advocate for [AIEP] in Washington D.C. in the group’s challenge to the Federal Government to create fair and balanced policies for the Hawaiian community. This effort took a tremendous amount of coaching, training, and strategic advising by the facilitator at [AIEP]’s leadership’s request.

Multipartial engagement with HE‘E participants was played out in the form of strategic advising, coaching behind the scenes, and empowerment efforts to achieve goals. For example, when concerns were brought to my attention about fairness, I would discuss the issues with my planning team and then provide strategies to the dissatisfied people about how to get their voices heard more successfully and their ideas considered, which involved coaching and empowering. When a couple of participants threatened (in private) to no longer participate unless their opinions were more fully considered, I
advocated to the group to reconsider these opinions because I personally felt they were underrepresented and extremely important, which resulted in one of the two participants staying committed to the end.
The diversity of roles facilitators play is suggested by Thomas Justice and David Jamieson’s list of the following “skills” or “roles”;

- Contracting
- Designing structured activities and processes
- Listening, paraphrasing, observing, clarifying, elaborating
- Interpreting verbal and nonverbal behavior
- Confronting others
- Managing differences
- Collaborating with others
- Project management
- Meeting management
- Logistics management

They go on to list the personal characteristics most effective for facilitators: steadiness (serenity—calm and centered), confidence, assertiveness, openness, flexibility, authenticity, humility, optimism, and results-oriented disposition. The only role I see missing is that of a “content consultant,” which could be included in their “coaching” description. There have been times when my expertise in community mobilization, coalition building, or nonprofit management has been sought and considered. Many times, these areas of expertise were considered essential when groups were hiring facilitators.

Achieving true deliberation and, particularly, democratic means of decision-making introduced challenges in each case, but significantly more for [Walsh] and the [AIEP] staff. It was not a matter of intention or even process design that caused the challenges, but the political realities that influenced the backdrop of [AIEP] that presented the greatest obstacles. In comparing the disparities between the two case studies, I found most of the discontent and challenges to be situated within the unique contexts of each, and most pronounced within [AIEP].

For example, the [AIEP] Emeritus Council Member wielding so much power over other members of the Executive Committee combined with an Executive Director who was not willing to advocate for the grantees at large created a challenging environment for [Walsh]. Consequently, the outcomes that were decided upon by consensus could not be fully implemented. Throughout the planning processes, [Walsh] and the [AIEP] staff rarely included Council members in the design and strategy meetings. Rather, they would meet and then present the information to the Council, feigning transparency. This worked well until the very end when
the Emeritus Council Member realized that her informal position of influence was going to be jeopardized.

Except for the ED, the other nine interviewees from the [AIEP] case study were not part of the [AIEP] staff, so they were not privy to the larger, behind-the-scenes discussions and planning. Those interviewed sensed tension between the Emeritus Council Member, the facilitator, and the ED, but nobody could pinpoint what the issues were about. All were pleased with the facilitation and the consensus on indicators, yet some expressed their discontent with how infrequently outcomes were actually implemented, and they expressed concern about the effectiveness of the process.

The other disparity involved what culture they collectively rallied behind. For [AIEP] participants, it was ethnic culture. My interview questions about facilitation processes, roles, neutrality, content knowledge, and similar matters were all answered in a cultural framework. Every [AIEP] participant told me that neutrality is not possible, and that, culturally, neutrality is not an expectation. Rather, someone trusted from the community who has relationships with those in the room is preferred. They all viewed [Walsh] more as an agenda facilitator and were generally satisfied.

In the HE‘E case study, participants connected around the culture of community advocacy. Deliberation, democratic decision-making, and the need for lobbying were values that were fundamentally shared among nearly all participants as well as the client. HE‘E participants focused primarily on ensuring a safe environment focused on fairness and inclusion, while being cautious about elevating any one ethnic culture.

The Three Politics

The complexities of politics existed in both case studies both internally and externally. For example, internally, there was competition for control within [AIEP] leadership, primarily between the Emeritus Council Member and the Executive Director. Externally, [AIEP] staff, Executive Committee members, and grantees were first trying to control how Hawaiian children were being evaluated in their educational experiences while the USDOE was trying to control
how programs that serve Hawaiians report data and demonstrate success. In HE‘E, internally there was a lot of emphasis placed on consensus to ensure that no one individual and/or group had control over decision-making. Externally, participants were trying to bring a community voice to state education policies and mobilize the community to enhance the community’s control over educational decisions for their children. If groups are content with where power is situated and trust they have access when they desire it, then processes are relatively straightforward and successful. Conversely, when discontentment exists, facilitators need to work harder to build trust and shift systems, which demands addressing the power imbalances inside and outside of any given room. The differentiated politics of history, differences, and structures existed in both case studies.

The politics of history were fully present in both case studies. HE‘E participants were pushing back on the State’s public education system, wanting to ensure it was serving the diversity of its students and families in the most effective ways. [AIEP] participants were facing the history of colonization by trying to ensure the education system was most reflective of Hawaiians’ culture, language and style of learning. Where they diverge in response to colonization is that [AIEP] participants all shared the goal of protecting and perpetuating Hawaiian culture, language, and values whereas HE‘E participants were striving to meet the diverse needs of all children under the HIDOE system.

Additionally, the sensitivities to having [Walsh]’s name on the evaluation matrix or providing her credit for any of the efforts, I believe, were steeped in the politics of history and cultural difference. The critique of having a non-Hawaiian up in front of the room or advocating on behalf of Hawaiians in D.C. is an additional example of such politics. The group was extremely sensitive to ensuring that the process, the metaphors used, and the outcomes reached were culture-based and driven by Hawaiians so as not to perpetuate the historical injustices. Yet [Walsh] was behind the scenes in planning meetings offering a variety of cultural strategies to guide the process. [AIEP]’s ED describes the behind-the-scenes involvement of [Walsh]:

What constantly will happen in our conservations; I’m trying to deliver a product, so I push to get to that point. [Walsh] responds to me and pushes in a powerful way to be strategic and culturally sensitive. She’s not afraid to have an opinion and she tells me what steps I’m skipping over and where I need to pull people together, what key ingredients I need. She somehow is able to mix the seven colors to paint a picture that
everyone will be able to paint. She is able to create a common mural that goes from beginning to end, always keeping the culture and politics pieces front and center. (ED interview, 03.17.2008)

The *politics of difference* looked quite different in the two case studies. [AIEP], fraught with hierarchical assumptions, displayed layered differences in “position” and “authority” that were relatively static despite efforts to decentralize power. The ominous positional power of the Emeritus Council Member, even though she held no official “position” was truly at the kernel of the challenges [Walsh] and [AIEP] staff faced. She had a handful of allies with similar positional authority, whether based on age or position, in the Councils. This intimate group of powerful stakeholders impeded the achievement of the necessary outcomes that most grantees were expecting. Facilitators as well maintain a certain level of positional power, as they are responsible for creating processes for deliberation. How those processes are designed and their influence “behind the scenes” provides them a certain level of power. When those positions do not align, tension naturally results.

HE‘E participants were overly sensitive to anyone who felt they were in a position of power. Positional differences naturally existed, particularly between the DOE, the Teachers’ Union, and community organizations, which were powerful in that order. One similarity between the cases was the tension between those who held higher levels of positional power. Within HE‘E, there was occasionally mild tension between my client and me. Most often, those who hold the money wield a tremendous amount of positional power, whether that person or group is a part of the process or paying for the process. In the [AIEP] case, the external powerhouse was the USDOE, which was threatening to withhold thirty-three million dollars, while the internal power was situated with the elders. Within HE‘E, positional power was situated with my client, although I do not believe she abused her position of power. It was not the best decision to hire staff without the coalition members’ input, but I do not believe it was because she was wielding her power. Rather she was focused on expediency.

Within HE‘E, participants brought with them their divergent histories and politics and they defined others by where they fell along the spectrum of public education. Finally, *politics of culture* definitely existed, but the “cultures” were not defined by ethnicity, rather by organizations. The State DOE has its own culture, as do the teacher’s union, legislators, and community groups. Community groups were diligently working to ensure that what they
perceived to be historical injustices in influencing the education system did not get perpetuated. They did not demand “special rights,” but they did demand a strong focus on trust building and transparency throughout the project. HE‘E participants came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, so many participants expressed the need to respect the unique differences in the group. Young suggests that moments of cultural difference present moments of opportunity to resolve intercultural conflicts. Young says, “On the dialogic view, members of different cultural groups within a society often influence one another and engage in productive cultural exchange, and this interaction ought to be mobilized to resolve intercultural conflict.” HE‘E participants harnessed this opportunity to celebrate differences and come together with a shared vision of improving the public education system through family engagement. [AIEP] participants on the other hand were less interested in celebrating diversity of culture than in celebrating the healing of their own culture through self-determination.

The elements of multipartial facilitation meet this need to treat participants not necessarily with equal time or attention, but with equitable opportunities to participate fully in both design and decision-making, which is at the root of democratic processes. If we collectively agree that positional and cultural differences exist, there is a natural need to mitigate those differences to the best of our abilities to ensure that broader and safer participation can occur. When we do intake processes with groups, we are frequently told that “cultural differences,” meaning “ethnic differences,” are impeding progress, hindering outcomes, causing interpersonal strife, and so on. Yet what we often find is that “cultural differences” are easy to identify and label, whereas it is much more challenging and riskier to pinpoint “politics of structures” that may be creating obstacles. One HE‘E participant shared,

It’s more important to me that a facilitator respects the person of the participants. I’ve been working in Kāne‘ohe almost my entire life. Its largest ethnic population is mixed race and we try to avoid pandering to small groups. A facilitator needs to protect the participants’ mode of communication and different styles of being in a group. Sometimes groups here let difference in culture become the issue rather than focusing on content and structure differences and challenges. (#4, 05.12.11)

There is little that silences a group faster than when someone plays the big “C” culture card. Because of the risk of appearing prejudiced, ignorant, and/or victimized, participants will rarely speak to the card that was played. It is up to the facilitator to guide the conversation, validating what he/she heard, reframing it if necessary, and digging down deeper through questions about
underlying interests and needs. How to do this effectively is quite challenging. [Walsh] could safely speak about culture with a big “C” and discuss how to strategically use it as a tool to help the group gel and to help the [AIEP] staff to negotiate with the USDOE. She also discussed how to avoid using it to manipulate power in the room. However, she refrained from doing so in front of the larger group, allowing the ED and Executive Committee members to take the leadership roles in speaking to culture.

I experienced this dynamic during my meeting with the Emeritus Council Member. When she declined to support my research, she said that she “did not want a non-Hawaiian publishing on a Hawaiian organization.” This left me with little room for rebuttal, even though I knew the issues went well beyond “culture,” and particularly included fear of what would be revealed about [AIEP]’s leadership. Playing the gender card can be just as powerful and easily manipulated. If the structures are truly defined by those who are considered “in” or “out” based on their ethnicity, skin color, or gender then the “culture” can be powerfully manipulated. In the contexts of my two case studies, what may appear to have been a surface “cultural conflict” may in fact have been an issue of structural inequality, alternative underlying interests and needs, or personality conflicts. For the Emeritus Council Member, I think her fear of my research reflecting poorly on [AIEP]’s leadership or providing [Walsh] with any credit were more influential in her decision than my non-Hawaiian background.

Third, both case studies’ participants were pushing back strongly on the politics of structures, particularly the structure of public education. For example, [AIEP]’s internal “structure” is reflective of historical hierarchical cultural structures as well as our perceptions and respect of kūpuna or elders. The USDOE system is similarly shaped by its history, including the omission of native peoples when the structures were being established. Both [AIEP] participants and HE‘E participants were striving for a more multicultural approach to learning. They had divergent focuses but similar goals whereby the indicators, approaches to learning, and ways of engaging families would be more place-based and more reflective of the community.

In [AIEP], there was definitely a priority placed on Hawaiian culture-based models of learning and perpetuating Hawaiian language and culture. Yet they took it a step further to challenge the
structures that were impeding their goals, for example, federally mandated indicators that do not resonate with their communities, reporting structures that make it challenging to share progress, lack of institutional support to accomplish reporting requirements, and basic need constraints that are infringing on their children’s opportunity to excel in school. As the project progressed, it became evident that not only did they need to critically look at the external structural obstacles but they also needed to reexamine their internal structures. When they did, they realized that leadership was going to have to be reorganized and restructured.

Within HE‘E, furloughing public school teachers for seventeen days was considered a structural injustice for families, students, and DOE personnel who lost pay. Although it may not have led to “culture-based injustices,” it did lead to injustices across class, most negatively affecting families who could not provide alternative care for their children on the furloughed days and subsequently left them home alone. HE‘E participants went directly to analyzing and critiquing the impediments to family engagement within the HIDOE system. They identified necessary DOE-wide policy changes at the management levels and at the school-based levels that would support family engagement efforts more fully. They identified “Meeting Basic Needs” as a priority, critiquing the structural obstacles to families’ abilities to meet these needs.

**Points of Diversion**

a) **How Participants Entered the Process:** [AIEP] participants were responding to the potential crisis of losing thirty-three million federal dollars for grantees and entered the process in a defensive posture, whereas HE‘E participants were coming off of a political win, entering the process apprehensively but with enthusiasm and hope. HE‘E participants joined with the expectation of collaboration, knowing the end goal was the formation of a coalition that would ideally push their own missions forward.

b) **Political Ramifications:** The outcomes of [AIEP] had dire consequences not just for the grantees but also for people’s jobs. [AIEP]’s ED was under considerable stress in meeting the demands of the USDOE. His State Council’s positions of authority were being jeopardized, which put everyone on alert. [Walsh] was put in a position of trying to protect all involved while still achieving the necessary outcomes that would secure the millions of
dollars in investments. HE’E participants had little if anything to lose. If the coalition failed, they would not be any worse off than before it existed. This took significant pressure off of everyone, including me as the facilitator.

c) **Willingness to Participate:** Participation in the [AIEP] effort most likely felt mandatory for many participants because the stakes were so high and grantees were being asked to integrate evaluation mechanisms to demonstrate success into their programs to justify continued funding. The [AIEP] process was mandated as a result of the audit, whereas the HE’E participation was voluntary and the effort organically driven.

d) **Cultural Specificity:** [AIEP] participants were solely focused on the Hawaiian community, so cultural responsiveness by staff, facilitators, and contractors was evaluated with a critical eye, whereas HE’E participants routinely pushed back on any effort that was made to elevate any one ethnic and/or cultural group. For the facilitator, [Walsh] was more challenged with her own identity as a non-Hawaiian. I did not encounter any pushback on my ethnic background, at least not overtly.

e) **Convening Bodies and Decision-makers:** The convening body in the [AIEP] study was an organization with existing hierarchies of decision-making with a relatively long history. They participated intimately throughout the process. HE’E’s initiators were three people who shared positions of authority and stayed relatively distant from decision-making. The decision-making responsibilities were on the participants.

f) **Decision-making Structures:** Decision-making within [AIEP] was highly centralized, whereas HE’E was extremely de-centralized, almost to the discomfort of some who got impatient with how slowly decisions were being made. Although I believe the intention within [AIEP] was for grantees to guide decisions, realistically, a lot was decided between [AIEP] staff, Council members, and [Walsh] and it became even more centralized when the Emeritus Council Member began making unilateral decisions toward the end of [Walsh]’s time with [AIEP]. HE’E participants were completely committed to consensus building and
watched with careful eyes as decisions were made to ensure they were reflective of the group’s wishes.

g) Complexity: The [AIEP] study was situated in a more complex canvas that directly involved multiple layers of influence. The USDOE, senators, kūpuna in the community, and a vast array of community organizations were involved. Additionally, [AIEP] is steeped in postcolonial efforts for self-determination, protection and perpetuation of native language and culture, and advocacy for the Hawaiian community. The outcomes of [AIEP] efforts would have greater impacts on individual and organizational funding, leadership positions, and decision-making structures. HE‘E was fully open to the public and attracted participants from an array of sectors and cultures, but it was Hawai‘i-centric. It did not have the same level of risk. Postcolonial realities of blended cultures existed, but the collective commitment to working together and not elevating any particular position seemed to dilute potential complexities.

Facilitation is clearly an ambiguous and at best loosely defined tool for community engagement and problem-solving, shaped by the distinctive qualities of those participating and the political influences that surround them. These two case studies reveal very disparate experiences and outcomes, even with the facilitators sharing relatively similar assumptions about the field. So what did I learn? What matters first is full buy-in and trust from those in leadership positions of the role(s) the facilitator will play throughout the process. The second most important element is a shared commitment to deliberation and to democratic principles of decision-making, and third is transparency at all levels to overcome the distrust that most community members bring with them to any given process. And when these prerequisites are absent, facilitators have the responsibility—not just from an ethical perspective, but, according to my interviews, also to meet the wishes of participants—to advocate, empower, and strategize to ensure these requirements are met, which counters notions of neutrality.

I believe all three requirements were missing in the [AIEP] case study, whereas in the HE‘E study, all three were generally honored. Not only were these requirements missing within [AIEP], but also the political contexts within the leadership structure as well as within the larger
context of USDOE relations were complex and laden with resentment, mandates, threats, and ulterior motives. It was a recipe for disaster. It is not difficult to appreciate how much taller and wider the obstacles were for [Walsh] in the [AIEP] case study. Moving beyond the bounds of neutrality seems to be riskier the more complex the project is, the more centralized the existing decision-making structures are, when participants enter a project cautiously if not defensively, when stakes are high, and when convening bodies are less inclined to give up power. However, it is in these very situations where multipartial facilitation is critical in order to address imbalances in decision-making, to contribute to content when necessary to bring everyone along, to be of strategic service, to unravel the complexities, and to build relationships and trust to achieve desired outcomes. Otherwise, a facilitator fundamentally risks reinforcing the status quo, which often perpetuates the existing challenges. It is in these areas of gray, delicate spaces where most facilitators operate and need to navigate with wisdom.

**Participant Insight**

Based on the rich feedback from my interviewees, both participants and facilitators, I am confident the time has come to close the gap between how we train and educate future facilitators by (a) using more accurate and responsive language reflective of what we experience with groups, (b) deconstructing the political, social, and economic influences present in each room, and (c) providing the complex skills necessary to meet unique challenges. It has been demonstrated in research and expressed in interviews that the perception of neutrality holds many values. A position of neutrality may be a viable “starting point” when engaging groups of people if that is what they desire, but a rich and contextual conversation needs to develop about the necessity of going beyond neutrality as deemed necessary. The reaction to such conversations can serve as a litmus test to clients and groups about their commitment to fully working with one another to reach their desired goals. However it is an insufficient position for facilitators to take in most processes. Through over one hundred hours of interviews, I learned extensively from participants about how they felt about neutrality, hiring criteria, approaches to power imbalances, and content knowledge of facilitators. The input was critical to evaluating how effective we are at creating environments of deliberation and democratic decision-making. The feedback also supported my initial experiences and observations in the field, which led me to believe, mainly, that facilitation is an extremely multifarious communication, decision-making,
and conflict resolution tool. How we define facilitation and prepare up-and-coming facilitators truly needs to be revisited and problematized.

*About Neutrality*

In order to validate the need for moving beyond neutrality as a means for achieving full deliberative and democratic outcomes, I first had to inquire about whether or not neutrality was expected and then measure and compare participants’ responses to subsequent questions to determine if the responses were consistent or not with their expressed expectation of “neutrality.”

In order to elicit their initial gut responses, one of the first questions I asked my interviewees was if they expected facilitators to be neutral. Responses were often very quick and clear: “yes,” “no,” “it’s impossible,” or “it depends”—and then followed by lengthy and qualifying commentary. The following chart depicts the findings. It is important to note that all facilitators felt that neutrality was most likely expected by their participants because that is how the role of “facilitators” has been traditionally defined, so “yes” would seem like the correct answer. However, when asked if they would perceive themselves as neutral, all but one said, “no,” and qualified to varying degrees the multiplicity of roles beyond “neutral” they are expected to play.

![Expectation of Neutrality](image)

*Figure 3.*

Although participants responded relatively more often with either “yes” or “no,” many did then think a bit more to conclude that indeed it depends on the context and why a facilitator was hired. For those who quickly said “yes,” they were most likely responding to the safety
component of neutrality; that the facilitator will be fair and not take sides. For those responding “no,” they are committed to the realization that nobody is “neutral” and understand that someone’s biases naturally influence the room, the process, the relationships, and even the outcomes, if even in a subtle way. Others simply expected a more proactive, social justice position and actually desired facilitators to be more involved in balancing power, advising, coaching, and other such activities.

Although I wanted to glean gut reactions, I did not want their opinions to be tainted by subsequent questions and discussions. Soon after this question, I asked about hiring criteria to compare what criteria they cited with what they meant by “expectation” or “no expectation” of neutrality. I would then go deeper by asking questions about the importance of content knowledge of facilitators, which invariably made them reflect on the challenges of balancing facilitators’ content contribution and positions of neutrality. Finally, I would inquire about expectations of facilitators dealing with power imbalances, challenges in processes they have experienced, other hats their facilitators wore, and similar experiences, to further compare these answers to their initial reaction to “neutrality.” It may be perceived that my questions were leading, but I was in fact digging for the complexities of facilitative experiences from the participants’ viewpoints, and as I dug, the discussion returned to the question of “neutrality.”

Only one participant out of thirty-nine was very clear and consistent in his expectation and definition of neutrality. His definition of neutrality was: “when a facilitator is respectful of all positions, is emotionally even keeled, sensitive to language used, and not patronizing” (#16, 05.22.11). When asked about hiring criteria, he said he would hire someone he trusted would respect all sides, stick to the agenda as closely as possible, is unbiased, can diffuse tensions, and has basic content knowledge to accurately record and follow conversation and to come to a conclusion at each meeting. When asked if it is a facilitator’s role to balance power in the room, he expressed that respecting everyone’s voice is important but beyond that, it’s not the facilitator’s job and it might distract from reaching the outcomes of the meeting. And finally, when asked if the facilitator he experienced from the particular case study was “neutral,” he said,

Yes. Even when only one or two people disagreed, the facilitator ensured they could safely express why. I respected the people paying for the process, that they didn’t impose their ideas. I didn’t feel like you were facilitating their outcomes and that felt good. (#16, 05.22.11)
Finally, when I asked him if he witnessed the facilitator playing any other role than a neutral third-party role, he responded,

I didn’t see the facilitator doing any strategic advising like I have with others, I think it’s a conflict of interest and sometimes facilitators take off their neutrality hat. It’s distracting. Rather, you were trying to get us to come to a solution; guiding gets in the way of neutrality. You kept discussions on task and on time and helped us arrive to decisions; what facilitators should be doing. (#16, 05.22.11)

His response was about as textbook as it gets in terms of mirroring what conventional facilitation books promote and teach. What was most important was that he was very satisfied with the facilitation and for him the perception of neutrality was important. Ironically, it was me to whom he was referring, highlighting that perhaps perception is more important than reality. It was fascinating to hear the divergent reactions from the different participants who experienced the same facilitator and attended the same meetings. I did note in my data the distance each participant had with the facilitator with 1 being the furthest and 5 being the closest. Clearly, the participants who contributed to the planning of the processes saw a different side of the facilitator and expected the facilitator to wear different hats. However, even for participants who shared the same distance from the facilitator, perceptions could not have been more divergent. There was a surprisingly large number of participants who cited that neutrality is impossible; that it’s not humanly possible; we operate in diverse contexts, we’re unaware of many of our own biases, we are multi-faceted creatures, and we’re not naturally neutral; so it was impossible to pretend. People linked having more trust with those who say they aren’t neutral and are honest about their biases.

However, one consistency remained, which can be seen by comparing the graphs; the majority of those who “expected neutrality” responded that “yes,” their facilitator was “neutral,” while, conversely, those who did not expect neutrality responded that “no,” their facilitator was not neutral. Given the long list of roles that facilitators play, the “yes and no” responses are probably quite accurate because there are times when facilitators are perceived to be neutral and other times when they are clearly wearing different hats. The real tightrope walk is balancing what the group desires and what is being asked of you by the client or people in decision-making positions; and balancing really caring about individuals in the room, as well as about the outcomes and effects on the larger community, with a perception of neutrality.
As mentioned in previous chapters, some facilitators have identified the possibility of being a process advocate while being content neutral. Yet there is an inherent conundrum to this assertion. To be a process advocate, you have to pay attention to who is allowed to participate, who is invited, and what knowledge and expertise are included. The line begins to blur between process and content because you have to be familiar with content to know how to advocate for best process, particularly who should be included and why. You may not be advocating for a particular position on content, but a facilitator often identifies when certain content is being intentionally or unintentionally excluded. In a sense, you begin to advocate for the inclusion of certain content when you recognize it as essential to the process.

Seven out of the nine facilitators I interviewed expressed in one way or another their awareness of groups speaking out of both sides of their mouth when it comes to neutrality. Participants often vie for the facilitator’s attention to “get them on their side,” and many clients want to ensure that the facilitator is on their side, naturally enough, given that they are hiring the facilitator and most likely have outcomes in mind. Clients are naturally apprehensive about opening up a process; fearful of responses, not confident they will be able to implement suggestions, and worried about criticism and losing decision-making power; all of this needs to be fleshed out in the planning stages and articulated in the description of outcomes and the roles/responsibilities of the facilitator.

**About Hiring Criteria**

I did not inquire about “public deliberation” explicitly with my interviewees, feeling the concepts too academic. Rather, I asked what criteria they would use to hire facilitators and then asked facilitators the same question. I then compared their responses to what the literature says about what defines “public deliberation,” as well as what participants shared about the expectation of neutrality.

I identified themes as responses emerged. Despite best efforts at accurately coding each response, overlaps naturally existed. Content knowledge could be considered “tech skills” for some participants, while cultural sensitivity could be considered “personality” to others, for
example. I attempted to pull out themes that were explicitly spoken to more than once and appeared to refer to something somewhat tangible. And although there are inherent overlaps, the themes do stand alone in that, for example, a person could desire tech skills, but not content knowledge or cultural sensitivity. The following graphs compare the top six criteria cited by participants and by facilitators. It is not difficult to see why these criteria would inherently challenge the notion of neutrality.

![Hiring Criteria](image)

**Figure 4.**

The next three criteria were identified as “great listening skills,” “honesty,” and “reputation.”
The next four criteria were identified as “reputation,” “cultural sensitivity,” “identify pivotal points,” and “sixth sense–intuition.”

It was striking that “technical skills,” “personality,” and “content knowledge” were identified as the top three criteria for both interviewee groups, and the technical skills identified were quite complex. They include the skills listed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use small groups</th>
<th>Get folks moving and focused</th>
<th>Use entrusted people in community to share info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use facilitator teams</td>
<td>Move groups from stone soup</td>
<td>Provide clarity in writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide safety to share; to speak truths</td>
<td>Design right pace for particular groups</td>
<td>Capitalize on strengths each person brings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be flexible</td>
<td>Stick to agenda</td>
<td>Follow-through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be organized and structured</td>
<td>Have a concept of flow-charts</td>
<td>Be timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be an active listener</td>
<td>Synthesize ideas</td>
<td>Reframe and clarify well</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.
Facilitating effective deliberation is the overarching outcome I see as resulting from these skills. “Content knowledge” was another key ingredient that both participants and facilitators felt was important for a facilitator to have, which would also enhance the deliberation. If a facilitator is capable of achieving the identified technical skills, she will be much more prepared and likely to address the diverse politics effectively.

When asked what criteria they would use to hire a facilitator, participants responded with similarly diverse responses, demonstrated in the graphs. It is not surprising that for participants but not facilitators, “connection to group” as well as “trust” were identified within the top six criteria. If facilitators had cited “connection to group,” they may have risked a perception of partiality whether they felt it important or not. “Honesty,” however, did surface for facilitators as a leading criterion, perhaps referring to sensitivities about being fully transparent amidst diverse positions and opinions. For example, [Walsh] could be very honest with her planning team, which is essential for successful designing. However, it was more difficult for [Walsh] and the planning team to be fully transparent with grantees and the Executive Council because they sensed there would be resistance to [Walsh]’s deeper engagement.

Facilitators identified “dispute resolution skills” as one of the top six most critical criteria for hiring a facilitator. Such skills might include having intimate experience with the undercurrents in any given room, unofficially mediating outside of a room, or facilitating through conflict directly within a room. Given how intimate facilitators are with process, their unique responses of being able to “identify pivotal points” and “having a sixth sense” were insightful. Pivotal points were explained as points when facilitators recognize that a group is taking a ninety-degree turn toward decision-making, rallying around a new and innovative idea, transforming relationships, and so forth, and facilitating through such processes is critical. A sixth sense was referred to as “intuition,” and can be thought of as being able to feel the temperature in the room,
even the temperature of each individual, beyond listening to body language. In addition to the six facilitators who came up with this as a criterion, one participant did as well. She referred to it as “good energy sense” and an ability to “read the minds and feelings of participants” (#29, 02.20.11).

It is important to note that criteria were self-identified, not selected from a predetermined set of potential criteria. The reason this is significant is because, most likely, participants did not exhaust their ideas about criteria but rather expressed criteria that came to mind during our interview, suggesting that perhaps they did not identify every element that they expect. Their responses could have been influenced by recent facilitations with particular facilitators or generalized criteria. What is important to note is that the criteria expressed are what naturally came to mind first without prompting.

My case studies diverged in how deliberation may or may not have been used in decision-making. HE‘E participants did not have a hierarchical structure and they deliberately ensured that every decision came from the group after significant dialogue, whereas [AIEP] did have an existing hierarchical decision-making structure in addition to a powerful individual who wielded significant influence. Regardless of the efficacy of the deliberation, decisions “went up the chain” and could be barred at any given time. A HE‘E participant expressed well the feeling of when true deliberation is honored:

I continually had opportunities to bring in personal areas of concern. We had opportunities to bring in our own mana‘o, which was really a gift for me. I had the ability to put forward what I thought was important and relevant, which kept me committed and engaged. (#4, 05.12.11)

In [AIEP], many participants needed significant capacity building to (a) gain the knowledge of what was intended in the processes, and (b) determine how they were going to get the support to do the proper monitoring and evaluation of their programs. For these participants to be fully deliberative, they needed this information and ideas for solutions to contribute to the conversation. Therefore, facilitators spent more time with these participants outside of the room to help them build the necessary capacity to fully participate. In both case studies, sensitivities to alternative modes of communication existed. Mixes of large and small groups, one-on-one
sharing, anonymous reporting, and private conversations outside the room are but a few examples of strategies that were used to ensure that everyone felt they had a voice.

Generally, every participant I interviewed was very satisfied by the experience they had with their facilitator, except three who participated in the [AIEP] facilitation. One was in a leadership position and was threatened by the outcomes that were being developed; one was not upset with the facilitator but upset with [AIEP] leadership, feeling that they were not transparent about how decisions were being made; and the final participant felt that it was a lot of talk with little effect, and her frustration with facilitation is that “strategic ideas emerge, plans develop and then no money comes to implement until the next facilitator is hired to do yet another process” (#24, 05.25.11). When she shared this with me, I felt her frustration when I reflected on several processes over the years that seemingly went very well and then either did not have the institutional support or funding to reach the intended outcomes. Having decision-makers, funders, or strategic champions involved in the process is critical to ensure outcomes can be realized. Sometimes, even if the outcomes could not be met, the relationships that were formed or transformed have been success enough for a group, and other times, a process may merely be a stepping stone to the next gathering that may bear more fruit.

**About Power Imbalances**

Interviewees unanimously expressed that ensuring everyone was able to share his/her voice was important to them. When asked about criteria for hiring a facilitator and, subsequently, about what made the process they recently engaged in unique, twenty-five out of twenty-nine who responded commented about participants having equal voices, honoring different perspectives, safety in sharing, demonstrating the significant value participants place on this tenet. Everyone who responded to the definition of a facilitator alluded to each participant being able to share freely and safely. If these goals are achieved, an environment of deliberation results. It was a leading criteria for almost all participants, but it can be somewhat threatening to clients and/or participants who are in positions of decision-making. One participant from [AIEP], who was in a threatened leadership position, expressed that the process was unique because the facilitator sided with certain participants and did not provide a voice for everyone. Her response is
indicative that participants might feel threatened by what they are hearing whether or not they are in leadership positions.

One HE‘E participant said, “The only reason I felt comfortable joining the coalition was that I saw the group identified ‘trust building’ as the second priority of the coalition!” (#1, 05.14.11).

What this notion of trust refers to is multi-faceted. It can include the sense that people feel safe in sharing; that participants gain enough trust with each other that in their absence, they can trust they are still represented; clients’ trust of the facilitators to operate with best intentions by being committed to the group’s success; and participants’ trust that their voices will be heard, respected, and integrated either as recommendations or in decision-making. In order to reach this level of trust, which was explicitly identified over and over, people have to feel safe, and to feel safe, they need to know they can share without repercussions and judgment.

One of the leading hindrances to feeling safe is an oppressive power imbalance. Positional power imbalances can be expected, as some people have significantly more responsibility in decision-making and therefore hold a disproportionate power relative to others in a room, but how that power is exercised determines whether or not that power is considered “leadership” or “oppression.”

How a facilitator attempts to correct oppressive power imbalances to elicit greater trust and greater outcomes can be risky both for the facilitator and the client. Facilitators were asked how they respond when they see that imbalances need to be corrected, either because voices are being marginalized or processes are being diverted by a select few. Eight out of the nine facilitators explicitly stated that it is their responsibility as a facilitator to ensure that all people are heard, that processes do not get diverted, and so on, telling me that they are partial to those who may be left behind. Now some would say that this is being a process advocate and they remain content neutral. That’s true, but they are not being “neutral” in the sense of “being indifferent to the client’s welfare,” as in the definition by Robert Benjamin\textsuperscript{287} that is mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. It becomes an issue of ethics, and many facilitators are not comfortable or prepared to take on that role.
Had [Walsh] played more of a neutral position, she would have refrained from participating in the strategies around restructuring the organization and left it to the staff to do it. The staff did not feel prepared to undertake this effort and therefore may have done nothing, reinforcing the status quo, which was responsible for [AIEP]’s failures in monitoring, evaluating, and documenting federal investments and successes in the first place. At the end of the day, had [Walsh] not intervened, she would have risked not fulfilling the outcomes she was hired to accomplish.

The HE‘E case study did not share the same power dynamics as [AIEP]. Interventionist approaches were needed more when certain positions were not being equitably considered because those positions did not have equitable representation. For example, those who represented the Hawaiian community, early childhood programs, or organizations that provide basic needs services had fewer participants. However, many recognized that family engagement in a child’s education experience at home and at school would not be realized if basic needs are not addressed. As a facilitator, I had to keep bringing this back to the table, suggesting to them that in order to achieve their identified priorities as a coalition they needed either to (a) prioritize and support more of a community school model, or (b) partner with organizations who do focus on basic needs.

Ho-Won Jeong has this to say about the facilitator’s role:

Regardless of being nominally committed to impartiality, interveners unavoidably play more than neutral facilitator roles of eliciting information, asking questions or determining agendas. An intervener’s knowledge, values and expertise are important in assisting disputants in identifying concerns that affect them and exploring the specific needs that must be addressed in any outcome. While conflict resolution practitioners should strategically use skills to keep the communication process balanced, fair and productive, their conscience should not be closed to injustice. Especially in power asymmetry, an intervener may need to be engaged in diverse subtle methods of addressing issues of justice.  

[Walsh] addressed issues of “justice” both externally and internally during her time at [AIEP]. [Walsh] agreed that the mandates being placed on [AIEP] were culturally inappropriate and thus a “justice” issue. The institutions and values of the colonial power did not correlate with those of Hawaiian culture and therefore, generations had struggled, for example, within the education system. Grantees of [AIEP], along with staff and the facilitator, were advocating for culturally aligned and responsive indicators to compliment No Child Left Behind indicators.
Institutionalizing these indicators would be a step toward restorative justice for the Hawaiian community. Internally, the hierarchy of decision-making appeared flawed and seemed to be holding [AIEP] back from achieving its goals and securing future funding. Power asymmetry was high, and [Walsh] had to work to balance this power, particularly with the Emeritus Council Member and her supporters.

Justice issues were the impetus for HE‘E participants coming together in the first place. The group itself did not exhibit “justice” issues per se within the group; rather they were reacting to “justice” issues within the Department of Education that they felt were negatively affecting students, families, and teachers. The state furloughing teachers was the most egregious justice issue, serving as the impetus for the formation of the coalition. The coalition effort therefore was launched from a position of advocacy, and I was hired to support this effort, which automatically put me in that space as well. As a facilitator, I did not witness issues of justice within the group, aside from the ramifications of the historical injustices to the Hawaiian community, which were discussed and considered throughout the process.

Jeong discusses different types of injustices:

> The field of conflict resolution has long grappled with such questions as when and how justice can be addressed. While distributive justice concentrates on egalitarianism, procedural justice is derived from unbiased, fair processes in the administration of law. Distributive justice entails concerns with what is right as to the allocation of wealth, income, jobs, welfare and opportunities.289

In both case studies, issues of justice are a reflection of the history of the islands as well as the perpetuation of systems that continue to disenfranchise groups of people in Hawai‘i, not always ethnically determined. In both [AIEP] and HE‘E, outcomes were meant to move toward correcting distributive injustices while ensuring processes used to reach those outcomes were as just as possible.

One facilitator shared, “There are ten thousand ways to empower people at the table. The question is, is it our obligation? I can’t change the lions and the lambs” (#34, 06.12.11). An [AIEP] participant responded, “If a facilitator doesn’t balance power, it’s not a safe place for me to be. I expect a facilitator to be aggressively balancing power by commentary, body language,
positioning. They should assertively manage the power” (#29, 02.20.11). Every participant except one expressed the need and desire for a “level playing field” as necessary for building trust with the people in the room, the facilitators, and the process to be used. The paradox here is that through my interviews, I consistently heard from facilitators a collective pause about whether or not it is our role to address power imbalances, while nearly every participant confirmed that they do believe it is our role.

The majority of interviewees expressed this obligation in a number of ways, either by stating explicitly that “power needs to be balanced,” or implicitly by mentioning the facilitators’ role in:

- Conducting intake interviews to glean diverse perspectives to inform the process
- Designing a process whereby everyone can fully participate; strategically designing “the table” was expressed as an important first step based on initial assessment. Strategies for designing the table with the right people and setting shared values or ground rules are important, along with other technical strategies of initial sharing to get voices at the table, such as using small groups, individual input, storytelling, consensus building strategies, agreeing on experts ahead of time, etc.
- Establishing expectations upfront through contracts and charters that explicitly state that facilitators are serving everyone, not just the person paying the bill; defining their role(s) as facilitators; and insisting on transparency to ensure everyone knows how the design came to be, who is paying, etc.
- Spending more time with certain participants who may need greater capacity for engaging more fully and in some cases respectfully in processes

Two facilitators were very confident that this can be dealt with through process design; one even shared that she coaches on collaboration. In my experience, it is more about convincing those in power that participatory brainstorming and decision-making not only make their jobs easier, but establish a working environment that is more filled with trust, and that therefore there are fewer opportunities for misperceptions, miscommunication, overt and covert conflict, and other such challenges.

It is one challenge to ensure that everyone has equitable opportunities to voice their opinions in a deliberation; it is another challenge to ensure good and reliable information is being shared. One of the facilitators I interviewed spoke to this very issue when he shared that his primary focus is less on trying to correct asymmetrical power imbalances and more on ensuring the group creates informed agreements and outcomes:
The danger comes when people start to make uninformed agreements. It’s my responsibility to prevent people from reaching agreements when I know one side doesn’t have access to information, etcetera. If you have created a good table process, you have created a fair process. You are giving power when you set that up. I want to ensure sturdy, tractable and well informed outcomes. (#34, 06.12.11)

What this facilitator was speaking to is “improving the completeness of the debate” or deliberation to ensure sustainable outcomes. Ensuring decisions are informed by reliable data and information demands the facilitator have a working knowledge of the content of any given process.

**About Content Knowledge**

Some facilitators will differentiate between being “content neutral” versus a “process advocate,” which is a safe and middle-of-the-road description for ensuring a process is safe for all to participate. It falls short of addressing the issues of clients and participants who desire content expertise and request strategic advising and even participation in outcomes. Michael Doyle states,

> We found that the power in the role of the facilitator was in becoming content neutral and a process advocate—advocating for fair, inclusive and open processes that would balance participation and improve productivity while establishing a safe psychological space in which all group members could fully participate.”

Doyle’s statement about process advocacy and content neutrality does introduce moving beyond the bounds of neutrality and the accompanying sensitivities. Throughout the interviews, participants were very sensitive to how involved a facilitator was in the content of a discussion and/or the outcomes of the group, generally suggesting that it is a fine balance; that they appreciate someone who has content knowledge and can contribute when asked; but that they did not appreciate when a facilitator contributes too much or influences the outcomes to meet their own vision.

In both case studies, facilitators were hired because of their knowledge in the particular content area of education and community building. Despite both facilitators being requested to engage in strategic advising and content driven outcomes, [AIEP] leadership responded negatively when
[Walsh]’s involvement seemed to move too far beyond the bounds of neutrality. The following graph shows the variance in expectations for facilitators to have content knowledge.

![Graph showing the variance in expectations for facilitators to have content knowledge.](image)

**Figure 6.**

Not surprisingly, participants valued having just enough base knowledge rather than rich content knowledge for fear that the more knowledge a facilitator had of a particular subject, the more tempting it might be to get involved too much in content, highlighting the sensitivity routinely expressed about balancing involvement with content and staying impartial. All of the facilitators I interviewed are seasoned facilitators with over twenty ears of experience. Many found it to be more helpful to have deeper knowledge, particularly on matters of technical content like environmental sciences. Others shared that groups responded positively when the groups knew they had content expertise, and often the content expertise was a criterion for getting hired. It is interesting that about thirty-five percent of the participants, including many of the clients, expressed that they appreciate when facilitators share examples from other organizations they’ve been involved with, and about fifty percent of the facilitators recognized the value of what [Walsh] terms “cross-pollinating,” or sharing where appropriate other examples to consider either as questions or as suggestions depending on the group. Facilitators serve as vaults, collecting “strategies” as they travel from room to room, group to group. Of course sensitivity to and when information is shared is very critical.
The identification of personality and content knowledge has the potential to challenge notions of neutrality; particularly with traits such as interpersonal skills, connection with participants, heartfelt approach, charisma, and empathetic personality. In the participant feedback, “connection to group” was identified as the fourth most desired criteria, which too could potentially challenge a position of neutrality, and is perhaps why so many participants indicated that neutrality was not necessarily expected. I would conjecture to say that relationship, trust, skills, and personality trump the expectation of neutrality. Only three participants specifically identified “neutrality” as a criterion.

There was significant sensitivity among the majority of both participants and facilitators about how facilitators shared content knowledge, suggesting that it is a matter of providing content expertise when asked or very sparingly as needed. When participants were asked when facilitators “overstepped,” their leading response was related to when facilitators shared content knowledge without being asked or without asking permission of the group. Nearly everyone felt that some content knowledge was important; only one person, a facilitator, explicitly stated that it was best to have no content knowledge.

**About Cultural Sensitivity**

I knew asking a question about the importance of cultural sensitivity would provide interesting insights, but I was uncertain about how it would relate or not to the concept or expectation of “neutrality.” It proved to be a more critical question than I had imagined. When “cultural sensitivity” was cited, I would dig deeper to ask what cultural sensitivity meant for people, and there was a wide range of responses. Cultural sensitivity can mean sensitivity to:

**The Hawaiian community specifically**: This seemed to be the most common response; it is understandable given the sociopolitical and historical atrocities that have happened in the islands. Having an understanding of history and place is important, along with respecting the current resulting struggles, incorporating Hawaiian protocol, and honoring kūpuna.

**Diverse ethnic groups**: This was the second most frequent response, again understandable given the unique diversity in the islands and consequent tensions. There was as frequent sensitivity to
facilitators catering to the dominant culture group, whatever that may be, for the particular group varies from room to room.

**Groups themselves:** This meaning was expressed by fewer people but they highlighted that each group has its own “culture” or way of defining and structuring itself, and it is important to know that culture, whether it is defined by gender, position, organization, age, sexuality, etc.

**Individuals themselves:** Even fewer expressed the importance of showing sensitivity to each individual’s culture, recognizing that it’s impossible to make assumptions about someone’s “culture” based on their ethnicity and/or group affiliation.

**Not important:** Three people expressed that cultural sensitivity was not important at all and could derail a process if too much emphasis was put on it. All three participants were born and raised in Hawai‘i but not of Hawaiian descent. My assumption is that they have sensitivity to the frequent valuing of Hawaiian values and culture over those of other ethnic cultures and therefore react strongly to the notion of “cultural sensitivity,” although I did not clarify this with them.

One participant clearly stated that groups should be encouraged to “let it be ok that we don’t understand each other’s cultural perspectives” as a way of showing respect. Based on the frequency with which “cultural sensitivity” was stated, and the extended conversations when interviewees were asked to expand on what “cultural sensitivity” means, it would demand a relatively close proximity to individuals and the group as a whole for a facilitator to feel, inquire about, and understand the “cultural” nuances, ethnic or otherwise. I have found a level of knowledge about particular ethnic and organizational culture groups to be helpful to me, but I have found it even more important to connect to the individuals, because often the assumptions I would make based on my knowledge or experience were overgeneralized or not relevant to the unique dynamics in each room. It is impossible to make generalizations about Americans, Hawaiians, Koreans, Japanese, Europeans, etc., based on nationality, or about women or men based on gender, or about professionals in public health, education, and government, without encountering a multitude of exceptions to those assumptions. I have found it to be most strategic to try to understand each individual in context with the others in the group and the larger sociopolitical and economic systems. This takes closer proximity to individuals and/or groups,
and it takes asking more difficult questions or facilitating deeper relationships to build trust, all of which can threaten notions of neutrality. If you are too responsive to any one culture in such a diverse place, you will most likely not gain trust or achieve the best outcomes for the community at large.

**About Personality**

Finally, “personality” of the facilitator was discussed throughout the interview process.

Personality was described by interviewees as:

- **Heartfelt**
  - (respectful, empathetic, kind, open-minded, smiling, engaged)

- **Charismatic and Creative**
  - (think on feet, confident and self-assured without being arrogant, thick skin)

- **Great Interpersonal Skills**
  - (greetings, connection with participants, laid back- no stick up ass, sense of humor)

- **Relaxed and Calm**
  - (good energy fit for group)

**Figure 7.**

The personality of a facilitator may serve as the underlying variable that affects how a facilitator addresses issues of power imbalances, content needs, relationships with participants, and cultural responsiveness, although I did not probe deeply about its impact.

In comparing how participants responded between the two case studies, the most glaring differences involved perceptions of the facilitator role and reactions to processes in general. [AIEP] participants unanimously said that they prefer someone they know and who knows the history of Hawai‘i, preferably someone within their own community rather than someone who is
perceived to be “neutral.” All [AIEP] participants shared that content knowledge was critical. Six of the ten [AIEP] interviewees also expressed frustration with processes generally, feeling that they took too long and often the outcomes were not implemented. Finally, all of the [AIEP] participants who I interviewed mentioned the need for facilitators to work closely with kūpuna in any given process.

HE‘E participants, on the other hand, were more cautious about stating confidently that facilitators should intervene to correct power imbalances, get involved in content, build relationships, and so on, yet after richer discussion, they came back to affirming that these roles were needed and desired. HE‘E participants focused a lot on the differences between participants and the need to mitigate those differences well in order to reach consensus, whereas [AIEP] participants assumed a similarity among participants and a commitment to serving a target population. Feedback was generally similar when it came to recognizing the diversity of roles a facilitator may play and the unique context of any given room. Participants in both case studies shared the opinion that facilitators are often viewed as leaders in a process, although HE‘E participants appeared to be more comfortable with this perspective.

The participant feedback illuminates the complexities of facilitation, blurring the boundaries of how we have defined the field and designed our trainings. The feedback not only validated my initial discomfort about “neutrality,” which I began to experience twelve years ago when I officially “entered” the field, but broadened my perspective on what is really needed from facilitators. The participants’ universal frustrations with processes “going nowhere” or being “hijacked” reinforced their desire for good process and sustainable outcomes. The conversations I had with participants were humbling, particularly given the participants’ commitment to positive social change. We can do better.
Chapter 7 Conclusion: Beyond Neutrality

Gaps in Literature, Training, and Reality

“Disorder, chaos, anarchy: now that’s fun!”
– David J. Schow, The Crow

According to Jürgen Habermas,

> When popular sovereignty or government designed by the will of the people, is realized, the political system is structured in such a way as to create procedures by which the free and open public sphere can generate and communicate ideas that mark the range of appropriate administrative discretion.

In a democracy, there is an expectation that the public will have opportunities to participate and even influence decision-making on issues that will affect their lives and communities. Similarly, within any organization that values democratic participation and decision-making, the same expectations exist at the juncture of management and personnel.

Although it began as an inquiry into how politics and power play out in community-based processes in Hawai‘i, my research morphed into a more explicit examination of whether and how facilitators should respond to and engage with these existing issues of politics and power. I wanted to compare what facilitators think and practice with how they have been educated and trained and subsequently compare whether or not our perceived roles for ourselves match with the desires of our participants. My research identified a fissure, which existed around this concept of neutrality. This research is not necessarily new, but rather was approached from a different angle, a more evaluative angle. Rather than presenting research solely on what I as a researcher observed and experienced during my case studies or presenting strictly what facilitators believe and experience on this topic, I brought the voice of our participants to the table.

Why did it become necessary to so deeply explore the essence of neutrality? Facilitators operate at the juncture of political, economic, and social systems. As a result, they must have a sensitivity and understanding of “how things came to be” for the particular group that they are serving. Based on the multiple definitions of “neutrality” provided in the introduction, it is not hard to imagine why such a position of engagement may not serve our groups best.
My research explored the role of a facilitator vis-à-vis power imbalances, political dynamics, relationships with participants, and cultural needs. In addressing these issues, groups are forced to address the politics of history, differences, and structures that function as obstacles to achieving outcomes. If I ascertain that fundamental to our role as facilitators is “shrinking the proximity between the citizenry and the decision-makers” to come to more creative and sustainable outcomes, then perhaps a position of neutrality will not suffice. Participants generally agreed with this perspective, making it clear that they desire engagement beyond the bounds of neutrality, which allows me to conclude that neutrality does not appear to be realistic and could truly be a myth.

Is it too bold to assume that we as facilitators are promoting democracy and human rights in the processes within which we engage? Such language may feel strong in our field of conflict resolution because it alludes to partial engagement. However, we promote respect, safety, equity, and trust, as identified by the fifth value in our IAF Code of Ethics; and these for me are additional ways of describing democracy, justice, and human rights. As facilitators, if we are able to assist participants in becoming unafraid of “politics” and able to harness the opportunities politics presents for affecting policy in democratic societies, we will have succeeded in at least transforming the stigma that often comes with politics. Engaging in deliberative democracy allows us to do so. If processes go well, we may even have opportunities to construct a new kind of politics, one that works more effectively for everyone involved and affected.

**Our Role**

So what is our role as facilitators to public deliberations? In the *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*, a graph that breaks down the various possibilities is presented. A handful of roles for third party interveners includes: “convener, observer, researcher, legal adviser, conciliator, spiritual guide, facilitator, moderator, adviser, expert, trainer, coach.” All of these roles were echoed in my interview responses. No wonder we are struggling with our identity as practitioners!
In both case studies, the dominant narrative of public education was challenged, although in distinct ways, as were the dominant structures of decision-making and collaboration. Both [Walsh] and I were responsible for facilitating the conversations that elicited new narratives, which worked to establish new and more responsive structures so that each group could meet their outcomes as successfully and sustainably as possible. In our work, the description of why we do what we do is as critical as the description of how we do it. Our descriptions of our roles articulate a set of values, operating principles, and personal influences by which we conduct ourselves and shape the way we design our processes. Seven of the nine facilitators I interviewed confidently said that they are not neutral; rather they strive to be fair, trusted, competent, and strategic. One facilitator said she is sometimes neutral and sometimes will add more to content as needed, which she felt went beyond neutrality, and another facilitator was very clear that she was indeed neutral and to consider being anything else introduced unnecessary risk and could jeopardize processes.

Multiplicity of Roles
Multipartiality demands a reconstitution of political space whereby a group and its facilitator try to create a forum where people can begin to address the more tangled but important issues of class, race, gender, history, and politics. As Healey puts it, “The argument here is that such processes are more likely to promote attention to the values of social justice, environmental responsibility and cultural sensitivity than overly competitive processes and overly generalized ideologies.” I would suggest that multipartiality goes beyond parties to extend to outcomes as well, meaning that there is a responsibility that the outcomes benefit those most affected, do not cause harm to the larger community, and strengthen the group that is working together. It becomes a question of what responsibility facilitators have to not only the groups they are working with but also all those affected by the outcomes as well.

In Chapter 2, I introduced what some of the more progressive facilitator literature proposes about alternatives to neutral engagement, depicted in the continuum below.
Figure 8.

Although this figure depicts facilitator involvement as occurring anywhere on the continuum from the more neutral position to the other extreme of activist facilitation, the reality is that the multiplicity of roles creates more of a mosh pit of engagement needed to address competing interests and diverse personalities, histories, and politics. I observed and experienced all of these roles being expected of the facilitator by the participants in both case studies and all of these hats were worn by both [Walsh] and me throughout the processes. Both of us strived to be balanced and fair, but it took guiding, training, empowering, and advocating to get there.

Participants responded to my questions with multiple descriptions of roles they feel facilitators play, indicated in the facilitator wheel below, which complements what the more progressive literature assumes.
Figure 9.

The Wheel of Facilitation demonstrates the multiple roles desired of facilitators by participants and groups.

While observing and minimally participating in the [AIEP] project over a two-year time period, I saw that internal and external politics along with accompanying power issues proved to be hurdles, especially for the staff and hired consultants like [Walsh]. The internal and external politics were handled relatively gracefully with multipartial engagement from [Walsh],
supported by staff, through coaching on community engagement and capacity building, strategic advising on how to effectively negotiate with the USDOE, advising on reconfiguring internal management structures, and designing processes that were inclusive and grounded in consensus building around (a) the need to establish effective evaluation systems for grantees and (b) the need to identify and lobby for a new set of educational indicators for Hawaiian children. Her role was not neutral and demanded her multipartial engagement throughout. This type of engagement created friction by challenging existing power structures, particularly that supported by the Emeritus Council Member, who felt threatened and seemingly displaced.

[Walsh] responded to the case study chapter on [AIEP]:

Clients/participants who would otherwise value the multipartial approach as being culturally sensitive, use the “neutral” card when they don’t feel the process is sufficiently supporting them. That makes sense. What happens when supporting them to their liking seems to be at odds with the greater needs of the community, as evidenced by the process itself? The community had spoken. Now the board was wanting to do something that was not supportive of the needs identified and vetted by the community. Now what is my role? What are my options? What is the right thing to do? (T. [Walsh] email, 09.19.12)

This question was the crux of my research. As facilitators, we all find ourselves in these situations to varying degrees. According to feedback from participants, [Walsh] did what she should have done and that was stand by and advocate for where the community and the staff reached consensus, which was part of the identified outcomes from the beginning of the project. All but the Emeritus Council Member from the [AIEP] case study shared that they expect facilitators to push back on power, that they are hired to ensure processes are inclusive and honest, and that collaborative decisions are honored. For those who expressed apprehensions about facilitative processes, their number one concern was that they might fully participate, spending copious amounts of time planning, and still in the end not have their ideas and decisions honored: “Don’t ask me to participate if what I say isn’t going to matter. Facilitators have to ensure what we say matters, otherwise what’s the point?” (#12, 05.26.11).

[AIEP] proved to be a rich case study to explore the complexities of facilitation and to explore alternatives to neutrality, primarily multipartiality. HE’E provided me with a case study to juxtapose my experiences and observations within [AIEP]. It also allowed me to try some things differently so that participants and leaders expected multipartiality and were not surprised by it.
Based on my interviews, I essentially conclude that neutrality is indeed a myth and that multipartiality is the most strategic and successful approach to engaging in the complexities of politics and power to achieve deliberation and democratic decision-making. Having revealed the strengths of multipartiality, I believe it is critical for organizations and institutions that train people in third-party conflict resolution, primarily facilitation and even mediation, to reconsider how they are training and to incorporate these complexities and accompanying ethical dilemmas that many of us encounter.

As facilitators, it is easy to lose sight of whom we are really serving, which should be those most affected by any given process. Often those most affected are those with the least powerful voices: our environment, our children, our economically and socially vulnerable groups. However, we often end up serving those who hired us or even the immediate participants in the room, overlooking those who will be most impacted. If we can hover above the politics, power, and inter-relational challenges in any given group to ensure we are creating the most deliberative and democratic processes possible, we will have succeeded. We are in positions of power ourselves, fraught with ethical dilemmas that need to be navigated. Although professing to be neutral might make participants feel safe, a position of neutrality may slide the deeper issues that are hindering a group under the rug, thereby reinforcing the status quo, which most likely got the group in trouble in the first place.

Facilitation is truly a form of peacebuilding, a way to bring individuals and groups of people with divergent views together to solve complex problems and/or to reach consensus on certain decisions impacting our communities and organizations. Because processes are not only political in and of themselves but are couched in external political realities often fraught with systemic injustices, we are tasked with advocating for fair, trusted, inclusive, and transparent processes, which mandates us to step beyond the bounds of neutrality. Every group we work with, whether the group comprises community members or employees, is situated within complex social systems, histories, politics, and power dynamics. To fully achieve the desired outcomes, it is extremely beneficial for facilitators to understand these dynamics. This information will inform how processes are designed, what strategies can be shared, who needs to feel empowered with the necessary skills to participate, and who needs to be at the table. To inform these decisions,
facilitators have to spend considerable time listening and learning and then advocating for processes and engagement they think will achieve the most desired outcomes, which can sometimes be done in a “neutral” way, but quite rarely. Traditionally, I think we’ve left these decisions up to those who have hired us. From what I heard in my interviews and what I have observed and experienced over the last fifteen years, facilitators need to perceive themselves differently, appreciate the power they harness in creating more thriving communities, and ensure the roles they play are expressed and fully supported.

My intuition tells me that the majority of practitioners that have gotten into the field of alternative dispute resolution did so because of a “calling,” a desire to serve humanity and make the world a better place for everyone that inhabits the planet. There is an active purpose, an active drive in what we do. The risk we take in professing “neutrality” is two-fold: (1) It may not be an honest expression of our roles and (2) it may not be an effective role for achieving the most just and sustainable solutions. It is my wish that we speak honestly about our roles in our communities as peacebuilders and create more reflective sets of skills, intentions, and frameworks that elicit better outcomes. We cannot accomplish just and sustainable outcomes in our communities if we do not address issues of power, politics, and difference or if we withhold information and/or content because we are supposed to be “neutral.” When asked about whether or not a facilitator’s role is to balance power or to address when power is being abused, ninety percent of the participants interviewed expressed that this is indeed our role. How can we do this safely and with transparency if we maintain that we are neutral? These two positions are diametrically opposed to one another.

Rather than being closet peacebuilders by professing a neutral position, we need to advertise our services and ourselves differently and subsequently train future conflict resolution practitioners accordingly. I feel this would (a) address the disconnect most of us have felt after completing degrees or trainings in alternative dispute resolution methodologies that tout neutrality between what we’ve been taught and what we’ve experienced in complicated and complex community-based conflicts and/or processes that needed more aggressive levels of engagement, (b) provide more clarity to both clients and participants about what to expect, and (c) expand the possibilities for what content is considered, what partners are brought in, and what expertise can be drawn.
upon. Ultimately, I think it would have greater and more sustainable impacts on our communities. For example, if [Walsh] had been publicly brought on as a consultant who was going to provide facilitation skills, evaluation expertise, strategic mobilization, and writing skills, AND she had the blessing from the Executive Council to do so, she would have been in a much different position. Despite being let go from the contract, [AIEP] was able to meet many of the outcomes participants desired. What was compromised in the end was the transition to new leadership that could have set a new and more successful course for [AIEP].

Conversely, HE‘E participants knew I had interest in and commitment to the outcomes from the get-go. They also knew what expertise I was bringing, so when I spoke from the position of having that expertise, they were not surprised. I still had to balance the delicacies of getting too involved in the decision-making or pushing a particular position, like I did with the inclusion of “meeting basic needs.” Not only did I have outside experience with wraparound services, that bring medical, dental, literacy and other services to a school, but I appreciated, along with a handful of others, that this priority was critical if they were to achieve the other four priorities they had identified. If I had taken a strictly neutral position, I may have chosen to skip over this priority because it did not receive enough votes rather than critically think about its importance and relative under-representation in the room.

In each room, every individual and every group is influenced by the stories people bring with them. Some share similarities in historical, political, social, or economic influences while others are quite divergent. It takes relationship building for facilitators to fully comprehend the landscape. In a multipartial approach, efforts are made to flush out the stories in order to more fully understand the context within which the facilitators are working. The political and historical realities of public education in the islands were fully present, which urged HE‘E participants to identify “Building Trust” as one of their key priorities. People came with various perspectives and opinions of public education, based on their own families’ experiences and where they grew up. Many shared the historical frustrations with the economic disparities in the islands and how those disparities affect opportunities for a good education, the tensions between public and private schools, and related issues. And the policy makers in the room offered interesting perspectives on past, present, and future legislation. In the present, at the time when HE‘E was
being developed there were numerous efforts within the community and at the government level
to address public education challenges. Knowledge sharing and collaboration across sectors was
essential. As [Walsh] stated,

Facilitators are like bees, cross-pollinating in the different rooms they visit. We sometimes have a unique
lens into other movements, programs and initiatives happening in our communities and feel obligated to
share strategies or discuss what others are doing to explore alternatives and introduce opportunities for
resource sharing. (T. [Walsh] interview, 04.26.12)

This type of engagement is often implied as being other than neutral engagement.

There is still much confusion about the diverse roles facilitators can play and the importance of
articulating clearly what those roles will entail. Four out of seven facilitators expressed that what
they have learned over the years was that the initial negotiation of roles and expectations of the
facilitator was absolutely critical and that they now share even the contracts with the full group
so as to enhance transparency on (a) who is paying the facilitator, (b) what role the facilitator
will play, and (c) the client’s expected outcomes if they are predetermined.

I appreciate that I am making a leap in assuming that the majority of alternative dispute
resolution (ADR) specialists are interested in contributing to just and sustainable communities at
an organizational, community, or national level. I do not wish to make those assumptions for all
ADR practitioners. But I am speaking for those who do come to this field with an ethical
commitment to justice, human rights, and peace. And I also speak to those who do not see
themselves as peacebuilders, to ask them to critically reflect on what processes they helped to
develop and what outcomes resulted. This work demands tireless efforts to seek solutions and
collaborative decisions, often around historically, socially, and politically complex issues.

John Paul Lederach shares his perspective of where we are situated both as facilitators of a
process and participants in a process. He uses the term “moral imagination,” pointing out that
“moral” must not be confused with “morality.” “Moral” relates to the mind, and it is the act of
the mind to reflect, think, and act (create). In his conception of the moral imagination it
devels the capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye. It is
the power to see into the very nature of things. It is a creative act. The capacity to give birth to something
new that in its very birth changes our world and the way we see things. Creativity and art makes more reasoning possible. Has quality transcendence. It breaks out of what appears to be narrow, shortsighted or structurally determined dead-ends. The moral imagination breaks into new territory and refuses to be bound by what existing views of perceived realities suggest. Finds a way to transcend the seen and the common.294

Having a moral imagination does not just encourage us to think outside of the box; it is willingness to take the risk to live outside of the box. It allows us to imagine and visualize processes as a catalyst of change. We are at this crux whenever we engage in community-based processes, and I would conjecture to say that a moral imagination is essential for both facilitators and participants in order to make a real impact on the social and political order of things.

Lederach goes on to share,

For those of us in the justice, peace and conflict professions, vocation calls us back to the road that winds beyond the rest stops of techniques and day-to-day practice. It beckons us to search for our deeper purpose and possibility, found more in who we are than in what we do. For our human community to find this deeper sense of who we are, where we are situated, and where we are going requires that we locate our bearings, our compass. A compass needle functions by finding its north. The north of peacebuilding is best articulated as finding our way toward becoming and being local and global human communities characterized by respect, dignity, fairness, cooperation, and the nonviolent resolution of conflict. To understand this north, to read and use a compass, requires that we recognize and develop our moral imagination far more intentionally.295

Facilitators are often keenly aware of what Lederach refers to as “the north of peacebuilding.” Groups begin heading north when “aha” opportunities emerge, enabling them to take a leap in a particular direction, together. These turning points make constructive change in human affairs possible and constitute the moral imagination without which peacebuilding cannot be understood or practiced. Lederach concludes,

However, such pregnant moments do not emerge through the rote application of a technique or a recipe. They must be explored and understood in the context of something that approximates the artistic process, imbued as it is with creativity, skill, serendipity and craftsmanship. For our field this kind of journey is not built with a technician’s manual. It requires us to explore the art and soul of social change and it starts with the need to explore the essence of peacebuilding and the heart of on-the-ground realities where violent patterns have dominated human affairs.296

Where are facilitators in this dance toward tipping points? We are situated in community-based processes, in which we assist in design and inform on who is invited to participate and outcomes. It is where people come together to create better futures for themselves and their communities, it is where the ripples of historical conflict collide, where political, economic, and social injustices flare, where realization dawns of how many of our systems we’ve designed do not advance
humanity but rather suppress it. It is in these spaces with people of all ethnicities, people of all ages, people of all professions that we work toward a tipping point. But if the intention of those who lead is not committed to advancing humanity in the most positive ways, there is an ethics that we as the community of facilitators need to consult. And then a decision must be made—do we bail on the process for ethical reasons, leaving the bulk of the participants flailing with their hopes and desires squelched or do we push ahead, working to build collaborative leadership to overcome the challenges of power and greed? This is where what we have been taught about neutrality, about our “roles vis-à-vis parties,” is most deeply challenged.

In the majority of my interviews, participants waffled consistently about how involved a facilitator should become. This issue was discussed in terms of:

- How close they should get to participants
- How much they should advocate for certain individuals, groups, or outcomes
- How much they should cater to any one “culture”
- How much content knowledge they should share
- How much they should be noticeable
- How much they should push back on power and get involved with the internal politics
- How much coaching and advising they should do

It was clear from participants that a moderate amount of all of these was desired, but there exists an ill-defined, ominous line that facilitators can cross, and when they do they risk the trust of participants and potentially jeopardize processes. What seemed to trump everything was trust, relationship, efficiency, and effectiveness, so the question still remains: to what degree do we get involved? And I will conclude that it truly depends on the threshold of the group and where that line is set. However, I do believe that with greater trust, relationship, efficiency, and effectiveness, the line is malleable enough to move.

**Top Nine Takeaways**

In any community,

1) Conflicts continually exist between the state and its citizenry, for allocation of resources and access but also for transparency and participation in decision-making. Voting is not the only indicator of civic engagement. It also involves participation in planning and
ultimately decision-making on issues facing our communities. Issues such as urban and regional planning, public health, public education, environmental conservation, violence prevention, etc., are multi-faceted and extremely complex. In our democracy, citizens have opportunities to engage with these issues and help the state and supporting organizations seek viable solutions. How these processes are facilitated directly correlates to the success of the outcomes.

2) Historical events that have shaped our current ways of being with one another are at play constantly as we engage in these processes. Historical events such as oppression, violence, abuse of power, and distrust are ever present. With the passing of time, there results for many people a distance from considering how things came to be, but such consideration is essential to understanding and seeking viable solutions.

3) These historical events are often perpetuated in existing structures, relationships, and politics if they are not interrupted.

4) For many processes, the goal is to interrupt these trends, and the facilitator is at the helm, helping to shape the process as well as to ensure those most affected by decisions are participating, along with those in decision-making positions.

5) In the United States, opportunities exist to address these complexities in a variety of ways, often involving third parties (whether they be professional or informal). They could be friends, relatives, lawyers, mediators, negotiators, arbitrators, and/or facilitators. How these individuals and/or teams are brought into the process and for what purpose will often determine how successful a process is in meeting the needs of those most affected.

6) For facilitators in particular, who are working with multiple individuals and groups seeking common ground through collaboration, the process that is designed and the roles the facilitator plays are critical. Assuming facilitators are not being used as puppets to
facilitate predetermined outcomes, the majority of facilitators should strive for a
democratic process rich with deliberation.

7) But how one achieves a deliberative democratic process while juggling competing power
streams and closing the gap between the state and its citizenry or between management
and personnel, introduces the complexity.

8) My research has demonstrated that taking a neutral position makes it very challenging to
(a) achieve deliberative democratic decision-making by actively balancing power
structures and (b) delicately yet confidently maneuver within the politics of identity,
structures, and history. This alone is not a new discovery. What is new is that I have
identified that those whom we serve are expecting more from us. This means that we
should no longer be viewed as neutral blank slates who enter a group and listen, record
what we hear, ensure everyone shares, and then provide a report. Participants need more
from us. Despite what we hear in our classes, read in our books, or learn in our trainings,
this is rarely how things work with a group we are facilitating. Not only do we need to be
more reflective of the realities and all of the behind-the-scenes ancillary work and
prepare our up-and-coming facilitators appropriately, but we need to refrain from
advertising facilitators as “neutral” and accept and embrace that we are change agents
and problem solvers in our communities. We need to accept that a slew of ethical
dilemmas and considerations come with this responsibility. Otherwise, we are candy-
coating the complexities, ignoring abuses of power, and thereby perpetuating
dysfunction.

9) Doing this is risky business, which was particularly evident in the [AIEP] case study. But
in an age when greater transparency is possible with technological advances, we live in a
place where civic engagement is encouraged and supported, and facilitators have an
opportunity to design and engage responsively, by ensuring that:
 a) processes are strategically designed to safely include all voices;
 b) all participants are supported to participate fully, even if this means spending more time
with certain participants to coach and/or advise them;
c) decision-making is truly shared and when it cannot be, that this is explicitly stated;
d) existing power imbalances that are impeding successful outcomes are addressed and renegotiated;
e) facilitators have just enough content knowledge to (i) document well and (ii) ensure that multiple lenses of knowledge/expertise are shared and considered and multiple sectors are included;
f) leaders of any process are fully committed to the work and the values of transparency, inclusiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, collaboration, and consensus building;
g) leaders are willing to adapt and/or change what is not working.

If I could attempt to put my dissertation research and findings into a picture, it would look something like this:

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Source: Beyond Intractability.org

**Figure 10.**

Not only does this picture depict the complexity of the majority of community-based processes, but it is also a snapshot of a new framework for facilitation. At the center of our work, we strive for just and sustainable solutions while navigating the complex and diverse array of impacting variables. Participants validated across the board that facilitators play a part in ensuring that
outcomes are just and sustainable, with varying opinions about how to get there. If our toolbox only includes tools of neutrality, we will fall short in seeking just and sustainable solutions. It is time to provide a proper burial for neutrality, paving the way for a more dynamic and responsive approach to multipartial facilitation.

As Freire taught, “Nobody liberates anybody else, and nobody liberates themselves all alone. People liberate themselves in fellowship with each other.”298 If we can help facilitate in the most appropriate ways such connections, we will have contributed with the best intention.

Limitations and Future Research

Access to Participants

The Emeritus Council Member’s decision to no longer support my research prevented me from learning from the broader [AIEP] grantee community, particularly the Executive Council members, who the Emeritus Council Member claimed she represented. Thus I was limited to a handful of like-minded folks who were willing to share with me and valued the research. Although their ideas, expectations, and experiences were helpful, there was little diversity in their responses and they were all quite supportive of the facilitator roles and methods that were applied. With limited access to others who may have had a different experience, I had to extrapolate from what I observed, pull data from secondary sources, or cite [Walsh] herself about the real challenges. The Emeritus Council Member did provide me with several hours of feedback and I tried to ensure that I did not assume that her opinions and/or experiences were reflective of the other Executive Council members. I could have approached the other members despite the strong persuasion against doing so, but I overlap with many of them in my work in the community and could not jeopardize those relationships and risk compromising the positive impacts our programs are having.

HE‘E participants shared freely and openly, providing the bulk of my data. My research provided an opportunity for participants to voice their opinions and desires about how facilitators can better serve them. It also invited participants to more clearly identify for themselves their expectations of facilitated processes. One participant clearly expressed something that many others alluded to:
I’ve never thought about it. I always just thought facilitators run the agenda, keep us on track, and make sure everyone talks. Until you asked me these questions, I didn’t appreciate how much went into design, the negotiating behind the scenes and the other issues that arise. I’ll pay more attention in the future!” (#11, 01.17.12)

Interviews also provided clients with insights into hiring criteria and being more reflective of what types of processes they are willing to support and what types of facilitators they should hire.

However, neither teachers nor students—whose voices should be foundational, given that they are the most impacted by the coalition’s decisions—were participants in the formation of the statewide education coalition. Consequently, my interviews did not include their voices.

**Concrete Strategies for Interrupting and Transforming Impeding Politics and Power**

Further research is necessary, as participants in community processes increasingly insist that outcomes not only be considered but also implemented by policy makers and others with decision-making responsibilities. My research explored the complexities of such processes and the facilitation methodologies that can and should be applied. The research questions included “How do power and politics interact in facilitated community-based processes?” and “Should facilitators confront such power and politics?” Based on data, observation, and experience, I concluded that yes, facilitators should confront these potential hurdles, and I offered sweeping suggestions about how to constructively engage with power and politics to achieve the desired outcomes in just and sustainable ways. The suggestions were indeed sweeping, under the umbrella of multipartiality. Future research is needed to look more explicitly into the concrete skills needed to interrupt, engage with, and/or transform the power structures and political influences that shape deliberative democratic processes. And follow-up research delving into the ethical dilemmas of such engagement would be welcomed.

**Deliberative Democracy in Non-Democratic Environments**

Most if not all of the participants in the case studies presented here were raised in a relatively stable and democratic nation. They were also encouraged through their educational experiences to be confident in public speaking, debate, and individuality. Yet because the case studies were
in Hawai‘i and involved people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, there was variance in who felt comfortable with deliberation and who did not. Research on if and how community processes are designed in emerging democracies, like Egypt, for example, and how those processes interact with existing power structures and politics would broaden the topic dramatically. Learning about who facilitates such processes, who is invited to participate, what outcomes are sought, how fervently those most impacted are included, and what types of facilitators are hired, at what levels and why, would provide a rich comparison. Such research could also provide more realistic best practices for communities around the world whose members desire greater access to decisions that affect their lives, particularly if the research is approached from the participants’ perspective.

More on Hybridization
Throughout this dissertation, I have examined the concept of “culture” and problematized the practice of essentializing cultures by reflecting on Geertz’s speculation regarding culture, that what man is may be so entangled with where he is, who he is, and what he believes that it is inseparable from them. It is precisely the consideration of such a possibility that led to the rise of the concept of culture and the decline of the uniformitarian view of man […] We have had, and to some extent still have, both of these aberrations in the social sciences—one marching under the banner of cultural relativism, the other under that of cultural evolution.

I believe we are experiencing a similar continuum within the field of conflict resolution, particularly when employing hybridized facilitation models. It is within these perilous waters that we are drifting as practitioners, trying to identify what works with what communities of people.

In reviewing the various approaches to cross-cultural facilitation and mediation, it becomes apparent that we are indeed making strides in creating processes more inclusive and reflective of participants’ varying identities and needs. It seems greater efforts need to be made to present the field of facilitation in a more human and holistic way, shying away from cultural assumptions and looking more critically at designing processes that challenge existing structures that impede moving humanity forward. Further research on broadening “hybridization” beyond culture and looking more critically at processes is much needed.
Appendix A

Open-ended Interview Questions
For participants

The following questions in Appendix A and B were meant to keep the conversation going. As participants spoke to each of the questions, I would check them off, so not all questions were asked directly. Many look redundant. This was intentional. It was a way of checking participants’ consistencies/disparities in responses, as well as providing opportunities for participants to answer the questions fully if they did not do so the first time something was asked.

1) Which of the following meetings did you attend?
   a)  
   b)  
   c)  
   d)  

2) Who were you representing in the group?

3) What do you feel have been successes thus far?

4) What do you feel have been challenges thus far?

5) How has the experience been with the facilitator?

6) What qualities do you look for in a facilitator?

7) How do you define facilitation?

8) Who hired the facilitator? How was this decided?

9) Why was this process pursued? What led up to this need?

10) Why was an outside facilitator hired?

11) What are your criteria for hiring facilitators?

12) What are your expectations of a facilitator? Pre-work, in the room, and post involvement?

13) How important is it to you that the facilitator remain neutral? Please explain.

14) How are the approaches we used different from other facilitative approaches you have encountered, if at all?

15) Would you consider my ([Walsh]’s) engagement as neutral engagement? Please explain.

16) If you perceived that my ([Walsh]’s) involvement was not neutral, what was it and how did it feel?

17) How important is it to you that facilitators have content knowledge in the area they are facilitating?

18) Should a facilitator contribute to the content discussions? Why or why not?

19) How do you think this affects neutrality if at all?
20) How did the meetings feel for you? Please explain.
21) How could meetings have been improved?
22) Who designed the agendas for the meetings?
23) Are the current processes for decision-making the best processes? Please explain.
24) What challenges have you experienced with implementing the outcomes of your meetings?

25) How would you define a facilitator who is culturally responsive? Would you consider my ([Walsh]'s) approach to be culturally responsive? If yes, please explain how. If no, please explain why not.
26) Were there times in the facilitations where you felt power was being abused? What did that look like? How did the facilitator respond?
27) Were there times when power was unevenly distributed? What did that look like and how did the facilitator respond?
28) How would you prefer a facilitator respond to issues of power imbalances and abuse of power? How does this support or not support being neutral?

29) How would you describe my ([Walsh]'s) approach?
30) How did my ([Walsh]'s) approach meet the needs of your group if at all?
31) What elements of my ([Walsh]'s) approach have you found helpful?
32) What elements have you found challenging?
33) Do you and others in your organization believe that everyone was able to fully participate? If yes, what enabled everyone to participate? If no, what were the barriers?
34) Do you feel everyone had equitable time with the facilitator, before and during the process? Please explain.
35) How important is equitable time for you?
36) What could have been done differently to get to this point?

**What would you like shared about HE‘E’s or [AIEP]’s story?
Appendix B

Open-ended Interview Questions
For facilitators

1) When you entered the field, were you taught to be neutral? What was your reaction at the time? What is your reaction now that you are a seasoned facilitator?

2) Do you expect facilitators to be neutral? Please explain.

3) Do you consider your own engagement as neutral engagement? Please explain.

4) How does being neutral assist a group, if at all?

5) How does being neutral challenge a group, if at all?

6) Do you think it is important that facilitators have a background in the area in which they work?

7) How important is to you that facilitators contribute to the content knowledge of the group?

8) How do you think this affects neutrality, if at all?

9) Have you had challenges with neutrality in the past? Please explain.

10) Do your clients expect you to be neutral? If not, what do they expect you to be?

11) Do you believe there are times when being neutral does not serve the group well? Please explain.

12) If you were hiring a facilitator, what criteria would you use for hiring?

13) When signing a contract, how explicit are you with the role you imagine you will play?

14) Have there been times when the expectation of your role from the group did not match your perceived expectation of yourself? Please explain.

15) How would you describe a facilitator who is culturally responsive?

16) How do you perceive neutrality of a facilitator and power dynamics in the room interrelate, if at all?

17) How do you think participants expect you to respond to power imbalances in a group?

18) How do you think participants expect you to respond to abuse of power in a group?
19) How do you respond to either situation involving power? How does this affect your role, if at all?

20) What can be done to make your job easier as a facilitator?

21) When you begin to notice that the group's needs and opinions are divergent from leadership’s needs and opinions, how do you handle this? Particularly when leadership hired you to facilitate a process.

22) What values do you bring to your work and how do your values influence the way you engage groups?

23) What do you do when you notice that key stakeholder people and/or groups are intentionally excluded from processes?

24) What would you say to an up-and-coming facilitator?
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