

THERE IS BEAUTY IN THE SPACE BETWEEN CHILD AND TEACHER:
A MO‘OKŪ‘AUHAU OF A KANAKA ‘ŌIWI EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR
(AN ‘ŌIWI MO‘OLELO RESEARCH STUDY)

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Dedication

To the beauty of childhood.

For my 'ohana.

Mahalo palena ‘ole

As I bring this particular weaving to an end, my gratitude is clear. Nā mo‘olelo within these pages reflect the influences of the many relationships within my life and my mo‘okū‘auhau.

To my haumāna and your families: I have been privileged to learn alongside you. I am forever grateful for how you have enriched my life and my story. I offer these mo‘olelo as a way to honor you, and the unique lei each of you is weaving.

To my colleagues and friends, you are eager to think out loud, challenge the status quo, and reflect on our practice together. You inspire me in your creativity and your willingness to innovate in the service of children. I look forward to our continuing conversations. Mahalo piha.

I have been blessed by an amazing group of educators known as Cohort Three. This cohort, the best cohort ever, offered me a safe and trusting space to carry out this work and strengthen my voice. You have become my friends, my mentors, and my kumu. I am so very grateful for all that I have learned from you.

There were several professors who inspired and nurtured the work within these pages. Me ka mahalo to our program leadership, Dr. Lori Ideta, Dr. Walter Kahumoku III, Dr. Sarah Twomey, and Dr. Ronald Heck, for supporting our cohort throughout this journey. Mahalo piha Dr. Punihei Lipe for the provocation of our many mo‘okū‘auhau. Those early understandings would stretch and grow into the framework for this study. Dr. Julie Kaomea, your advocacy for nā pua o Hawai‘i has influenced my classroom every day since our initial meeting. Dr. Sanjeev Sridharan, handing me Pablo Neruda's Book of Questions, led to my musing—is there beauty in the space between child and teacher? This question was whispering just below the surface of this work and was the inspiration for the title of this dissertation. Your commitment to learning and

your craft inspired strength and perseverance long after I left your classroom. Dr. Sarah Twomey, you were the first one to say yes to a study that would be uniquely my own. Mahalo, for those initial words that empowered me to play with the possibilities.

I am grateful to my committee, four unique and formidable individuals, for coming together to engage with my work. I am forever inspired and humbled by your deep, abiding care as mentors. I am honored to be among your haumāna. I will always remember that my defense began on the trailings of your laughter.

Dr. Walter Kahumoku III, mahalo nui loa, for walking this path alongside me. It has been a journey of a lifetime. You have embodied everything it means to be kumu in your mentorship and unwavering support. You have helped me to embrace my piko‘u kanaka.

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Dr. Chris Au, our fortuitous crossing of paths uncovered possibilities that may have remained hidden without our conversations that reached beyond the edges. Your passion and perspective genuinely inspire me.

I offer this lei as a makana to those who came before as they set this path before me, offering opportunities for growth and discovery. My ‘ohana is present in these pages. To my parents James Lyman Reid and Althea Beatty Reid, our mo‘olelo helped me understand the words he pili wehena ‘ole—those relationships that are inseverable. In planting me firmly in this place, you offered me a life filled with love and meaning. I know you stand with me here as I

offer this lei, something that began long before me and will continue long after my time has passed.

To my children, Paul, Reid, and David, I am so grateful for all that I am learning in being your mother. Each phase of your lives has offered me new explorations and opportunities to grow and wonder. Welcoming a daughter, Zoe, into our ‘ohana encouraged us to shift again, stepping into a new phase of joyful learning. Aloha no au ia‘oukou.

I have been blessed with the time and space to pursue my learning and answer my own questions. More than anyone, I want to thank my husband, Clayton Hayes, for this gift. Your belief in my ideas and your steadfast patience and support through challenges and doubts has been the grace that kept me moving forward. In the end, this is our gift to our ‘ohana; those who came before us, those who are here with us now, and those yet to come. Maybe now, you will take the time to write your own stories. Me ke aloha pumehana, Donna.

Foreword

"I ulu no ka lālā i ke kumu" (Pukui, 1983, p. 137)

I stepped out of our zoom room, leaving my committee to discuss my defense. In the spirit of reciprocity—aloha aku, aloha mai—my chair asked each committee member to write a mo‘olelo as a makana for me. As a way of getting to know me through the eyes of my mentors, here are the mo‘olelo they offered. Mahalo piha to my four generous kumu.

Mo‘olelo: My reflection—3 Moments of Aloha

So I’ve come to Punahou to meet with my doctorate’s candidate, Mrs. Hayes, or more appropriately and affectionately known as my friend Donna, and I find myself waiting on a bench in the middle of a breezeway that is used for the keiki’s drop-offs and pick-ups. My ears ring with the melodic cacophony of keiki being keiki—laughing, jumping, crying, teasing, cajoling, begging, requesting. I observe, using my well-honed kilo skills to in-take more than what I can tangibly see or touch... like the slightest of makani as one of the cars exits the breezeway... and Donna waving to kindergarteners as they, little-hand-clutching-large-hand, are guided into waiting cars, some with engines running.

A man with his daughter approached Donna and as they began talking, I watched this educator gracefully glance between the father and the five-year-old. The little one, clutching her parent’s leg and red face buried in his trouser, looked as if she was ready to burst. On some na‘au-guided cue, Donna bent to the child’s eye level to share a few words. Without the bandwidth to catch the details that floated between kumu and keiki, I saw the small head nod and then, ever slowly, a smile replaced the former frown. Then, after a few more moments, a quick hug and wave and the little one skipped with her dad to their car. She climbed into the back seat,

buckled, and after the door closed eagerly waved goodbye. Only then did her teacher, waving as the child and father drove by, stand fully and turn her attention to me.

This is the Donna Elizabeth Kaleiokalani Reid-Hayes that I have known for the last 10 years. I am blessed that she has entered and stayed in my life—first as my son’s kindergarten kumu, then in one of my master’s courses, and now in the final stage of her doctorate degree. There is no denying... I am biased. I have watched her share her aloha nui with so many children like my Kīkau.

It was the May Day celebration for K-3 at Punahou and Donna had selected my son for one of two speaking parts as a representative of his grade level. We had practiced his speech at home, every evening talking through the 3 lines he needed to say. Being a speech teacher by trade, I had expectations; but being a parent and more so an introvert, I understood how difficult this was for my quiet child.

Kīkau at that young age (and even now) was never child-loud. Being an only child, he never had to raise his voice over that of siblings, always had what he desired, and was constantly reminded that nothing is for free and everything given should be accepted with gratitude and reciprocation. I remember him walking into Donna’s class—day 2 or 3 of his first year at Punahou—and quietly saying ‘hi’ in response to her greeting. He obediently sat at his seat, stealing a quick glance at me before turning his attention to her. This was (and still is) my quiet little man.

Eight months had passed and May Day had finally arrived. As the kindergarteners gathered on the floor to present their ho‘okupu—a chant and a dance—to the audience, I tracked my son and his co-presenter, a little girl, as they made their way to the microphones. Both speakers were introduced as microphones were adjusted to their eye level. Then Kīkau started...

and paused... and silence. A woman behind him hefting an oversized binder strode up to him and began what seemed to be prompting. In an instant, my little man returned with a sneer that spoke “back off lady.” Donna, who was next to the speakers, gently bent down to the level of his eyes and, after what looked like a whisper of encouragement, Kīkau began again, without hesitation nor memory loss. His rich leo echoed throughout Punahou’s gym that morning.

Our alawai, our pathways, have crisscrossed-connected multiple times in the last decade, and I’m sure they will continue to do so long after this dissertation. I have been witness to so many children like my now-not-so-little son—he stands fully at 6’ though I hate to admit it—who have been blessed by her wisdom, grace, and aloha. Beyond them, I am a bit selfish to admit, I have relished the last year of working alongside this incredible educator—without the little ones. Yes, I have had the privilege of Donna all to myself. What an honor.

The struggle to complete a dissertation can be as demanding, discouraging, and downright difficult as it is enlightening, energizing, and incredibly euphoric. There are moments when frustration and anxiety, caused by an inherent need to do what’s right and to be right, plummet one’s heart into dark, disparaging depths. Yet, one must persevere with the might, ingenuity, and wisdom of ancients who crossed the mighty unforgiving Pacific to reach these islands’ shores. The struggle is raw-real, for this task has been created to defeat all but those of the most trepidatious of voyagers.

At the start of this journey, Donna stridently specified: “I want this dissertation not to be like the others.” When asked to elucidate, she described the end product as a book of sharing—one in which educators and others could wander through its contents to visualize educational spaces where play, investigation, exploration, and ethnic heritage were the norms for teaching and learning. She wanted to paint a dissertation that displayed images of Reggio Emilia and

Hawaiian culture and language against a backdrop of early childhood learning. All of this was to be done through the lens of autoethnography as a means of explaining her continually expanding life canvas.

Nearing the end of the journey—some 160 pages into the text and about a month before her dissertation presentation—she hurried to write, rewrite and rewrite again her methods chapter. The discouraging demands of time, getting it right by trying “to make you [her dissertation chair—me] proud”, and hoping to just be done with this darn thing, crashed in on her. What advice I offered seemed to be challenging; what corrections she made seemed wrong and worse, woefully inadequate. She wept... her sobs echoing through the empty zoom space with deafening alacrity.

And yet... we are here... the “defense” magnificently traversed and the final perfunctory edits and additions to the text managed with pro-like efficiency. Donna stands tall—literally and figuratively. Her story is as unique and different as she proclaimed a year ago. The strength of her being and voice waft throughout the pages of her dissertation; and again, I find myself sitting on a proverbial bench watching her wave goodbye—and this time, that wave is for me.

Walter Kahumoku III, Ph.D.

Mo‘olelo: A Lesson Learned

It was the first day of class for a new cohort of students in the Private School Leadership (PSL) graduate degree program. I watched as students entered the classroom, found a seat, and chatted quietly and just a little nervously. Over the course of the 14 days we would spend together in a seminar on Curriculum Theory and Leadership, we would immerse ourselves in deep, reflective conversations that would serve to help students integrate theory with their own

practice. In this class, approximately five summers ago, I came to know Donna Reid-Hayes as both an educator and an individual.

I learned that she was a veteran kindergarten teacher who had a deep, enduring passion for her students. Her eyes lit up with excitement when she shared stories of how she implemented curriculum and interacted with students who were in their first year of formal learning. The depth of her experience and passion was wonderful to listen to—captivating and invigorating. She was so thoughtful in her efforts to operationalize the curriculum for her kindergarteners. Additionally, I was enthralled when she shared how she facilitated learning and involved parents in meaningful early learning experiences.

Over the course of our collective learning that summer, I saw that her approach to teaching and learning mirrored how she navigated learning with her colleagues in the cohort. While she was highly motivated to be successful in her own learning, she naturally and readily helped her colleagues make sense of their own experiences. After several days, I witnessed students gathering around her seat, before class and during breaks, as they sought to integrate the theories of curriculum and leadership with their own professional practice. At first, I couldn't figure out what was going on, but slowly—as I can be sometimes—I noticed that she had a special way of reaching out and helping those students who were struggling with new concepts, much in the same way that a mother, or treasured auntie, reaches out and teaches and nurtures her young.

One would imagine that after 16 years of teaching graduate students, facilitating learning would be quite routine for me. However, that summer presented me with an epiphany, one that spoke to the dynamic nature of learning at any level and how we, as teachers and educators, may

entrust our students to engage in unique, independent ways to enhance their own learning and the learning of others.

While in the end every student brought their special gifts to our learning community, Donna shared with all of us with the knowledge and experience of how to openly share our gifts with others. Even to this day, I imagine wherever Donna goes, she is always thinking of others and reaching out in wonderful ways to nurture relationships and enhance learning in any environment. In reflection, I've come to understand that this is truly the heart of a teacher.

Thank you, Donna. I'm eternally grateful for the lessons learned through the experiences you brought into our class that summer. I believe that, along with many other students, you had a profound impact on my journey as a teacher and educator.

Steven M. Shiraki, Ph.D.

Mo'olelo: A Story for Donna

The water boiled, right there! I knew the sand got deep right there and I didn't want to follow my cousins through that spot, through the rough scary waves, by myself. I put my hand up, but no one took it. Then I saw my cousins appear, confident and tall, in the calmer water beyond. Splashing each other and giggling, they seemed to completely forget I was there. I walked backwards up the beach, heels first, roughly plopped myself down, and watched the water stream away in trickles of sand.

Donna called me halfway through the process of remembering stories for her dissertation, and asked if she should include more experiences from childhood.

I assumed that she had demons to tame. "Yeah," I replied, beginning a familiar rant. "It's powerful data in a lot of autoethnography... what we experience as children is carried with us when we become teachers. Like for me, after my dad left, my feelings were never acknowledged,

and I was always expected to just behave and not ask questions about the divorce, about anything. That's why I am so interested in treating children like fully-formed human beings, so they can express themselves and are fully seen and heard. It's a good way to structure arguments in autoethnography."

I heard Donna take a breath, and I knew she was composing her response carefully. She had already written stories about a childhood of outdoor adventure. As a little girl, she picked wild ginger and went fishing, built dams in swift-flowing streams, and loved to take the long way home from school. Donna was weaving a lei that honored those memories and the places her family called home.

"Well, I ask because I read a lot of autoethnographies, including yours, and I can't draw upon my childhood the way you did."

"You had a happy childhood?" I asked, a bit incredulously.

"Yeah, I did. Can I still use it?"

Now I was embarrassed. "Of course, you can. You... I guess you can write about how it nourished your ideals and dreams!"

I laughed to myself. Donna didn't have childhood trauma to exorcise; she had a childhood's beauty to share. She was ready to dive in and really write. She was ready to submerge all of us, all of her students and families, her colleagues and community, her friends and professors, into her turbulent, shimmering work with children.

After the water slid away, sand tumbled in on itself and a tiny hole appeared. A little sand crab stuck out its eyestalk and looked at me cautiously. I stayed very still so it felt safe. It clambered out of the hole on sharp little feet and ran until it hit a wave.

Christopher K. H. Au, Ph.D.

Mo‘olelo: Joyful Learning Through Play

Donna Reid-Hayes’ brilliant scholarly work entitled, “There is Beauty in the Space between Child and Teacher” stirred up powerful memories of the “beauty in the space” between me and my own kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Brandt, over six decades ago.

It began on the first day of school, when she warmly greeted me with, “Aloha. My name is Mrs. Brandt. E komo mai. Welcome to kindergarten.” From her words a new world opened up. It was a world of respectful relationships and joyful “here and now” interactions between me, my new friends, and Mrs. Brandt.

Her classroom was spacious, with wooden floors, big windows, child-size furniture and shelves, and a variety of interesting hands-on materials. Central to Mrs. Brandt’s caring classroom community was her strong belief that kindergartners learned best through play. With enthusiasm, humor, and ingenuity, Mrs. Brandt used moment-to-moment interactions to encourage me and my peers to wonder about bugs and prisms, construct with wooden blocks, create with clay and paint, pretend with dress up clothes and dolls, stretch our thinking with books, make sense of letters and numbers, sing and dance to music, and resolve our conflicts. When Mrs. Brandt saw that we were ready for something else, she knew how to gently nudge us along our journey. By giving us puppets to retell stories or allowing us to create royal crowns out of soft twigs and flowers at recess, she honored our childhood. Through this magical year, the beauty in the space between me and Mrs. Brandt gave me confidence to use my voice, to imagine the possibilities, to take pride in my accomplishments, and to cultivate my delight in learning.

Theresa F. Lock, Ed.D

Abstract

This qualitative, autoethnographic study utilized an indigenous lens to investigate how Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-Based Education philosophies have transformed my practice and Hawaiian identity. Through the Hawaiian frameworks of mo‘okū‘auhau and ‘ōiwi mo‘olelo, this inquiry examined my own past, present, and future narratives to develop three themes—trusting the strength of the child, kuleana (a sense of responsibility), and huliau (a time for transformation). Implications of this research are to explore how to develop Hawaiian spirituality in young children, integrate Hawaiian Culture-Based Education into early childhood settings, and create culturally-integrated language learning opportunities. This study recommends that educators operationalize stronger, positive images of the child, Hawaiian Culture-Based Education into the lives of children and their families, the co-construction of knowledge, and advocacy for childhood—educating children as children.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Mahalo palena ‘ole.....	iii
Foreword.....	vi
Abstract.....	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Halia Aloha	1
“He Haku Aloha, research as lei making” (Vaughan, 2019, p. 28)	2
Preparations and Plantings-Ho‘omākaukau.....	3
Mo‘okū‘auhau.....	5
Research Question-Ho‘onīnau.....	6
The Children of Hawai‘i-Nā Pua o Hawai‘i.....	7
Hana Pono	8
Chapter 2: Methods	10
Preparing to Make the Lei	10
Introduction.....	10
Components of Qualitative Research.....	10
<i>Narrative Inquiry</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Autoethnography</i>	<i>12</i>
Summary.....	13

Making the Lei	14
Emergent Design.....	14
An Indigenous Lens	15
<i>Methodology of Mo‘okū‘auhau</i>	16
‘Ōiwi Mo‘olelo Research.....	17
<i>Data Collection</i>	17
<i>Mo‘olelo as Data</i>	19
<i>Data Analysis</i>	19
Ethical Considerations	21
<i>Credibility</i>	21
<i>Transferability</i>	22
<i>Limits of Study</i>	22
Summary	22
Chapter 3: Trusting the Strength of the Child.....	24
Mo‘olelo: Silenced.....	24
Trusting the Strength of the Child: Definition and Analysis	24
Trusting the Strength of the Child: Growing to Trust Myself	26
Mo‘olelo: Walking Home From School	26
Learning to Trust in Ourselves: Analysis	27
Mo‘olelo: The Theater	28
Developing Our Trust in the Child: Analysis and Literature.....	29

Trust in the Child: Summary.....	30
Trusting the Strength of the Child: The Child as Researcher	31
Mo‘olelo: Chili Peppers in Kapoho.....	31
Research Leads to Learning: Analysis.....	33
Mo‘olelo: Reggio Emilia—School Visit.....	33
Research Drives Learning: Analysis and Literature	35
Child as Researcher: Summary	38
Trusting the Strength of the Child: A Developing Voice	38
Mo‘olelo: First Teaching Position—A Challenge	38
Finding My Voice: Analysis.....	39
Mo‘olelo: Ohi‘a Lehua Retelling	40
Finding His Voice: Analysis and Literature	41
A Developing Voice: Summary.....	42
Trusting the Strength of the Child: Summary.....	42
Chapter 4: Kuleana.....	45
Mo‘olelo: Hilo March	45
Kuleana: Definition and Analysis.....	46
Kuleana: A Sense of Aloha ‘Āina.....	47
Mo‘olelo: Fishing in Kapoho	48

Planting the Seeds of Aloha ‘Āina: Analysis.....	49
Mo‘olelo: Jordan: Building Trust	50
The Valuing of Aloha ‘Āina In My Teaching: Analysis and Literature.....	51
Our Kuleana to Aloha ‘Āina: Summary	53
Kuleana: Creating Trusting and Caring Spaces Within Which Children can Thrive	53
Mo‘olelo: My First Days of School.....	54
Empathy Creates Trusting and Caring Spaces: Analysis.....	56
Mo‘olelo: Child Holding On To The Pole.....	57
A Child’s Right to a Gentle Welcome: Analysis and Literature	59
The Privilege of A Caring and Trusting Space: Summary	62
Kuleana: Kūpa‘a—To Stand Strong for What I Believe	62
Mo‘olelo: Aboard the Averick.....	62
Kūpa‘a: Standing on the Path of my Kūpuna: Analysis	64
Mo‘olelo: The Piazza and A Bubble In Your Mouth	64
Kūpa‘a for the Voices of Children: Analysis and Literature	66
Kūpa‘a: Summary	68
Kuleana: Continuing to Grow, Learn, and Innovate.....	69
Mo‘olelo: My First Teaching Position—Beginnings.....	69
Teacher as Learner: Analysis.....	71

Mo‘olelo: Our Deepest Fear	71
Our Deepest Fear	72
Letting My Light Shine: Analysis and Literature	73
Holomua for the Children: Summary	75
Kuleana: Summary.....	76
Chapter 5: Huliau	78
“Ka Wā Mamua” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Past.....	81
Honua—Sense of Place.....	82
Mo‘olelo: Kapoho—Relationships in Childhood	83
Honua—Sense of Place: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	85
Pili—Relationships	86
Mo‘olelo: Quiet and Thoughtful	86
Mo‘olelo: Parent Night—The Dot	88
Pili—Relationships: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	89
Na‘au—Foundational Learning	91
Mo‘olelo: A River Picnic	91
Na‘au—Foundational Learning: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	93
‘Uhane—Spirituality.....	93
Mo‘olelo: Waimānalo—Kaiona	94

‘Uhane—Spirituality: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	97
“Ka Wā Mamua” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Past: Summary	98
‘Ānō—Present.....	99
Pu‘uhonua—Sense of Place.....	100
Mo‘olelo: Kapoho: Walking in the Footsteps of my Kūpuna.....	100
Pu‘uhonua—Sense of Place: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature.....	101
Ho‘opili—A Bringing Together	103
Mo‘olelo: Materials Are Appealing.....	103
Mo‘olelo: The BHAG Assignment.....	107
Ho‘opili—Relationships: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	108
Ho‘ona‘auao—Learning and Innovation	110
Mo‘olelo: Reggio Emilia—Solo Trip.....	111
Ho‘ona‘auao—Learning and Innovation: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature.....	114
‘Uhane Kia‘i—Guardian Spirit.....	115
Mo‘olelo: Ed.D. Journey	116
‘Uhane Kia‘i—Spirituality: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	118
‘Ānō—Summary.....	120
“Ka Wā Mahope” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Future	120
Ku‘u Home—Sense of Place	121

Mo‘olelo: Kapoho: It’s Gone!	121
Ku‘u Home—Sense of Place: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	124
He Pili Wehena ‘Ole—Inseparable.....	125
Mo‘olelo: Dad’s Ashes	126
He Pili Wehena ‘Ole—Inseparable: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	127
Ho‘omohala—Blossoming	128
Mo‘olelo: Paepae o He‘eia.....	129
Ho‘omohala—Blossoming: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	133
A‘o Kahua ‘Uhane: Spiritually-based Learning	135
Mo‘olelo: Wedding Hula	135
A‘o Kahua ‘Uhane—Spiritually-based Learning: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature	138
“Ka Wā Mahope” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Future: Summary.....	138
Chapter 6: Implications and Recommendations.....	142
“E mau: No lei lasts forever, process over product” (Vaughan, 2019, p. 36).....	142
Implications for Future Research.....	143
Implication 1: Conduct a study of the development of Hawaiian spirituality in young children as an essential part of developing a deep relationship with place.....	143
Implication 2: Conduct a study on how Hawaiian and Non-Hawaiian educators effectively integrate ‘ike Hawai‘i and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i into the lives of Hawai‘i’s children.....	144
Implication 3: Conduct a study on language learning within culturally-integrated settings. .	145

Recommendations	146
Recommendation 1: Develop and operationalize a strong image of the child	146
Recommendation 2: Implement Hawaiian Culture-Based Education for Early-Childhood...	147
Recommendation 3: Increase Avenues for Teachers to be Researchers and Co-constructors of Knowledge	149
Recommendation 4: Kūpa‘a for Our Keiki.....	150
Mana‘o	151
Mo‘olelo: Walking With Puna.....	154
References.....	156

Chapter 1: Introduction

Halia Aloha

Aunty sat with the ever-present bowl of water, pikake buds floating on the surface, placed in the center of the table. The lei needle filled with the fragrant white pearls waited for her to gently push the blossoms onto the thread. She was stringing lei for our party! She stopped when my mom and I came in. I ran to her, leaning in for a hug and kiss.

“Would you like to help?” she asked with a smile. “Yes!” She pulled up a stool from across the kitchen and sat me down. She passed me a lei needle, long and thin. “Careful now. These buds are delicate. There you go. Slowly. Gently. That’s it.” I worked carefully, breathing in a fragrance that encouraged deep, lingering breaths. We worked quietly for a while, stringing blossom after blossom, my tiny four-year-old hands working hard to keep up. I strung one blossom to her many, and then as the blossoms neared the end of the thread, she stopped. She took the needle from my hand and placed both our lei on the table. “I have something for you!” She wiped her hands on her apron and turned towards the counter behind her. There was a red bundle; tiny geometric shapes patterned across the fabric. She unfolded it, held it up for us to see. It was a mu‘umu‘u for me! Quilted and simple, and I was thrilled! I tried it on right there in the kitchen, dancing merrily around the table, the tiny bells in the heels of my geta ringing. It was perfect! “Oh!” was all I could say. I hugged Aunty with all the gratitude I could not express with words. That mu‘umu‘u still holds the fragrance of that pikake and the image of my aunty in her kitchen.

*

“He Haku Aloha, research as lei making” (Vaughan, 2019, p. 28)

In this research, I embraced the work of Vaughan (2019) and the concept of “he haku aloha: research as lei making” (p. 28) and Alencastre’s (2015) metaphor of lei making in research to provide a framing for the mo‘olelo examined within.

Vaughan (2019) offered the concept of “‘Āina uluwehi: Every lei is a unique reflection of the ‘āina from which it was made” (p. 28), and in terms of research, each study is a unique journey through a landscape as the researcher/research team prepares for the gathering and analyzing of data. Just as a lei maker learns how to prepare for gathering flowers, mapping the landscape, the hike deep into the valley, the asking for permission to gather just what she needs, Vaughan (2019) recognizes that researchers—especially those here in Hawai‘i—must follow a similar protocol in preparation for data collection. And as the lei maker carefully picks pua, liko, and palapalai, mindful not to take more than is needed, qualitative researchers, in particular, are selective and purposeful in whom they interview or observe. Even beyond the process of picking, a lei maker knows that flowers must be cleaned, stems cut, leaves set aside, ferns trimmed and materials for binding set out at the ready, surveying all that has been gathered in order to see what groupings emerge, what intricate patterns can be created from this particular collection of foliage. Once the pattern is discovered, strong but gentle hands work tirelessly to weave or string the mixtures into a lei that is both pleasing and balanced. Each product is unique, authored by the maker to be an embodiment of new experiences and new learning (Vaughan, 2019). In this lei context, I, as a researcher, have set out to understand my journey as a practitioner. As the blossoms and greenery of my life have been woven together in service of the culture of childhood, I have stepped back to reflect upon the lei that I am weaving in order to step into the

future with more knowledgeable eyes. I have chosen the route of remembrance, and in utilizing the traditions of mo‘olelo and mo‘okū‘auhau, I have reflected on my journey to become the early childhood educator, practitioner-scholar, and Kanaka Hawai‘i that I am today and will become in the future. As Vaughan (2019) offers the idea of “‘Ike: Every Hand Makes a Different Lei” (p. 32), this dissertation seeks to uncover at a foundational understanding level, the uniqueness of my growth throughout my life.

Preparations and Plantings-Ho‘omākaukau

I have had experiences, the seeds planted beginning in my childhood, that continued to grow throughout my personal and professional life. These experiences have offered me the blossoms for the weaving of this lei. The true beginning of this lei began as my kūpuna came to this place from distant shores and uncommon experiences. The Hawaiians came in wa‘a, growing strong in the ‘āina that I call home. The missionaries traveled from the eastern shores of the continental United States. They were voyagers on both sides, individuals who were willing to leave their homes for imagined lives in new lands. As I begin to add to the weaving of this lei, it is important to look back in appreciation for those who came before.

As a young child, I grew up on Hawai‘i Island with my time shared between the small town of Hilo and the rural area of Kapoho. Kapoho was known for a coastline dotted with fishponds and tide pools. Although that place now lies under fresh lava my memories conjure images of driving through the lava fields, scanning the ‘ōhi‘a lehua trees, stopping to pick ginger, hearing cinders crunching under the tires of the car, enjoying the sweet taste of manini fresh off the hibachi, and carefully stringing of pikake lei. I spent days wandering the paths around our fishpond, swimming with the turtles, visiting the dump, and fishing with a bamboo pole. This was an idyllic place for a small child to explore, and I never realized how my experiences on that

‘āina would grow to become critical blossoms in the lei of my life, my identity, my work as an educator, and my worldview.

That childhood in Kapoho drifted into the distance as my father’s job moved us to Honolulu. O‘ahu offered me new places to explore and the possibility of new mo‘olelo. Kapoho became our weekend life, coveted opportunities to return to those beloved places and people. I entered kindergarten close to my home and began the life of school and education. There were fears and struggles there, as well as joys and laughter. I built forts in the bushes, climbed our shower tree, and swam in the shallow waters in Waimānalo. I was weaving the experiences of this new home into the lei that began long before.

The beauty of Hawai‘i has always given me pause. The shape of a kukui leaf, the varied coloring of an anthurium, water flowing between the boulders of the Wailuku river behind our house in Hilo, and the fragrance of pakalana that pushes me to breathe more deeply are unique facets of home. I have learned that this appreciation comes from my childhood and that immersion in the natural world that surrounded our home and that of my grandparents.

My adult life has revolved around raising my own family and deepening my work as an educator. I traveled to Reggio Emilia, Italy, seeking a more in-depth understanding of how to honor the culture of childhood. Returning to Hawai‘i from Italy and walking straight into a master's program would lead to connections and new challenges that were not yet visible on the horizon.

The idea of integration of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and Hawaiian culture would grow into something I would cultivate in my master's work. Seeds were planted, and new growth began to flourish. I had no idea this work would lead to important professional and personal work to come. As my curriculum became more place- and culture-based, my haumāna began to

experience the natural environment of their island home. We exposed them to cultural practices and mo‘olelo of the places we explored. My learning as a teacher required me to take on new concepts, new vocabulary, and protocols. My master's research would leave me with an emerging sense of possibility and responsibility around the idea of a more culturally rich and integrated pedagogy. These plantings continued to flourish. As I finished my master's research, I intended to put research aside, to walk out into the sunlight, free of stress, deadlines, and writing. As it turned out, I would not stop there. The connections that were emerging between my Hawaiian Culture-based research and my growing interest in Reggio Emilia pedagogy were tugging at my imagination, like a child tugging at me to share an intriguing discovery. What would I find if I explored these connections more fully? How might I change my practice with further study?

Mo‘okū‘auhau

Mo‘okū‘auhau is a foundational term and I have woven that concept throughout this study. In the simplest terms, mo‘okū‘auhau means as genealogy (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.); however, in Hawaiian epistemology, it is a highly complex and multi-layered concept (Wilson-Hokowhitu, 2019). Wilson-Hokowhitu (2019) broke the word mo‘okū‘auhau down into discreet parts: “mo‘o in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i means succession, kū is the god of war (or it can also mean steadfast), and ‘auhau is literally the femur bone” (p. 127). This brings to mind the strength with which my family raised me. To be kūpa‘a; to stand strong as our family stood for the playing of the Hilo March, proud of who we were and proud of our home. “When strung together, mo‘okū‘auhau refers to our Kanaka Maoli ancestry” (p. 127) including our connection to “nā akua, nā ‘aumakua, nā kūpuna, our ancestors both living and in spirit” (p. 127). The concept of “connectedness” (p. 127) is vital to our understanding of the Hawaiian worldview

(Wilson-Hokowhitu, 2019). Saffery (2016) stated, “genealogy has and always will be a cornerstone of our Hawaiian worldview” (p. 112).

Vaughan’s (2019) use of the lei as a metaphorical way of honoring mo‘okū‘auhau furthers that image of connection to the past, as the weaving of my lei began long before I brought my hands to this work. Likewise, I am embracing the metaphor of lei making (Alencastre, 2015) as my way of remaining connected to the past while looking to the future of my growth and learning. As per Saffery (2016), sitting with our many mo‘okū‘auhau allows us to discover facets of our identity, and uncover the layers of our experiences that will open our minds and hearts to new learning.

Research Question-Ho‘onīnau

This study is a lei of my own weaving, as I have gathered diverse materials from a multitude of places, experiences, and relationships to create a lei that is my unique and humble gift. The mo‘olelo written in this study provide the lei’s raw materials—the blooms, the ferns, and the liko—that embody my learning, and my transformation. Lei represent love, and the careful efforts of the lei maker. They depict the travels (Vaughan, 2016) and the playful artistry of the individual who creates the lei—unique, and particular in all aspects. This research is a weaving of mo‘olelo into a lei of love, offering the reader space for self-reflection, inspiration, and aloha.

This study is centered around one main research question: How has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based educational philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a Kanaka Hawai‘i?

The Children of Hawai‘i-Nā Pua o Hawai‘i

My work in education has been to continually develop keener knowledge in the service of children and their families, offering them the best possible environment and classroom culture in which to thrive. Using the image of the lei, I have stepped back to look at the weaving that has come before, breathing in the fragrances, immersing myself in the myriad of greens, reds, and yellows, and noticing the patterns and themes that have come to light in order to step forward with intention and purpose (Oliveira, 2014). My work has developed in my relationship with my haumāna, their ‘ohana, my colleagues, and beloved friends, authors, and other educators. This is a work that grows out of love for children, for learning, and for beauty, and yet, there is an underlying anger at the following injustices that pushes me to advocate more fully for children and deeper learning. Children are dominated, silenced, and manipulated to fit into our system’s pre-conceived notion of what they should be and how they should act. Cunningham (2019) emphatically reminded us that “today, the need for childhood itself to be honored and valued is increasingly urgent” (p. 7). I was well into my teaching career when I began to see the landscape of childhood changing. Play was becoming an option, a reward for hard work, rather than a core component of rich, child-centered learning environments. Teachers were asking the questions, and children were merely there to fill in the blanks.

I realized that my unique childhood and role as an educator would be valuable in advocating for the voices of young children. I have learned that as educators in Hawai‘i, our kuleana is to ground our haumāna in the values, the culture, and the beauty of their island home (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013). This is the ‘āina that is nurturing their growth. This is the culture and the beauty that surrounds them each day.

Hana Pono

Each chapter of this study will intertwine what might seem to be disparate strands of my life, both professional and personal, in order to illuminate and examine the transformation that is occurring within me as an educator and Kanaka Hawai‘i.

This chapter introduced the metaphor of lei making as a way to coalesce the many genealogies of a life lived and the lessons learned. It offered a more in-depth look at how the concept of mo‘okū‘auhau and mo‘olelo could support this research endeavor.

The second chapter will describe how I have designed this study using lei making as a frame. It will introduce the concept of mo‘olelo as data. I have rememored and recreated these stories from a variety of stimuli, photos, former journals, and classroom writings, as well as memories of ‘ohana and classroom events evoked in moments of awakening and inspiration. These mo‘olelo introduce the reader to the analysis through moe ‘uhane, aesthetic experience, and critical reflection utilized throughout this study. 'Ōiwi Mo‘olelo research will also be described as a research method that emerged during this study.

The third, fourth, and fifth chapters will offer the interweaving of these mo‘olelo. There will be a layering of reflection, analysis, and literature that will reveal personal and professional responses to these mo‘olelo, and consequently the more transformational meaning gleaned as this research seeks to articulate a journey of growth over time. There will be a foundational look at literature using critical theory to frame my work that advocates for honoring student voice and the home culture of Hawai‘i. There will be literature around Reggio Emilia philosophy, Hawaiian Culture-based education, and constructivist theory in early childhood education as critical components in building a program that honors the rights and strengths of each child.

Finally, the sixth chapter steps back to look at my lei at this point. As the lei maker steps back during her process to view the collective whole, this chapter offered space to pause and acknowledge understandings that emerged as I laid the blossoms and foliage side by side. Their colors were often contrasted against unexpected partners, bringing the beauty of the other into the light. There were new insights, new textures, and new shapes created as I wove combinations of ideas together. This final chapter will synthesize what has been learned and describe implications for future research and possible next steps for practitioners. As we walk the landscape of our lives, gathering blossoms and noticing what materials call us, we can embrace the endless opportunities for the continual weaving of our lei.

Chapter 2: Methods

As I wove the lei of this research, I chose each mo‘olelo for its particular shape, color, and texture. Each mo‘olelo was thoughtfully prepared and repeatedly turned over in this researcher’s hands to place it carefully within the context of the developing study. As the lei maker/researcher, I offered my unique perspective choosing clusters of data that offered thematic insights, speaking to my purpose and my growing vision for what this study would become. The lei of this research study is this lei maker's offering to other educators who are weaving their own lei of experiences.

Preparing to Make the Lei

Introduction

This chapter describes the components of qualitative research, including narrative inquiry and autoethnography, as significant influences on the design of this research study. These current qualitative practices serve as a starting point. I describe facets of indigenous research as it became the more appropriate choice as my study progressed. I include the concept of mo‘okū‘auhau as a core element of this research design. I introduce the developing idea of ‘Ōiwi Mo‘olelo research as a method that I uncovered, utilizing mo‘olelo as data points to explore transformation. I describe the procedures used for data collection and data analysis. I discuss the ethical considerations and issues of credibility and transferability. The chapter concludes with an acknowledgment of the limits of this study and a summary bringing individual elements of this chapter into a more cohesive whole.

Components of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an approach that supports the idea of using research to build an understanding of the lived experiences of an individual (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell,

2014; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers are “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Qualitative research is grounded in the idea that “reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (p. 8). This approach “involves emerging questions and procedures” and “addresses the complexity of a situation” (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). There is an inherent constructivist nature to qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) as meaning “is not discovered but constructed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22).

An essential characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher's role as the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). In qualitative research, inductive thinking places the researcher in control of building their understanding from observations, documents, and interviews (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative research process involves a willingness to be highly reflexive. Attitudes, biases, cultural identity, and experiences affect data interpretation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2014). Reflexivity is necessary to generate themes, theories, and concepts (Merriam, 2009).

A qualitative approach allows the researcher's values to be incorporated and acknowledged within the study (Creswell, 2014). This view of the researcher moves research towards a more human process, recognizing the attitudes and beliefs the researcher brings to the work. However, it also acknowledges that the “human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry research studies people's lives and gathers their stories as a way to build understanding. This form of research often blends the participants' perspectives with that

of the researcher (Creswell, 2014). These types of studies can include biographies, autobiographies, life histories, and autoethnography. Narrative inquiry acknowledges the value of stories to understand experiences and our world (Merriam, 2009). This method began to help me see how I might use the exploration of autobiographic stories as a way to address my research question. Understandings about narrative inquiry led me to a further dive into autoethnography as a possible method for this inquiry.

Autoethnography

Holt (2003) described autoethnography as involving “highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (p. 18). It is a study about the self and reflecting on the self within a particular setting (Reed-Dannahay, 1997). The “tradition” of autoethnography (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 10) was “designed to be unruly, dangerous, vulnerable, rebellious, and creative” (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433). The autoethnographer seeks to evoke emotion, empathy, and action (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

As I was the researcher looking inward, I looked to autoethnography to understand how this self-exploration could take shape. The ability to use this type of self-narrative (Reed-Dannahay, 1997) would have been an appropriate choice for the weaving of my personal stories and reflections within current qualitative traditions. As the storyteller and potential autoethnographer, I saw myself as “the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (Ellis, 2009, p. 13). Autoethnography encouraged me to consider my insider voice and unique lived experiences as sources of data and reflection (Reed-Dannahay, 1997). The qualities of autoethnography as creativity, vulnerability, evoking empathy, and action (Ellis & Bochner,

2006) would be qualities I would carry with me as I stepped further into indigenous research methods.

Summary

As I studied qualitative research methods, I learned to value many of its components that would serve my purpose in an indigenous context. Qualitative research takes a constructivist stance on research and values the building of understandings and theories from the experiences of those studied (Merriam, 2009). Both qualitative research and indigenous research value relationships as useful and relevant resources (Creswell, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Narrative inquiry and autoethnography helped me to see myself as a valid instrument of the research. There is an understanding that the researchers themselves are involved in the shaping of the research (Creswell, 2014). Narrative inquiry and autoethnography offered initial validation for the use of personal narratives or stories as data (Merriam, 2009).

Critical research holds connections in both qualitative research and indigenous research. In a broad sense, critical research goes beyond searching for understanding to a search for how to use that understanding to take action towards change (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) stated, “power dynamics are at the heart of critical research... who has power, how it’s negotiated, and what structures in society reinforce current distribution of power” (p. 35). This lens was important as I searched for methods to empower and uplift the image of children. As my goal was to understand a transformation, Kovach’s (2012) words, “in both critical theory and constructivism, knowledge in itself is not seen as the ultimate goal; rather the goal is the change that this knowledge may help to bring about” (p. 37) were particularly meaningful. As I grew more knowledgeable about qualitative research, I could see I was still searching for the method

that would embrace the use of metaphor and spirituality. I needed a methodology that held a philosophical underpinning on the use of research for change.

Making the Lei

Emergent Design

It has been essential for me, as the researcher, to have a degree of flexibility and comfort with ambiguity (Merriam, 2009) as the design of this study needed to shift from a purely qualitative, autoethnographic stance to an indigenous stance. Unexpected experiences, conversations, and insights would further shift the lens of this study into the realm of indigenous ways of knowing as my perspective transformed. Vaughan (2019) advised, “Let your research, like lei, be shaped by your hands, the changing environment from which you gathered your data, and the guidance of the community in which you work” (p. 33).

The examination of autoethnography enhanced my developing awareness, shifting my view towards the significance and possibilities within indigenous methodologies (Oliveira & Wright, 2016; Wilson-Hokowhitu, 2019). I would be examining a transformation of evolving practice in a classroom in Hawai‘i and my emerging Hawaiian identity. I intended to utilize an autoethnographic approach (Creswell, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Reed-Dannahay, 1997) with an indigenous lens (Four Arrows, aka Jacobs, D. T., 2008; Kovach, 2012; Meyer, 2016; Oliveira & Wright, 2016; Wilson, 2008) in framing this study. However, it became clear that there was a philosophical disconnect. Autoethnography would not provide the foundation in ‘ike kūpuna that my transformation would require (Maunakea, 2016). It became clear that I would need to listen to my kūpuna and step into the “life changing ceremony” (Wilson, 2008, p. 61) of indigenous research.

An Indigenous Lens

Kahakalau (2019) stressed the importance of indigenous research stating “we must honor the past before us with confidence in our traditional ways and reliance on the teachings of our ancestors as we take our rightful place as contributing members of the international community of researchers, on our terms” (p. 26). Similar to current qualitative research, indigenous research takes on a constructivist stance as it embraces the idea that understanding comes from experience. It goes further into believing that there is “not merely one fluid reality, but many realities specific to the people and locations that hold them” (Wilson, 2008, p. 37). Four Arrows, aka Jacobs (2008), stated, “Indigenous ways of learning have always been about the inner journey that respects intuition, spirituality, artfulness, interconnectedness, Mother Earth, and situated experiences as the ultimate ‘primary resources’ for data” (p. 5). These facets of indigenous research and learning offered me a method to frame my inquiry in an authentic format.

Our perspectives shift as we view research through the eyes of our unique cultural setting (Smith, 1999). Indigenous research holds a more critical lens focused beyond interpretation in its search for change and transformation (Wilson, 2008). Kovach (2012) discussed the similarities between the qualitative methodologies and indigenous methodologies, suggesting that differences in language and indigenous ways of knowing further separate the two methodologies. Looking at my research through an indigenous lens allowed me to incorporate my voice, creativity, and values into this research. This indigenous lens would allow me to “retrieve my story from the archive of my being” (Kovach, 2012, p. 6).

Methodology of Mo‘okū‘auhau

The concept of mo‘okū‘auhau helped me to see my life and my work as connected to a broader continuum of continuity and purpose. At first, the concept of mo‘okū‘auhau can seem linear and sequential, bound by time and generation, but as Brown (2019) stated, “‘Ōiwi perceive the world genealogically. We are part of a complex web of relationality in which everything in our native island world (land, sea, and sky and all therein) are kin” (p. VIII). The concept of mo‘okū‘auhau offered me a way to frame my thinking about the relationships within this study. I explored the intermingling of past generations with my present life and then with others in the future. This sense of genealogy or lineage helped me to understand the complexity of these relationships. Brown (2019) described, mo‘okū‘auhau as:

an apt philosophical construct for understanding other kinds of genealogies: conceptual (the worldview our ancestors bequeathed us); intellectual (knowledge and practices generated, learned, and transmitted); aesthetic (inherited ideas about what constitutes the good and beautiful, which are encapsulated in ‘Ōiwi poetic devices); and power (inherited authority or capacity to effect change). (p. VIII)

The concepts of “continuity and relationality” (Brown, 2019, p. VII) exemplified in mo‘okū‘auhau “form the kuamo‘o (backbone) of Hawaiian culture” (p. VII). This idea supports my efforts to develop a deeper understanding of how to transform my teaching to honor those that I teach and learn alongside as I step into the future. As an early childhood educator, I have the opportunity to build relationships in learning with young children and their ‘ohana. There is a kuleana to this work that continues, connecting the generations of my haumāna.

‘Ōiwi Mo‘olelo Research

Smith (1999) spoke of indigenous scholars “grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person” (p. 38). As I tested my emerging indigenous voice, I found myself exploring new ways of seeing. I was seeking my own method grounded in ‘ike kūpuna (Maunakea, 2016) as I searched for what I needed to carry out this work; a method of ‘Ōiwi Mo‘olelo research began to emerge. Nā mo‘olelo were guiding my “transformative thinking” (Wright & Balutski, 2016). They were supporting my efforts to uncover layers of my identity and kuleana as a way to ho‘okūpa‘a for the children of Hawai‘i. I needed to expand my use of self-narrative into something broader and less linear. I began listening to my indigenous voice. Time and space took on a new dimension (Smith, 1999), a fluidity, as I created and analyzed the stories.

The past, childhood, and the early years of teaching led to conversations with kūpuna from generations ago and mo‘opuna not yet on the horizon. Some stories began in Italy and abruptly shifted into the lo‘i and back. The interplay of time and the flowing in and out of settings within one story encouraged me to think differently, acknowledge the qualitative methodologies of autoethnography and narrative inquiry as jumping-off points, and then set them to the side. I had stepped into new territory, without fully realizing it, into something more personal from within my na‘au. The blossoming idea of ‘Ōiwi Mo‘olelo research became a pathway to uncovering my Hawaiian identity and kuleana to those who came before me, those with me now, and those yet to come.

Data Collection

There was a certain unknown quality about how I would gather this data. I wrote some stories in one sitting while I reworked others over days or weeks. There were times when

mo‘olelo came freely, and other times I sifted through stacks of documents, read from cover to cover, and nothing came. Some mo‘olelo became the data for analysis. Others have served as inspiration or triggers for other writing.

In reality, many of the mo‘olelo gathered for this study came to me in the time of wana‘ao, those moments just before the dawn when your mind begins to stir (Kahumoku, personal communication, September 28, 2019). As the sun began to rise, not yet reaching its light into our morning sky, I often found myself stirring, my mind filled with ideas that tugged me awake. I sat on the couch in the dark, recording mo‘olelo in hushed tones to the dim light of my phone. These mo‘olelo required patience; they held me at bay and made me wait for just the right moment. There are times when our minds are more open to moe ‘uhane, to our kūpuna, to akua, to whomever we believe is there to guide us (P. Silva, personal communication, October 16, 2019).

Each mo‘olelo was a gift that came to me in a particular moment, shaping my research journey and setting the tone for my days. These moments were gifts from my kūpuna, encouraging me to continue to walk this path with my eyes wide and my heart open to whatever revealed itself next. I have approached this research as Vaughan (2019) advised stating, “proceed one step at a time and let the outcome surprise you” (p. 34). The writing of these mo‘olelo required waiting, spending time with my kūpuna through journals and dreams, with the memories of my haumāna and my ‘ohana in order to know them more fully. I could not summon this writing. It came when it was meant to come. It came through tears, often running into the lines of my smile.

Mo‘olelo as Data

Data are pieces of information. They can be distinct and easily measured or abstract and based on emotion and values (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative study data are derived from the “interest and perspective of the investigator” (p. 85). As Denzin (2014) stated, “stories are like pictures that have been painted over, and when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible” (p. 1). This research journey was about discovering what those layers within each story held.

The data for this study took the form of mo‘olelo, written to illuminate lived experiences that have contributed to the transformation of my classroom practice and my Hawaiian identity. There are mo‘olelo inspired by my kūpuna through my great, great, grandmother's journal, my Tūtū's autograph book, family photographs, journal entries, genealogical records, classroom newsletters, dreams, paintings, and life experiences. Brown (2019) stated, “mo‘olelo impart important lessons, preserve cultural knowledge, and reflect a distinctly ‘Ōiwi approach to narration that is unlike the linear narrative approach typical of Western culture” (p.ix). Meyer (2016) confirmed that data would look different when gathered through an indigenous research process. She suggested a researcher “honor the difference with clear descriptions” (p. 63) of what has been experienced and noted that we need to recognize that “knowledge is more than an external experience” (p. 64).

Data Analysis

The handling of data from collection, to analysis, to the writing of the findings was not an entirely linear process. There were times when these phases overlapped (Creswell, 2013). I recorded moments of reflection and reactions before, during, and after the writing of nā mo‘olelo. I began with a layered and thematic approach to the analysis of the data. Wolcott

(1994) offered three layers of analysis that I utilized in organizing this work. The first layer of descriptive analysis seeks articulation of what is occurring in the data. The second layer of analysis identifies the central features of the data and the “systemic description of interrelationships among them” (p. 12). The third layer of analysis is for interpretation or gathering of meaning from the data and its interconnections.

In the weaving of this research, the initial stage of analysis involved reading each mo‘olelo and recording initial impressions. I compiled notes describing key messages or lessons within the story. I recorded significant emotional reactions or aesthetic responses (Greene, 2001) to the individual mo‘olelo in this initial stage of analysis. As the mo‘olelo were read and reread, themes began to emerge around those initial vital messages. These themes were noted and allowed to linger as emerging possibilities for future thematic clustering.

The second layer of analysis involved the interweaving of the individual mo‘olelo. As I laid these mo‘olelo side by side, clusters began to form, and I began to envision new learning coming to the surface. With each subsequent reading and re-sorting, I refined and further focused the themes. The overarching themes that emerged would lead to a more in-depth analysis of the mo‘olelo chosen as I related those themes to the original question of this research.

The relationships between stories often led to new understandings. Significant aesthetic responses identified stories that depicted transformative moments. I needed to set some mo‘olelo aside in order to focus on the analysis of those that related most closely to the central research question of this study. I continued to revisit the data set aside throughout the analysis, as any researcher might revisit interview transcripts to ensure they had not missed essential data. The message of each mo‘olelo grew in clarity as clustering often revealed hidden layers requiring me

to make further shifts in the clusters. Once the final themes solidified, the weaving of the analysis could begin in earnest.

Within the three overarching themes of this study, sub-themes emerged. The sub-themes became apparent as I paired and grouped mo‘olelo. Additional meaning began to distinguish one group from another within the broader theme. Each layer led to a search for new vocabulary in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i to offer clarity and insight into my thinking. There was an ebb and flow to this process, as searching for just the right word or phrase often led to a more profound discovery of kaona within the layers of the mo‘olelo.

Ethical Considerations

In a research study of this type, the researcher must be careful to protect those who appear as characters in the mo‘olelo that are shared (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2014). I have intentionally obscured identities within the mo‘olelo by changing race, gender, and names to protect the privacy of those who played a role in my memories and learning. The authenticity of the data is dependent on these mo‘olelo, and yet the identities of the characters are not necessary to draw meaning from these mo‘olelo.

Credibility

It was important to collect a diverse set of data that illustrated and substantiated interpretations, findings, and recommendations of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Maxwell, 2013). The mo‘olelo I used as data came from periods before I was born, within my lifetime, and the future. These mo‘olelo came from both personal and professional settings. These timeframes offered different mo‘olelo to be held up against each other to see if they rang true within the study’s broader context.

Transferability

The use of “rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2009, p. 226) is one strategy that encourages transferability. I offered detail in hopes that the reader would be able to “filter the story being told through their own experience and thus adapt the information and make it relevant and specific to their life” (Wilson, 2008, p. 32). Learning is a relational activity, and when learning is clearly articulated by one, there is a likelihood that others will find something of use to their learning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2009).

Limits of Study

This study is the work of one individual developed through both personal and professional mo‘olelo. As Denzin (2014) stated, “a story is always an interpretive account, but, of course, all interpretations are biased” (p. 57). In the hands of another researcher, this study could have been a phenomenology (Creswell, 2014). It might have offered descriptions of the lived experiences of haumāna, families, and teachers in my context. The study might have included descriptions of particular schedules, ideas for curricular provocations, allotment of time to different cultural practices, and the participants’ perceptions of their learning in this environment. This study could have been done with an evaluative lens (Patton, 2011) and yielded quantifiable results leading toward the development of a proposal and program implementation. These other methodologies did not offer the facets of the researcher's voice and personal reflection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 2009). An indigenous lens (Oliveira & Wright, 2016; Wilson, 2008) was needed to construct the learning desired in this particular circumstance.

Summary

This study examined the mo‘olelo of my kūpuna, my childhood, my teaching, and my professional travels in search of insights that illuminated my journey. They illustrate my work to

create a kindergarten program that honors each child's dignity as it utilizes the educator's intellectual capacity. This work also reflects a "transformative worldview" (Creswell, 2014, p. 9), focusing on the empowerment of the young child and my emerging Hawaiian identity. Alencastre (2015) and Vaughan's (2016; 2019) work around the metaphor of lei making provided a frame for this work. Mo'okū'auhau (Brown, 2019) and stories as data offered indigenous methods (Wilson, 2008) that supported this endeavor. 'Ōiwi Mo'olelo research grew out of the firm foundation of 'ike kūpuna (Maunakea, 2016) to allow me to glean a deeper reflective understanding of the experiences of my life within an indigenous context. Qualitative research design offered this study a starting point that encouraged my voice and values as a researcher. It held a constructivist mindset at the fore (Merriam, 2009) and lent itself to emerging design and shifting focus (Creswell, 2014). The following chapters take the reader into the mo'olelo themselves as I examined each blossom for the weaving that was the body of this work.

Chapter 3: Trusting the Strength of the Child

Mo‘olelo: Silenced

We gathered our blankets and pillows and settled down on our cots for naptime. As soon as I lay down, I began to feel feverish. My head burned, and my left ear throbbed. Tears were pricking at the backs of my eyes as I got up to go to my teacher.

“Lie down, Donna!” was all she said. I stepped forward two more steps, and again her voice boomed, “Lie down! It’s naptime, Donna!”

I retreated to my cot, tears already welling up. I lay quietly curled tightly around my blanket, trying not to move in hopes that the throbbing would subside. Tears streamed across my face, soaking my pillow as I lay with my back to my teacher. She didn't care. She wouldn't care. I hated her in that moment. I gulped down my sobs, my chest heaving silently as I wished to be invisible. At my wit's end, I wept quietly and then... a warm hand on my back. Every muscle relaxed. I melted into a pool of tears.

“What’s wrong? Why are you crying?” My mommy was crouched next to me.

“My ear!” I wailed, defeating the quiet of the room. My mom lifted me into her arms and carried me out the door, never glancing back, as my teacher looked on.

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Trusting the Strength of the Child: Definition and Analysis

My memories of pre-school are jagged pages torn from a mostly-forgotten story. The feeling of betrayal when my best friend bit me, dressing as a flower for a play, and eating warm, sticky Spanish rice at a long counter facing the window are all sensory moments that drift back easily. This mo‘olelo of pre-school brings up the unforgettable feeling of being silenced. I felt helpless, with no voice and no way to be heard. I was stricken.

The early childhood educators of Reggio Emilia define their positive image of the child with terms like powerful, capable, competent, inquisitive, filled with potential, and strong (Clemens et al., 2012; Gandini, 2012; Wurm, 2005). When we trust in the strength and the capability of the child, we offer them the richest provocations and space for exploration, play, inquiry, problem-solving, and decision-making. Positive experiences with adults who trust and respect them encourage children to grow into self-confident and eager learners. Developing the ability to trust in that strength influences how we meet the challenges of our daily work and deepens the child's capacity to act for himself.

As my image of the child has strengthened and grown in complexity, it has created an openness in me that has encouraged me to step back or to the side, believing the child will make the first move into new learning. It is imperative to trust not only the children but the in-depth knowledge, attentiveness, and capability of early childhood educators, knowing they are keeping learning goals in mind as they take their cues from the children and their drive for understanding (Gandini, 2012).

Trusting the strength of the child is the first of three themes that rose out of the analysis of the mo'olelo of this study. As this chapter illustrates, my decisions as an educator are grounded in this belief in the child which, began as seeds planted in my childhood, coming to fruition years later in my adult life. This trust in the child was a central theme in 24 of the 73 mo'olelo of this study. As I looked to address the driving question of this research—how has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based educational philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a Kanaka Hawai'i—I chose to highlight seven of these mo'olelo to illustrate three aspects of this theme.

Within these stories, I noted the phrase: “I gulped down my sobs; my chest silently heaving as I wished to be invisible” (Mo‘olelo: Silenced), acknowledging the feelings that arose when I was silenced as a young child. Other phrases like: “our moms relaxing on the lanai” (Mo‘olelo: Walking Home), “leaders emerged with plans” (Mo‘olelo: The Theater), “kids were left to their own devices” (Mo‘olelo: Chili Peppers in Kapoho), and “children were teaching... translating... using the languages of drawing and writing to share their thinking” (Mo‘olelo: Reggio Emilia: School Visit) illustrate the trust that can be extended to children as they explore the world and their own ideas.

My trust in the child's strength centers around three sub-themes: 1) trusting in the child, 2) the child as a researcher, and 3) the child striving to develop her own voice as she seeks acceptance in the world.

Trusting the Strength of the Child: Growing to Trust Myself

The trust the adults in my life placed in me sits in my na‘au, weaving its way through this study, and appears in how I view children and teaching. *Walking Home From School* is a mo‘olelo highlighted in this chapter that demonstrates the belief that recognizing my capability and competence came from opportunities early in my childhood. This firm grounding in my own initiative and trustworthiness undergirds my belief in each child's right to take control of moments in his own learning, as illustrated in *The Theater*. The beauty of moments like these brings back the power of childhood learning that is integral to the development of self-efficacy and self-worth.

Mo‘olelo: Walking Home From School

We were walking home to my cousins’ house. There were three of us; two kindergartners and a first-grader. We headed out the school gate and down the block, eager for the routine of

our walk to begin. We traveled along the sidewalk, sometimes skipping, sometimes running, and laughing out loud as we ran. We crossed to the other side of the street. “Look both ways” ran through our minds. We crossed again as we approached the barking, black dog. Then we zigzagged back once he was behind us. Our pace slowed as we smelled the fragrance of what we called honeysuckle. We plucked blossoms from the bushes, sucking nectar from the base of the blooms. This was the sweet taste of that time, just us girls on our own. Eventually, we rounded the corner onto Farmers Road, and we knew we were almost home. Sticker Park, dry and poky, stretched ahead of us. We lingered under the shade tree, just two houses away. The damp sidewalk was slightly mossy and littered with leaves. We ran the last stretch, our lunch boxes swinging against our legs, and barreled through the gate. “We’re home!” we called as we ran to our mothers relaxing on the lanai.

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Learning to Trust in Ourselves: Analysis

Walking Home From School frames this childhood experience within the trust and responsibility we were given to walk home from school alone at a young age. Our mothers’ relaxed demeanor let us know that our safe arrival was expected and that we were trusted to make the trip home safely. During those walks we made our own decisions as we navigated the journey—when to cross the street, which corner we needed to turn on, and which houses had barking dogs to be avoided. We stopped to pick flowers and even tasted their nectar as we made our way home. Exploration like this sparked inquisitiveness and curiosity in me. We had the time and freedom to explore and play along the way, adding to our growing understanding of the world around us. From those simple experiences, I learned the value and importance of being

trusted by others and grew to trust myself as I saw my worthiness reflected in my parents' actions.

Mo'olelo: The Theater

A group of children decided to create a movie theater out of chairs, food from our pretending corner, pattern blocks, unifix cubes, and any other odds and ends. The concession and the tickets soon became the focus. The group had a ball, and children began to join in here and there. The theater grew, and the mess grew. The floor was filled with containers of food. Our entire meeting area was covered!

As we watched this group work, we were taken aback. We stood back and counted. The children, 16 kindergartners, were all working in sync, adding food, making tickets, arranging chairs, and inviting their teachers to the movies. No bickering, no bossing, just plain old pretending.

Then came the moment when it was time to clean up... beads, blocks, buttons, unifix cubes, wooden food, scraps of paper, chairs, and on and on. Would this be when 16 collaborative team members turned instantly into independent avoiders of clean up? No. Amazingly the dismantling of the theater became one large sorting project. Several leaders emerged with plans for sorting out buttons from unifix cubes, and off they went.

We stood back and reflected on what was happening. This was an opportunity to remind ourselves of why we chose not to set up arbitrary parameters around how many children could work together or where particular materials needed to be used. We would have missed this moment where 16 five and six-year-olds had gracefully navigated their own independent play.

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Developing Our Trust in the Child: Analysis and Literature

The Theater captures a classroom community coming together around a shared purpose. I was poised to step in. If I had, I would have destroyed the beauty of that learning for all of us. Palmer (2017) described times like this as “critical moments [when] ...a learning opportunity for students will open up, or shut down—depending, in part, on how the teacher handles it” (p. 150). I have learned to pause and check myself in that instant...to ask why before I make any move to step in. As educators, I find it concerning that we often set boundaries for children that are unnecessary and arbitrary. We control our students' actions out of convenience, habit, or our own inadequacies and fears. This mo‘olelo is a reminder that children need the space to create their own paths to learning as we honor their strengths and their gifts (Rinaldi, 2006; Routman, 1991; Wong-Kam, et al., 2001). A reflexive teacher will find a way to step past her own trepidation to make room for the children to develop their sense of autonomy and competence. Trusting the child is an integral pillar in the framework I use as I strive to create a learning environment that honors initiative, autonomy, and self-discovery.

Brown and Vaughan (2009) noted that play fills an invaluable role in all of our lives; it is a “force that allows us to both discover our most essential selves and enlarge our world” (p. 13). In a time when our schedules are overflowing with curricular initiatives, it is keenly important that we build in opportunities for children to play. Play sits at the core of the work I do with young children. When we think of play, it is vital to think about the properties of play that help us uncover the more profound value of this educational setting, which can often be set aside as trivial. Play is seemingly purposeless; it engages us in choice; it encourages us to lose track of time and let go of our pretenses and worries.

Play is open-ended and encourages its continuation as it is imbued with fun. Within play, children learn how to collaborate, experience the parameters that come with built relationships, and generate a sense of trust for others and their learning environment. It is vital that we respect a child's self-directed actions (Brown & Vaughan, 2009) as they occur in playful contexts. As we observe children who have the freedom to initiate their own play we are often led directly to next steps in our practice (Mraz, et al., 2016) as their interactions illuminate interests, strengths, and needs that may otherwise remain hidden (Dewey, 2013; Elkind, 2007).

Pretending is foundational to the development of the child's social, cognitive, and language capabilities. We can stimulate the child's abilities to visualize, create scenarios, regulate their own actions, and problem-solve by offering rich contexts. The opportunity to play imaginatively encourages children to test out different roles and reimagine themselves in a safe setting (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Ditzel, 2000; Elkind, 2007; Mraz, et al., 2016). Pretending and fantasy are an avenue into the world of storytelling, offering children a way to process their feelings and share their thinking (Paley et al., 2005). Brown and Vaughan (2009) underscored the value of play, stating: "the ability to play is critical not only to being happy but also to sustaining social relationships and being a creative, innovative person" (p. 6). We must consider play as foundational to trust.

Trust in the Child: Summary

Trusting the young child as a capable, competent individual is an essential understanding for each of us to have firmly in our sights if we are to nurture initiative and growth in the children. I believe in the complexity and gifts of each child, the hesitant child who needs time to grow into our classroom life, the child who cannot help but wiggle when others can remain still, and the child who needs me to listen when others are fed up with listening to her. I am poised to

scaffold and support each child as she develops trust in her capabilities and self-worth. I firmly believe as Palmer (2017) stated: “the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard... [B]ut if we are willing to sit quietly and wait for a while, the soul may show itself” (p. 156). Our mothers believed in us, giving us the latitude to act for ourselves in *Walking Home From School*. The children in *The Theater* grabbed hold of a spontaneous moment of collaboration and community. As educators, we can leave room for children to become fully immersed in their growing competence. As educators, we must trust in the strengths of the children to offer them the space to grow and stretch their own capacity for problem-solving and action.

Trusting the Strength of the Child: The Child as Researcher

The following mo‘olelo, *Chili Peppers in Kapoho* and *Reggio Emilia: School Visit*, capture two examples of the child as a researcher to develop an understanding of the world through exploration, experiences, and relationships. When we leave room for children to seek out their own learning, we encourage them to value their curiosity and pursue answers to questions that intrigue them. We teach them that their questions are worthy of the interest and consideration by others. In observing my haumāna, I am reminded of the freedom I had as a child to learn my own lessons as I engaged with the world around me.

Mo‘olelo: Chili Peppers in Kapoho

My cousins were with us for the weekend. There was a party in the house; aunties and uncles laughing and talking and lots of food. Someone was playing an ukulele, and there was fish on the grill. The kids were left to their own devices. We wandered the path around our uncle's pond. We raced the darting schools of mullet as they sped by. We picked vines and tied them into crowns. Then someone had a great idea!

“Let’s taste the chili peppers!”

“Nana said not to touch those!”

“But what do they taste like?”

“I don’t know.”

“When my daddy bites them, he cries,” I said.

My cousins were a pack while I was mostly an only child. They were braver, more adventurous.

“Let’s try them,” someone pushed.

So we did! Oh no! The tears...the heat! I can still remember the burning sensation! My tongue was on fire! We gulped water from the hose, grabbing it from each other in desperation. Nothing. Just the incessant burning. We snuck bottles of coke and strawberry soda from the cooler on the lanai, thinking the bubbles might help! Nothing. It seemed to be getting worse. Our littlest cousin had trusted us. His eyes were wide as tears rolled down his cheeks, soaking the front of his t-shirt. We were desperate for relief.

Finally, it was time to come clean.

“Nana! Our tongues are burning!” we cried at the back door.

“What did you do?” Nana asked, the screen door creaking on its hinges.

“We ate the chili peppers from the bush!” we sobbed.

“We’re sorry.”

“Come inside,” she said sternly. I think there was a hint of a smile on her face. “I told you not to touch them. Let’s get some milk,” she scolded. “You learned your lesson, didn’t you?”

We hung our heads as we gulped down the milk, guilt continuing to burn in our mouths.

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Research Leads to Learning: Analysis

Childhood is a time of research through exploration and experimentation. It is a time of trial and error. When we offer the child a time to explore, we are saying *I believe in you. I trust you to seek out new understandings through your research and investigation.* When we are indeed able to embrace the idea that children have an innate curiosity about the world around them, we can trust in their pursuit of learning and their ability to grow in that pursuit (Dewey, 2013). As educators, trust allows us to engage in more meaningful dialogue around co-constructing knowledge and opens us to a world of otherwise unavailable possibilities. If we are to enter into an authentic dialogue with our haumāna, we must base our relationships in love, humility, faith, hope, and the ability to think critically.

In this context, the teacher-child relationship is reciprocal, and we learn from each other (Bartolome, 1994). Freire (2017) described “education as the practice of freedom” (p. 81) which, requires us to acknowledge that in imposing our will on children, in taking away their ability to make decisions, we dehumanize the children in our care (Freire, 2017). As adults in the lives of young children, we must work with intentionality in designing opportunities that encourage children to develop new questions and new competencies as they research the world around them.

Mo‘olelo: Reggio Emilia—School Visit

Stepping off the train, a slight chill in the air, we looked up, and seeing the sign, Reggio Emilia, we stopped in our tracks! We were here! This was the epitome for us as early childhood educators; this town in Italy that valued children as capable and competent; as citizens with rights in their community.¹ We had come to learn with educators who embraced a “pedagogy of

¹ Gambetti, A., personal communication, May, 2015.

listening.”² Being welcomed into the town and the schools immersed us in the feelings, the attitudes, and the joyful learning environments just as they immersed their students.

I sat down on the floor next to a group of children working with colorful plastic pieces, creating elaborate designs and structures on a light table. They spoke no English, and of course, I spoke no Italian. I tried to introduce myself. “Donna.”

They looked at me curiously; “Si!” they said.

Yes, that’s obvious is what they really meant. I remembered Donna meant lady. They showed me what they were doing. Handing me a cylindrical piece of blue plastic, they were inviting me into their work. They took my pencil and wrote in my notebook, drawing snowmen to show me what they were talking about, to explain what I could not understand. As a means of conversation, we drew together, and I was breathless, awed, as these four-year-olds offered me a path in. The children were teaching me, translating for me, and using the languages of drawing and writing to share their thoughts. We were now friends, co-constructing our learning. Eventually, it was time for me to leave.

“Gracie mille!” I said and asked an interpreter to convey my gratitude. It became clear that the children could not believe that I did not speak Italian!

“But everyone speaks Italian!” the interpreter shared their reply.

This idea that not everyone spoke Italian was a new concept for them. We had added to our mo‘okū‘auhau, the lineage of our experiences, to our growing understanding of the world.

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² Ritchart, Church, and Morrison, 2011, p. 37.

Research Drives Learning: Analysis and Literature

In *Reggio Emilia: School Visit*, the conversation between the children and me was profoundly moving; the idea that we had each added to our understandings around communication and adult-child relationships was striking. In this context, we stood on equal footing, supported by our mutual interest to share ideas. These children had invited me into their work, and I left feeling connected and profoundly enriched. That experience in creative conversation was the embodiment of what Greene (2001) eloquently described as: “living of lyrical moments, moments at which human beings (freed to feel, to know, and to imagine) suddenly understand their own lives in relation to all that surrounds” (Greene, 2001, p. 7). We need to acknowledge and celebrate moments of joy, awe, and inspiration that are key to the awakening of new areas within ourselves. Each experience in our lives is a moment of education, nurturing our continuing growth if we are only awake enough to notice. In those moments, as I become a learner, fresh-faced and breathless, I am made aware of the impact my adult mindset can have on the journey of the child and her foundational explorations as a researcher. I can enhance her journey or hinder her growth in each choice that I make.

Gopnik (2011) described children as “the research and development division of the human species.” If children are free to explore and tinker without a predetermined outcome, they are more likely to be innovative and inquisitive. Offering children space to build their understanding, formulate their questions, and venture out in search of answers to those questions inspires deep and authentic learning. When children's questions and curiosities are encouraged to flourish, the balance of power in the classroom shifts, and we entrust the children with the task of pursuing their growth and development (Berger, 2014).

Embracing the tenets of social constructivism, we must provide the children with opportunities to explore and research through teaching and learning. This exploration and research uncover the “intricate patterning of life, with rhythms, textures, and shapes” and in ways that “we must attend to a kind of creative chaos we can learn to enjoy” (Palmer, 2017, p. 151). In the Hawaiian context, such research happens when educators help their keiki explore their island home (Kana‘iaupuni et al., 2017). Each child carries stories, a history, and a family background that add meaning and depth to our classroom community. When we create a classroom culture that acknowledges children’s background and where they come from, we embrace their whole being and “draw out their potentials and acknowledge the deepest wellspring from which our children create and make meaning” (Sumida & Meyer, 2006, p. 361).

I am cognizant of Kovach’s (2012) statement that curriculum “can be a mighty tool of social justice to the marginalized” (p. 6) as I open space for young children to exercise their right to explore interests and questions that hold meaning for them. The freedom to think, to pursue wonderings, and to draw independent conclusions are the principles of good research that are valuable to society (Black, 2016; Dewey, 2013). In our Hawaiian context, encouraging the curiosity of young children to develop a deep connection to their home will strengthen their commitment to this place as they mature (Johnson, 2010; Smith, 2002). Embracing facets of both place-based (Johnson, 2010; Smith, 2002; Sobel, 2002) and culture-based education (Kahumoku, forthcoming; Oliveira, 2014) offers me firm guideposts for framing my kindergarten curriculum. Learning within the local context encourages the development of the child’s capacity to research, enabling her to deal with complex situations and the uncertainty of our world through direct connection to her community (Kana‘iaupuni, et al., 2017; Sobel, 2002; Stevenson, 2008).

There are rich resources within our community that can immerse the children in the culture, the people, and the settings relevant to a child growing up in Hawai‘i. Opportunities for authentic and integrated learning in my context have come to include culture-rich, place-based experiences in Mānoa Valley and around our island home of O‘ahu. Seeking out culture-based opportunities such as trips to the lo‘i and the loko i‘a, as well as visiting the settings of traditional mo‘olelo, help children begin to see themselves as nā pua o Hawai‘i. Integrating ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and ‘ike Hawai‘i into our routines and protocols deepens our connection to our place and normalizes these practices in the child’s day. This strengthens the child’s sense of exploration, self, and belonging.

I strive to integrate families into our classroom community by including them in learning trips and inviting them to work and learn alongside their children at school. Families can observe and embrace the growing capabilities of their keiki in these moments of shared learning. Finding ways to support learning that includes the family encourages the enrichment of the child beyond the school day's scope. As Kahumoku (forthcoming) stated, “curricular content becomes contextual as it honors a students’ and their family’s capital and bridges between what is known with the unknown and the familiar (home) with the unfamiliar (school)” (p.7). I see the relationships between home and school and between family and teacher as vital in my work to develop opportunities and research.

The processes of research and reflection are elemental to cognitively- and socially-stimulating learning environments. When we are receptive to the discoveries of children made independent of the ones anticipated or even prescribed by the authority and structure of the school curriculum, children are empowered. Children in these environments learn that academic interests can coexist with trusting, reciprocal relationships, thereby developing an empathetic and

caring foundation for the socially-just, rather than adult-dominated interactions within the classroom (Fennimore, 2016).

Child as Researcher: Summary

I trust children's innate curiosity that compels them to investigate the world around them. They are hardwired to research their world through exploration, play, experimentation, and action. We all learn by doing and in relationship with those around us. We try things out, look at things from different perspectives, and take things apart to see how they work. When we view children as capable and competent, the adults in their lives will open spaces for them to do the work of a researcher to deepen their learning. There are times when a child may choose to take a divergent path, and habit or expedience might encourage me, as his teacher, to redirect his actions. My ability to pause, reflect, and check my reasoning before making decisions has grown to be a significant competency in my practice.

Trusting the Strength of the Child: A Developing Voice

We each have a powerful desire to speak for ourselves, our beliefs, and our experiences. As the children move forward in their learning, it is essential to encourage them to embrace their voices and express their unique perspectives and opinions (Palmer, 2017). In the following mo'olelo, *First Teaching Position: A Challenge* and *Ohi'a Lehua Retelling*, having the courage to find and use one's voice in pursuit of acceptance and entry into new and daunting situations can be empowering for both adults and children.

Mo'olelo: First Teaching Position—A Challenge

A parent who had been on the interviewing committee came up to me on the first day of class.

"You were not my first choice," he stated bluntly.

“Great!” I thought, “There were only two of us interviewing for the position.”

Amazingly, I was brave enough to ask, “Why?”

“Because you are fresh out of school, and I don't think you can handle starting in October for your first year of teaching.”

“Fair enough,” I answered. “All I can do is ask you to give me a chance, and let's talk again at the end of the year and see how it turns out.” He nodded, and we left that conversation for another day.

At the end of the year, I asked him what he thought. He smiled and hugged me. We had both grown a lot, learning alongside his son that year. That was the beginning of honest, upfront conversations with parents that I know have gotten better with time, experience, and maturity. But right at the start of my career, that was quite a first conversation! In retrospect, I am grateful for that moment of quick thinking and ability to offer a hand towards building a relationship in order to support his child.

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Finding My Voice: Analysis

Palmer (2017) described listening, not merely to what is said, but also listening to leave room for what will be said if we are willing to wait. The father's comment, “You were not my first choice” in *My First Teaching Position: A Challenge*, came as an invitation, offering me an opportunity to respond, to speak up for myself, and enter into a year-long conversation. As a first-year teacher, my ability to stand firm, kūpa‘a, and respond with “fair enough...all I can do is ask you to give me a chance” (Mo‘olelo: *My First Teaching Position: A Challenge*) was a pivotal moment in the development of my professional voice. The line at the end of the story, “I am grateful for that moment” (Mo‘olelo: *My First Teaching Position: A Challenge*), captures a

feeling of appreciation that bubbled forth along with those initial utterances of my emerging voice as an educator. I had no idea where that young teacher would go, but she had just entered the conversation.

Mo'olelo: Ohi'a Lehua Retelling

The chapel is quiet. Second graders fill the pews behind the altar. Gabriel stands at the podium, a taller version of his kindergarten self. He speaks with confidence gazing out over the audience as the light illuminates his face. I am so proud to see him standing there. I remember back to the first day of school two years before. "Good morning Gabriel." This child quietly looks at me, and dad shares that he will take time to get to know us. I reassure this father as I did when he arrived in my classroom as a six-year-old, a lifetime ago.

One morning we gathered in our morning circle and shared greetings. Counting around the circle, "One, two, three..."

A seemingly random comment interrupted the count. "Do you know if you pick the flower, it will rain?" He was talking about the ohi'a lehua that greets us as we climbed the stairs each day.

"Is that true?" asked one of his classmates.

Gabriel, who had rarely spoken up to this point in the year, said, "I know the story!" He went on quietly, telling the love story of Ohi'a and Lehua. The children hushed as he began, leaning close to hear this soft-spoken classmate share his understanding of a favorite story. He captivated the group. This was his introduction to our community. This would be a moment we would hold in our hearts throughout this year.

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Finding His Voice: Analysis and Literature

Children need to know they are loved and that their efforts, drive, and struggles are recognized and appreciated. They have to see that they matter. They need to know that the adults in their lives trust them enough to offer them space to work on things that are important to them. Similarly, each child comes into my classroom, searching for acceptance, looking to find a space that will encourage her to share her ideas and test her theories.

Ohi‘a Lehua Retelling tells the story of a child who entered with trepidation and found his voice as he shared a favorite mo‘olelo with his classmates. Children like Gabriel often linger at the periphery. He was quiet and easy to have in the room. On the surface, he required little of me as his teacher. He was not demanding or disruptive. I knew Gabriel from the moment he entered the room, slightly behind his father, a hand on his back gently nudging him through the door. I could see myself in his eyes, and even more powerfully, I could conjure his father as a small child, hesitating at the door years ago. In order to honor this child and offer him the fullest opportunities for growth, it was imperative that I listened closely. I carefully observed him and placed invitations and opportunities in our environment for him and his classmates to uncover and amplify their voices and their abilities to listen.

It is important that there is space for conversation and children to initiate their topics based on their interests and background knowledge. Understanding the impact of that moment with Gabriel (*Mo‘olelo: Ohi‘a Lehua Retelling*) I find I can wait patiently for the child to find and test his developing voice. I believe, as Edwards (2012) stated, that “all children seek to realize their identity and make their voice heard within that specific context” (p. 150). The young child is eager to engage with his world; he learns in relation to others and possesses the “plasticity” (Dewey, 2013, p. 33) to adapt as he learns from experience. Fraser and Gestwicki

(2000) stated, there are ways educators can “set the stage for productive conversation” (p. 79), such as following the wonderings of children, documenting conversations with children in order to return to important ideas, and providing time for open, group discussion.

In creating this environment, learning becomes reciprocal, and the children begin to see the value of their voices. Hertz and Mraz (2018) encourage educators to think of creating classroom environments where the behaviors encouraged are the skills and objectives that “will help children in the classroom and *in the world*” (p. 81; emphasis in original). If we want our children to grow up to speak for themselves and their home, it is incumbent on us to provide them the opportunity to strengthen and refine their voices in our classroom environments today.

A Developing Voice: Summary

These mo‘olelo demonstrate the connection between a developing voice and the proffering of space for that voice to enter into conversation. Developing my voice as a fledgling educator was not wholly different than Gabriel striking out in search of his own voice. Just as Gabriel found himself falling headlong into a retelling of the mo‘olelo of Ohi‘a and Lehua, I found myself responding candidly to a father who had left the door open for conversation. Palmer’s (2017) notion of listening underscores the need for reciprocity in the activation of an individual's voice. It is this interplay that is critical for early childhood educators to integrate into their relationships with children. My belief in a child's right to find and exercise his voice must be a factor as I design our learning environment and scaffold the development of our classroom community.

Trusting the Strength of the Child: Summary

To trust in the child’s strength means I believe wholeheartedly in her drive, innate curiosity, and competence as she embraces the learning opportunities that surround her. Trusting

the child's strength is the first theme drawn from the analysis of nā mo‘olelo of this study. This trust frames the core of my beliefs about children as learners. We know children learn by immersion and experience; they learn by working hard and struggling to solve real-world problems (Black, 2016).

In a world where young children are often marginalized and controlled by the authority of school, teachers, and curriculum, I believe it is crucial to our society and in particular our schools to encourage children to engage in their own pursuits, to find their voices, and to immerse themselves in the beauty of the world around them. Our role, as educators, is to support rather than control. Our role is to watch closely and patiently in order to understand the goals, the needs, and the cravings of each child. With this careful observation, we can learn what tools and experiences we might lay in the child’s path as he moves across the landscape of learning (Black, 2016).

The voices of children offer us important insights and new perspectives to elevate our own thinking. As Black (2016) reminds us, “human cognitive diversity exists for a reason; our differences are the genius—and the conscience—of our species” (Section 4, para. 26). Each of us chooses a particular path to take to make our unique contribution to the world. When we trust children as principle players in their learning (New, 2007), there is an opportunity to develop the necessary abilities to contribute as members of society (Meyer, et al., 2018). Laying these mo‘olelo side-by-side has illuminated the sub-themes—trusting the strength of the child, the child as a researcher, and the child striving to develop his own voice as he seeks acceptance in the world—which further refine the qualities of the child that serves as a central tenet of my professional practice.

In studying the central question of this research—how has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based Education philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a Kanaka Hawai‘i?—it is clear that the value of creating space for children to see their capabilities, pursue their own learning, and develop their voices is paramount to the way I walk in the world. The image of the child I hold has everything to do with how I design the learning opportunities within my classroom community. It has been influential in my practice to look towards rich possibilities for new growth and seek the transformation of my work with children and their families in order to empower the children as integral members of our community. It is our role to watch, to notice what inspires the child, brightens her eyes, draws out her laughter, eases her shoulders. These are the moments where learning can occur (Black, 2016).

As I have taken on the need to nurture a child’s connection to our home and the culture they are growing up in, the opportunities I offer children are more intentionally grounded in ‘ike Hawai‘i. There are more concrete opportunities for learning trips involving cultural sites and reading and retelling of traditional mo‘olelo. There are more abstract opportunities for ‘ike Hawai‘i such as increased collaborative and collective work, purposeful inclusion of families in our learning community, and more ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i integrated into our routines. As my understanding develops, this shift in practice will continue to enrich my teaching and my growing conceptualization of my indigeneity. This new focus encourages me to work with integrity and humility.

Chapter 4: Kuleana

Mo'olelo: Hilo March

The Hilo March begins... 'ike hou ana i ka nani a' o Hilo i ka uluwehiwehi o ka lehua... and my family rises to stand. My dad's shoulders lift, and his voice booms the words with pride. Our family is the only group standing; the blood rushes to my cheeks. I am embarrassed. Everyone is looking at us. I never wanted to stand out and have others looking at me, wondering why this family was standing up in the middle of the restaurant.

Although the early lessons about a kuleana for the land of my birth were embarrassing for my five-year-old self, today I am proud of that practice. More importantly, I did not truly understand the depth of my commitment to Hilo until, just a few days after my mother's death, I remember:

We are in the gym as the children are preparing for May Day practice. Teachers are lining children up, showing them where to stand, where to walk and when to sit. The noise is distracting, chatter from all sides. Then the musicians begin to warm up, to play music to settle the air. Those familiar notes sound. The words tug at my heart, only heard in my head. Most of the people in the gym are unaware of the familiar strains, but I hear 'ike hou ana i ka nani a' o Hilo, i ka uluwehiwehi a ka lehua, and the tears begin to flow. My mother's death was fresh in my heart; it had been just days, and there were those familiar notes calling me to stand. I stood, the proud girl from Hilo. No one noticed, but my partner and an old friend who strummed his guitar not knowing what chords he was striking. I motioned to my partner to take care of the children, and I left the gym. I stood looking out over my school, childhood, and history and let the tears run. The moment passed slowly. I collected myself, breathed deeply and returned to the

children, and the joyful work of kindergartners dancing the hula.

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Kuleana: Definition and Analysis

There are many lessons embedded within the mo‘olelo of *Hilo March*. It speaks of a love for Hawai‘i and for Hilo in particular and a willingness to stand up for what I believed. The subtle presence of learning in every experience is illustrated as that initial learning around aloha ‘āina, and kūpa‘a from childhood grew into a more powerful lesson years later as an adult standing tall in the gym. That lesson from my father came rushing back when I was ready to embrace it more fully.

The second theme generated through the analysis of nā mo‘olelo is the importance of kuleana. The definition provided by Pukui and Elbert (1986) acknowledges the complexity of the word kuleana—right, privilege, concern, responsibility, authority, interest, tenure, function, blood relative through whom a relationship to less close relatives is traced (p. 179)—which calls for steadfastness and commitment that induces a strong sense of responsibility and relationship for self and others. I believe, as Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013) emphasized, that as an educator living in Hawai‘i, I have the kuleana to ground the children in this place and in the culture that nurtures their childhood in order for them to grow to be responsible citizens and thoughtful stewards of this place. Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua (2013) noted, using the words of a Hālau Kū Māna graduate, “we’re in Hawai‘i; learn about where you’re living. Learn about the values and the culture of the place you call home” (p. 151). Kaomea (2005) asked non-indigenous educators to “listen closely to our wisdom as well as our concerns, interrogate unearned power and privilege (including one’s own), and use this privilege to confront oppression and ‘stand behind’ Natives so that our

voices can be heard” (p. 40). As educators in Hawai‘i, we are all obligated to take the kuleana of raising the children of Hawai‘i seriously.

As the following chapter articulates, kuleana has become more than being a mother and teacher; it means continually transforming how I live—among my children, at home, and my interactions with the world. This theme ran as a common thread in 15 of the 73 mo‘olelo of this study. In addressing my overarching research question—how has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based educational philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a Kanaka Hawai‘i?—I have chosen nine stories to illustrate the four aspects of kuleana that emerged. I noticed throughout these stories that I used phrases like “that our family has been of that land for generations” and “my commitment is to offer the children...” I also note “firmly stating that this is our work for the day” (Mo‘olelo: Jordan: Building Trust), “I held strong... keep my resolve... firmly grasping... encouraging and unrelenting... embracing” (Mo‘olelo: Jordan: Building Trust), and “new world of school... a haven, a place of excitement and growth” (Mo‘olelo: First Days of School). My concept of kuleana aligns with that of Pukui and Elbert. It is illustrated through four sub-themes: 1) the importance of aloha ‘āina, 2) creating trusting and caring spaces within which children can thrive, 3) standing firm—kūpa‘a—for my beliefs, and 4) the importance of continuing to learn, innovate, and grow.

Kuleana: A Sense of Aloha ‘Āina

The seeds of my commitment to aloha ‘āina were planted in the early days of my life. Those childhood moments of building a relationship with nature are evident through the body of this study. The following mo‘olelo, *Fishing in Kapoho* and *Jordan: Building Trust* demonstrate

how this relationship, formed in childhood, blossomed into the strong responsibility and privilege I carry to provide children with both sensory and culture-rich experiences in the ‘āina.

Mo‘olelo: Fishing in Kapoho

Carrying my bamboo pole, a dented metal bucket half full of water from the fishpond, and a paper sack of stale bread, I headed along the outer wall of the pond looking for just the right spot. A flat rock with some grass reaching across its surface meant it was not too hot to sit on. Tugging at the line hooked taut to the bottom of the pole, I loosened the hook and held it carefully in one hand while the other pinched the bread. Rolling a piece of the soft, white bread between my thumb and fingers, I created a ball. I squeezed it firmly around the hook and *plunk* into the pond; it sank.

I waited, trying to be patient. I peered into the water to see what fish were gathering. Sometimes I would see manini and mullet. My favorites for eating. Other times there would be stick fish that fascinated me, or the Moorish idol or humuhumu that darted out from between the rocks. These fish tended to ignore my bait and that was for the best. My grandfather’s words played over in my head. “You can keep the manini or the mullet to eat but everything else you have to throw back.” I knew this was to keep those special, less plentiful fish in the pond.

The pole began to bob, jerked by the fish tearing at the bread. The pole bent deeper. The bamboo rubbed the inside of my tiny hands. A manini! Its grey-green tint was glinting as it flashed from side to side, trying to leave the hook behind. I loved catching manini. They were small enough for me to handle myself. I pulled back hard with both hands. The curve of the pole deepening and pop! Out swept the fish splashing and flipping in the air around me. The line swung past me as I tried to grab it. My hands were grasping thin air more than once before finally securing the line. I pulled the hook from the lip of the thrashing fish... ouch!... and poked

myself in the process. A tiny droplet of blood wiped on the seat of my shorts, and the fish dropped, flopping wildly into my waiting bucket of water. My catch swam in circles looking for a way out.

“Daddy! Daddy! I caught one!” I yelled as I ran with water splashing from the bucket at my side. “Can we cook it?”

“Yes! Great catch! Let’s clean your fish.”

We used my grandfather’s knife to slit open the fish’s belly and clean out its insides. I stood a bit taller, proud that I was not squeamish about gutting fish. We rinsed the fish and dropped it onto the waiting hibachi. The skin sizzled, sending out the most delicious smell.

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Planting the Seeds of Aloha ‘Āina: Analysis

Throughout my stories, there is a deep sense of connection to this land I call home. Beginning with my earliest memories in Hilo and Kapoho as a young child, I learned to revel in the beauty of Hawai‘i. My ‘ohana instilled a love for this place and this ‘āina that sits in my na‘au today. I was raised to be proud of where I come from, and to stand up for what I believe is right.

Fishing was one way to engage with the environment around me, and I learned that there were protocols to that pastime. The idea of conservation was clear: “Manini or the mullet to eat but everything else... you have to throw back.” We fished for what we would eat and put back what were unusual or scarce. I knew how to clean the fish myself, and I took the responsibility of using a sharp knife seriously. The consequences of cleaning fish in the water at the pond’s edge, where eels hid amongst the rocks, were learned by observing the painful recovery of an older

friend. “Ma ka hana ka ‘ike”³ I learned these lessons by doing, and they made a significant impact on who I am today.

Mo‘olelo: Jordan: Building Trust

Jordan was defiant, reluctant, wanting to push away from the group, and yet seeking connection. He was hesitant to step into the mud and water of the lo‘i. We coaxed, joked, and encouraged but to no avail. He was adamant, even angry. This was not new to us. We often have children who are reluctant, uncomfortable or simply opposed to this work. Each year we find ways in... firmly stating that this is our work for the day.

We gathered at the lo‘i, kūpuna sharing their mana‘o with us. The children were excited to be here. Tiny bare feet lined the edge of the lo‘i where the grass stepped down into water and mud. Kumu held a kalo plant up.

“This is kalo... taro,” she said.

“The leaf looks like a heart!” exclaimed Jason.

“It does. Doesn’t it?”

“The stem is called the hā, and this part at the bottom is the kalo. We are going to harvest today, so you are going to need to reach down to the bottom of the kalo and pull up. You aren’t going to grab the hā... that is kind of...” she placed her hands around her neck in a sort of strangling motion. “So we have to reach down,” she reached down to demonstrate on a nearby plant... “and pull.” She showed them the kalo she pulled from the mud, mud dripping down her forearm. “Then, rinse it off.” She shook it gently in the water, “pull off the roots. Then you can throw it over here,” she said as she pointed to the edge of the grass where the two kalo lay in the sun. “Do you think you can do that?”

³ From Pukui, M.K. (1983). *‘Ōlelo No ‘eau: Hawaiian proverbs and poetical sayings*, Bishop Museum Press, p. 227.

“YES!!!!,” the children cried, eager to finally get in.

Jordan had begun to inch away from the edge, hoping to escape from this work. My hand wrapped around his, I whispered “we’re staying here... this is our work” But his hand continued to defy... pushing past my grip, his feet inching away just slightly... but no! I held firm, breathing deeply to keep my resolve from turning into the sourness of anger. Into the lo‘i, we stepped together... me firmly grasping his hand, encouraging and unrelenting. He turned to flee, and my arms went around him, firm but embracing. “This is our work today,” I reminded. He struggled, and then... his body relaxed against mine, his hand softened, and we began the work of pulling kalo. Reaching deep into the mud, dislodging the kalo, pulling off the roots, rinsing the mud and throwing our harvest onto the grassy bank.

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The Valuing of Aloha ‘Āina In My Teaching: Analysis and Literature

As noted above, I need to pass on this kuleana for our land and home—this sense of aloha ‘āina—to the children in my care. It is vital to place experiences in the children’s paths that will challenge them, encouraging them to develop a healthy respect and aloha for their homeland. This kuleana to our island home, to care for this land, has grown into a strong component in the work I do with my haumāna today. I am as firm and unrelenting in my commitment to nurturing my students’ sense of aloha ‘āina as I am with individual children in the lo‘i. We create opportunities to challenge their senses and immerse them in the beauty that surrounds them each day. Experiences in the lo‘i and the loko i‘a, as well as hikes into Mānoa valley and along its ridges, help our haumāna gather the meaningful experiences they need to connect with this place.

It is critically important in developing a kuleana to Hawai‘i that our keiki bond with the places of their childhood. Sobel (1993) embraced Gussow’s definition of place as “a piece of the

environment that is claimed by feelings” (p. 159) and added his thoughts stating, “to experience a place deeply is to bond with a place” (p. 159). Nabhan & Trimble (1994) described the way indigenous children once explored their surroundings while also gathering the stories of their place as a way to become “ecologically literate about their home ground” (p. 83). Today we know that this exploration and the relationship to the ‘āina that ensues is critical to our children’s commitment to their home and their Earth. Many children may never have “access to unpeopled places, neither food producing nor wildlands” (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994, p. 11). This can leave them without the ability to make that connection to their place that will serve as their foundation going forward. Louv (2008) spoke of the potential of our natural world: “we can become aware of how blessed our children can be—biologically, cognitively, and spiritually—through positive physical connection to nature” (p. 36). The benefits of a relationship with nature are numerous. Nature offers children a setting to “learn to take risks, overcome fears, make new friends, regulate emotions, and create imaginary worlds” (Hanscom, 2016, p. 3).

Meyer (2016) expressed concern over experiences that are lacking in our schools stating, “We have compromised with the devil when the empowerment of our students does not include physical challenges, spiritual epiphanies, passionate dialogue, and the cultural foundations that recognize the senses as pivotal to how we learn and how we create meaning” (p. 33). Offering children experiences in their natural surroundings creates opportunities for that type of sensory engagement that not only deepens their commitment to place but allows them to strengthen their senses and their sense of well-being. Burgess (2013) credited “a kūpuna, whose name [she] never knew” (p. 30) with an eloquent reminder of the importance of instilling aloha ‘āina in our keiki— “If you plan for a year—plant kalo. If you plan for ten years—plant koa. But, if you plan for a 100 years—teach the children Aloha ‘Āina (to Love the Land)” (p. 30). If we want our

keiki to have a love of this land, a respect for the place of their childhood, and a commitment to its future, we owe it to them to immerse them in the places, the textures, the colors, and the fragrances of their island home.

Our Kuleana to Aloha ‘Āina: Summary

My kuleana is to invest in my children, our children, so that they will grow up firmly rooted in the ‘āina of their home. It is critical to all of our well-being that the children engage deeply with the beauty and culture of their home in order to become caring, connected members of the world around them. As Vaughan (2019) stated, “teaching is a way of sharing that bedecks the ‘āina, abundant and thriving with blossoms for more lei” (p. 37). Knowing the importance of a child’s connection to nature and the deep, meaningful interactions they need to bond with their homeland, I strive to provide a variety of opportunities for my haumāna to engage with the natural environment and the cultural learning that is embedded within that environment. I encourage them to slow down, feel the texture of the rocks in the river, and notice the many greens on the mountainsides. Becoming grounded in the place of their childhood will strengthen the commitment a child feels towards this place throughout her life.

Kuleana: Creating Trusting and Caring Spaces Within Which Children can Thrive

Children have the right to feel safe, cared for, heard, and known in all the relationships of their childhood. It is my privilege and a central concern of my practice to create a safe space, both physically and emotionally, for children. The following mo‘olelo of *My First Days of School* and *Child Holding On To The Pole* share those moments at the beginning of the school year, when children, families, and even teachers are most sensitive and vulnerable. This is a time when my commitment to honor the child, as I invite her into this new setting, becomes key to how our relationship will develop over time.

Mo‘olelo: My First Days of School

Soft pink blooms and heart-shaped leaves, the curve of polka-dotted pots centered on each table, and lauhala baskets filled with new markers. There are baskets of brightly-colored books and walls blank in anticipation of the children and their creations. These are the first images awaiting the voices of the children who will soon inhabit this space. Everything is waiting; holding still for just a moment before all will become a blur of children and parents; of questions and expectations!

They begin to arrive, fresh faces, some with tentative smiles seeking my eyes to see if I can be trusted, and others with grins sharing their eagerness to engage in this new relationship. The child within me straightens, tenses, feeling their anxiety and their anticipation. Each new beginning takes me back to my first day of school.

We had just moved to Honolulu from Hilo. Tears were flying in all directions! “You didn’t say goodbye!” “Wait! I need another kiss!” My heart pounded, my mother was trying to smile, trying to be encouraging, but nothing calmed me. Eventually, we left... walking to the car... we had failed.

I went home to my new house to climb the shower tree in the front yard, my tree. My heart began to calm, my tears dried, and my mother went into the house to gather wet laundry to hang on the line. I didn’t know what to do. I had gotten what I wanted. I was not at school, but now what? I climbed higher and higher until I reached the spot I had claimed as my own, scanning the street and getting to know my new world.

We headed to school the next day to try again. My mom was holding her breath, trying to be brave. She pulled at my hand, rushing me along the sidewalk outside the fence. She pulled me through the gate, letting it slam behind me. To me, she seemed shaken.

We walked to my classroom. Miss Tan stood tall, looming over me.

“Good morning. Come on in and say goodbye to your mommy.” The tears began again as I looked at the children already playing, talking to each other, building with blocks, painting at an easel, laughing with friends. The same panic returned. They all seemed to know each other. I knew no one. My heart pounded. I couldn’t let go of my mom’s hand. She tried to pry my fingers from hers, but my crying got louder, more fitful. I clung desperately to her hand, and again we left, retreating to the parking lot. Back to the safety of the only place on O‘ahu that I knew, our house and my tree.

Finally, on the fourth day, we entered with more strength. My mom seemed to have a plan. I wonder now if she had talked to another mother for advice or if she and the teacher had made a decision together. She walked me to a small, friendly-looking child.

“This is Kathy. She lives in our neighborhood,” said my mother, encouragingly. She placed my hand in Kathy’s hand and fled! Years later, a mother myself by then, I learned that she ran to the car, tears streaming down her cheeks. This time seemingly successful, she returned home to the laundry and my tree, empty in the front yard.

Memories of those first days encourage me to crouch down, opening my arms for a hug. “Good morning. I’m Mrs. Hayes. You can call me Aunty Donna. I’m so excited to meet you.” Some parents push their children forward.

“Say hello to your teacher.” Some offer a handshake or a hug. Some are nervous, wondering how the goodbye will really go. My memories guide me, softening my tone, and slowing our transition to say goodbye to parents.

“Tell mom to be good! We are going to have a fun day!” To the parents, “We will take good care of him, not to worry.”

My first full day was a blur of painting, laughing, stories, snacks, and a boy named Jack, who seemed to be the focus of our teacher's energies. I loved the blocks, drawing with crayons on large sheets of paper, making books, and singing songs with our class. Kathy became my friend and my entry into this new world of school. A world I would come to see as a second home, a haven, a place of excitement and growth. I would reside there quietly, at the fringes, always a bit cautious before joining in.

The five-year-old in me thinks carefully about what I will offer the children on their first day. There will be hints of projects to come. There will be a bit of paint, some great stories, gentle hugs, and time to listen to each other; time to begin to form the relationships that will be so important in our work.

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Empathy Creates Trusting and Caring Spaces: Analysis

As a young child, my first days of kindergarten came during a time of upheaval. We had just moved from Hilo to Honolulu, and I knew not a soul. I was a quiet child, and a new school left me wide-eyed and off-balance. The opportunity to sit in my tree, to breathe, and return to try again another day gave me the time I must have needed. That entry into the world of school developed empathy in me for the child who hesitates and pleads silently for patience. As this mo'olelo states, my "memories of those first days encourage me to crouch down, opening my arms for a hug." I try to create the time and space for the child to breathe and open themselves to our classroom as they feel ready. I see myself in the faces of children each year; children who are afraid, lonely, or need to make sure that our classroom is safe. The following mo'olelo is one of many I could retell about the beginning of the year that invokes the five-year-old within me to step forward and offer a loving hand to each child who enters.

Mo‘olelo: Child Holding On To The Pole

The years continue to unfurl, and parents and children fill the walkways, holding hands. It is the first day for a new generation of families, some walking with excitement and some with nerves right at the surface. The classrooms are ready, doors open, with teachers smiling and eager for the year to begin.

A frazzled father comes in the door, and I can see his child lingering outside, with her arms firmly locked around a pole.

“What do I do? I can’t get her to come inside?” he pleads.

“Hang on. Let me try.” I step outside and crouch down with that child, who couldn’t enter kindergarten for days, at the ready.

“Hi. I’m Mrs. Hayes. I am going to be your teacher.” She looked at me with wary eyes as her grip tightened on the pole, wondering what my strategy would be. “I won’t make your dad leave, but I do need you to come inside because my job is to keep you safe. Can you do that for me?” An imperceptible nod. She cautiously takes my outstretched hand, releasing the pole, and follows me in the door. Her father breathes a sigh of relief, looking at me with eyes that extend friendship and gratitude. He helped her find her name tag, Christina, and then said a quick goodbye. We both knew that lingering would only make this more difficult. “Not to worry. We will be fine.”

Christina trailed me, clinging to my hand, huddled against my side while I greeted other children. “Hi. How are you?”

“I’m Dylan. Can I draw?”

“Sure. Christina, do you think you could draw with Dylan?” A look to consider the option. A shake of her head suggesting not yet. “OK, maybe later.”

The classroom has filled with eager families and children. There are children dressed in school colors, some in their favorite outfits. One has a kitty cat tail hanging from the back of her skirt. I look forward to getting to know her and her parents. There is a buzz as children move about exploring the materials that are offered on tables and in corners. The block corner has attracted a small group. They are forming irregular enclosures with the blocks and placing animals in each one. They work side-by-side, engaged in a wordless collaboration. The time comes for us to start our day. We begin to say goodbye to the last of the families.

The room clears of parents and grandparents. “Friends... let’s clean up, and we can gather on the rug.” Some children begin to put toys back in baskets, books back on shelves. Others continue to play, seemingly unaware of our words. It is the beginning of kindergarten. I remind myself that it will take days or even weeks before they all respond to their teachers’ voices. This is that time... so much talking, so much explaining. Our patience will be tested many, many times each day.

We gather in a circle, helping children find their way to a spot that seems comfortable. Christina is still at my side. “Come on, Christina, let’s sit here. Jamie, this is Christina. Why don’t you sit right here?” I motion to the spot on the other side of Christina.

“Good morning, everyone. I’m Mrs. Hayes, and this is Mrs. Lee. We’re so excited to meet you. We are going to go around the circle and just say our names so we can all begin to get to know each other.”

I motion to the child next to me. Luckily, this is someone who is feeling brave.

“Hi, I’m Nancy Sheridan.”

“Mahalo, Nancy. Thank you for telling us your first and your last name. Your last name tells us who your family is.”

“Good morning, I’m Matthew Ching.”

“Aloha e Matthew.” And we continue around the circle. We arrive at Christina, still clinging to my hand. I squeeze her hand, and she looks at me. I whisper to give it a try, and she says quietly, “I’m Christina Wong,” as she looks down at the rug. This is the beginning; this is all we can hope for today. It is a start.

The day continues on into exploring the classroom. Christina is still attached, my opihi, in need of something that will capture her long enough to leave my side. Jamie, the child who sat next to Christina in our circle, is playing in the pretending corner. She is happily cooking hot dogs and scooping ice cream onto small cones.

“Hey Jamie, can Christina come and make dinner with you?”

“Yes,” says Jamie looking up at Christina, “come on. We are making dinner for the babies.” Christina moves further into the space, picking up the ice cream scooper that drops plastic ice cream onto the cones. The two girls begin to work quietly side by side, and I slowly back away. She has taken her first steps.

She’ll be fine. I have met this child before; I have been this child.

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A Child’s Right to a Gentle Welcome: Analysis and Literature

My kuleana is to build caring and trusting relationships with my haumāna. I am committed to upholding the dignity of each child in my care. I offer each child the time and space they need to feel comfortable and secure. Some take my hand readily immersing themselves in the classroom from the first moments we are together, while others travel the edges unsure and wary. These children need to know that I am there as their safety net and their security blanket. They need to see the kindergartner within me that softens my gaze and quiets

my tone, letting them know they have someone who cares and is willing to wait, walking steadily alongside them until they are ready.

Edwards (2012) described the need for the teacher and child to be in a relationship. They are working together in concert, and the teacher must approach the work with a similar attitude to the child. In Reggio Emilia schools, the educators often describe this work using the metaphor of playing a game of catch with a ball (the learning and inquiry) being tossed back and forth between children and adults (Edwards, 2012). Likewise, the relationality of learning holds a strong position in Hawaiian tradition with haumāna learning by spending time with their kumu. They observe, listen, and “noho”—“making a commitment to establish a relationship with a place or a person” (Lopes, 2016, p. 32).

Each young child who comes into our care is seeking a place of trust and safety. They are hoping we will take the time to build a relationship with them to meet them where they are. Beginning with an appreciation for the child, his identity and background, allows us to “open the door to schooling where each learner comes to the educational conversation fully able to participate” (Sumida & Meyer, 2008, p. 362). There is a complexity of experiences that are necessary to bring about new learning that requires “patience and courage” (p. 358), and acknowledged that it is the “richness of human diversity and education that is at once elevating and humane” (p. 358).

Offering a child the gift of time is one of the most challenging tasks for an educator. How can we manage all that is being asked of us by external forces, while stepping back to allow the child the space and time to grow and develop in his own way? Each child deserves our compassionate attention as they come with their own stories and their wonderings around

learning. We step gently into the school year, feeling the pace needed by the group and the individual children.

The physical spaces we create for children are as important as the metaphorical spaces we create. In Reggio Emilia schools, the environment is considered an essential partner in the education of the child. “To act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible; it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge” (Gandini, 2012, p. 339). There are fundamental shifts in the classroom environment that can support culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015), similar to the environmental settings in Reggio Emilia. In both Reggio Emilia classrooms (Gandini, 2012) and culturally responsive classrooms (Hammond, 2015), educators ask themselves what the environment says to the children, what the materials imply about exploration, the capability of the child, and their classroom community values. We design environments carefully as each inclusion reflects our values and our beliefs (Biermeier, 2015). There are rituals, protocols, and attention to beauty, nature, songs, and the arts in classrooms infused with culture (Hammond, 2015; Meyer, et al., 2018) and in the classrooms of Reggio Emilia (Gandini, 2012).

Many culture-based experiences in Hawai‘i occur in nature (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013) such as learning at the lo‘i and the loko i‘a. Programs based in ‘āina, culture, and language have become strong proponents of “educational self-determination” (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013, p. 5) and offer great value to the Hawaiian community. Wurdeman-Thurston and Kaomea (2015) strongly advocate for culturally related literacy materials to address literacy learning from the strengths of the children rather than their deficits.

The Privilege of A Caring and Trusting Space: Summary

I believe that the work of teaching is a relational endeavor at its core. The caring relationships I build with my haumāna, and the empathy I hold for each child become critical as he pursues his own learning and his understanding of identity. Our classroom community offers each child the space to enter into the learning at their own pace and in their own way. We create new learning together through a variety of experiences, and the learning environment is one of reciprocity and genuine caring and trust.

There is an intentionality to the environment we create for and with children. Oil pastel drawings of Night Blooming Cereus capture the eye and lauhala baskets of markers and crayons fill our shelves. There are photos of children laughing, playing, and concentrating on their work. Each of these offers the child an entry, a way to see himself within the space of this community. Each child sees that we have made room for her presence in the future work that we will do together.

Kuleana: Kūpa‘a—To Stand Strong for What I Believe

To stand strong, kūpa‘a, is a sense of authority and commitment I pull from my na‘au and my life experiences. The fortitude and courage to stand up for my beliefs come from many places. *Aboard the Averick* and *The Piazza and a Bubble in Your Mouth* offer moments to help the reader understand the foundation that supports my strength and the deep commitment to the rights of children. This strength is what fuels my voice in my practice today.

Mo‘olelo: Aboard the Averick

“Tūtū, when you said yes to great, great grandfather David, did you hesitate?”

“I did. I wondered if I had the ‘missionary spirit’⁴ And if I had the strength to do the work that David was committed to. I had not ‘been so decidedly pious.’⁵ I struggled. Could I follow through on this commitment? Nevertheless, earlier that year, I had questioned myself: ‘What are my plans, what prospect of usefulness? Who has been or who will be benefitted by my existence?’⁶ I had to do something! I had to do something of purpose. I said, ‘Yes.’”

I often think about my work with young children. Some people can’t imagine it. They write it off with “I don’t know how you do it!” I have tried to picture you and great, great, grandfather David deciding to board a whaler bound for Hawai‘i... the middle of the ocean. The strength behind your choice, the bravery, and fortitude strikes me each time I read your journal. I have looked to you as a source of strength over the years. I see your commitment to education and to service, and find comfort and validation for my own choices. I have seen that I come from a line of educators, and that line continues in our son and daughter-in-law.

“But remember I was from a farm in Vermont. I had never even seen a city until shortly before I married your great, great, grandfather! I had no idea of the world outside. I was shocked when I arrived... my sensibilities were confronted with what we considered uncivilized behaviors. I remember the ‘poor creatures, how I [pitied] them, as I [saw] them almost entirely destitute of clothing.’⁷ But we did start to change. I did not recognize that transformation right away, but over the years, it became clear that we had shifted our views.”

⁴ From the personal journal of my great, great grandmother Sarah Joiner Lyman, written between 1832-1885, Lyman, S.J. (1970). *Sarah Joiner Lyman of Hawaii: Her own story*. Lyman House Memorial Museum, p. 10.

⁵ From the personal journal of my great, great grandmother Sarah Joiner Lyman, written between 1832-1885, Lyman, S.J. (1970). *Sarah Joiner Lyman of Hawaii: Her own story*. Lyman House Memorial Museum, p. 10.

⁶ From the personal journal of my great, great grandmother Sarah Joiner Lyman, written between 1832-1885, Lyman, S.J. (1970). *Sarah Joiner Lyman of Hawaii: Her own story*. Lyman House Memorial Museum, p. 9.

⁷ From the personal journal of my great, great grandmother Sarah Joiner Lyman, written between 1832-1885, Lyman, S.J. (1970). *Sarah Joiner Lyman of Hawaii: Her own story*. Lyman House Memorial Museum, p. 28.

This work is my effort to contribute; to add my breath to this fight for the children of Hawai‘i.

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Kūpa‘a: Standing on the Path of my Kūpuna: Analysis

In the footsteps of my ancestors from Vermont, I, too, have changed, awakening to a deeper understanding of myself and my connection to those who came before me. I came to know my great, great grandmother through the words in her journal. She is no longer just a name on a genealogical chart. She is now flesh and blood, a young woman with strong ideals and an arduous journey to stand for her beliefs. I have come to embrace my kūpuna in a wholly different way, seeing them as part of who I am, as important influences on my actions today. As Tūtū grew to accept the Hawaiian people and their culture as an important part of her life in her new home, I have taken decisive steps toward carrying the kuleana of my indigeneity into my actions and values. I find myself acknowledging new responsibilities and a new sense of who I am as I find my place in the mo‘okū‘auhau of my ‘ohana.

Mo‘olelo: The Piazza and A Bubble In Your Mouth

The piazza is a place at the center of the school, reminiscent of the many spaces around town where people gather, mingle, and celebrate. The children move in and out—a small boy traveling across to another classroom, returning with a camera in hand. A crawling baby makes her way out into the space, stopping to look behind her every so often. The adults are watching but giving her some distance, knowing she is seeking something. What might she be thinking? Is she looking for something? Is she wondering what will happen if she ventures farther than usual? Who are those people she can hear singing but cannot see? Her teachers know she has work to

do, she crawls with purpose, and they seem to trust that her work is worth the distance they are offering.

I see another setting in my mind, conjured by a conversation with a colleague.

“They say to catch a bubble in your mouth.”

“What?” I ask, not wanting to understand.

“Catch a bubble,” she says as she scoops the air with her hand and puts the imaginary bubble into her mouth. Her cheeks expand to hold that bubble, and her lips are forced closed to keep the bubble from escaping.

“No way! Are you kidding?”

“No, I saw it on the mainland, it’s a thing! They catch a bubble in their mouth and walk with butterfly hands,” she adds, crossing her hands behind her back.

“What is wrong with people? Why would they treat children like that?”

What is the difference between that and prisoners in zip ties? I wonder. What are schools trying to do to children? What are their goals? I cannot get this out of my mind. I go online to see what this looks like. Sure enough, some teachers feel this is a way to keep everyone quiet and safe as they walk down the halls. There are charts and bulletin boards; there are cutesy posters to tell us why we need to be quiet when someone else is talking. Do they think this will help children develop self-control, a strong voice, self-advocacy? Do they think clip art is going to teach children to be respectful? There are bribes of bubble gum and recess! I am livid! How can these people not see what they are doing is wrong? Demeaning to children? How can they have it so wrong? What is school doing to children and childhood?

Months later, I experience this for myself. We take a learning trip, and the docent feels the need for quiet when heading down a hallway. Instead of asking the children to be quiet as

they walk past some offices, to be respectful to those who are working, she says, “Put a bubble in your mouths.” I am horrified.

The parents look to me, their eyes asking, “What? Did she really just say that to our children?”

I turn to the children: “Take the bubble out of your mouths. Please walk quietly through the building until we get outside. Thanks, guys.” And of course, they do just what we need them to do. My feedback to this site is that their program was beautiful, but their docent was insulting to the children! Still livid!

Something brushes my ankle, I look down to see that sweet baby looking up at me. Her smile reveals two tiny teeth. I crouch down. She giggles as she pulls at the bow on my shoe. After moments of contemplation, she crawls on, heading back from where she came; her teacher waiting at the door, encouraging her with smiles and “brava, Angela, brava!”

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Kūpa‘a for the Voices of Children: Analysis and Literature

I hold a steadfast commitment to improving education for the children in Hawai‘i. I see my drive to ensure that children—in my classroom and at home—will continue to see their kuleana to embrace their island home. I see it in my son and daughter-in-law, and I hear it as my haumāna laugh alongside one another while working in the lo‘i. My heart is full, immersed in the sounds of the Hilo March playing in my mind as I see my dad standing proud, I feel the arms of a friend embracing me in a hug that does not let go. I am committed to engaging the children in developing their sense of kuleana and commitment as they discover and strengthen their voices. “This work is my effort to contribute; to add my breath to this fight for the children of Hawai‘i” (Mo‘olelo: Aboard the Averick) speaks directly to the commitment that sits at the center of all

that I do. The sense of kuleana that I carry from my kūpuna sits firmly at the foundation of my efforts to honor our ‘ohana, as well as advocate for the rights of children.

If we want children to grow up to speak for themselves and their home, if we want them to kūpa‘a for what is right, we have two concerns in these early childhood years. One is to model strength, honesty, and integrity, and the second is to create opportunities for the children to stretch their voices, stepping into spaces that help them see their ability to speak out and stand firm. In early childhood, children build their own morality by taking on the values and mindset that their family, their culture, and their community (Hawkins, 2014). It is our kuleana to model the mindset and commitment we strive to develop in our keiki. If we are to create space for the child to develop her voice, we must be prepared to stand firmly for her rights.

Critical theory seeks to amplify the voices of those who are often silenced (Freire, 2017), which in this case are young children. Fay (as cited in Creswell, 2014) described critical theory as addressing the empowerment of marginalized groups to rise above limits placed on them by the majority. These areas of marginalization usually include “race, class, and gender” (Fay, as cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 65). In this case, I use critical theory to uphold the empowerment of the young child and the early childhood educator within a Hawaiian context.

The critical theorists’ fight for the empowerment of the marginalized (Fay, as cited in Creswell, 2014; Freire, 2017) is well-supported in the Reggio Emilia methods that acknowledge the young child and the early childhood educator as intellectuals researching the world in order to build new understandings (Gandini, 2012). In our Hawaiian context, there is still not enough “culturally relevant, place-based education to transform and liberate the human potential of students” (Meyer, et al., 2018, p. 19). The weaving together of Hawaiian Culture-based practices and Reggio Emilia practices has created another avenue towards transformation and liberation.

Rather than seeing children as future citizens or future adults, childhood sociologists say that “children are competent human beings in their own right here and now” (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014, p. 120). When children feel safe, known, and valued, they are more likely to take hold of learning experiences (Hammond, 2015). The philosophy and pedagogy of Reggio Emilia early childhood schools are described by (Moss, 2012) as a “pedagogy of listening” (p. 106) where children are heard, valued, and respected. Gardner (2012) spoke of the Reggio Emilia schools as places where “each child’s intellectual, emotional, social, and moral potentials are carefully cultivated and guided” (p. xiv). Places with children involved in “long-term engrossing projects which are carried out in a beautiful, healthy, love-filled setting” (p. xiv). The work of Reggio Emilia offers compelling connections to the work of Hawaiian Culture-based Education in their need for the development of the voice of the child (Edwards, 2012; Meyer, et al., 2018) and the importance of experiential learning grounded in place and relationships (Biermeier, 2015; Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013). Kaomea (2017) expressed a need for more child-centered practices for native Hawaiian children to develop their voices so they will be able to “speak for their community, their rights, their history, and their people” (J. Kaomea, personal communication, July 2017).

Kūpa‘a: Summary

As my kūpuna dedicated their lives to their ideals and the kuleana they carried in their hearts, I find myself standing strong, firmly committed to the defense of the young child’s right to develop his voice and his identity in his own time. Burgess (2013) suggested, “assume that each person you meet or talk to is sacred and worthy, and that will help you interact and treat people with respect and dignity. Your children can be your best teachers if you let them” (p. 20).

If we can hold this idea of respect and dignity in the center of our practice, we can stand strong for the children and for our kuleana.

Kuleana: Continuing to Grow, Learn, and Innovate

Children offer us new eyes and fresh perspectives with which to view our lives. As I have placed my trust in the children as they explore, wonder, and pursue the world around us, I am privileged to grow, learn, and innovate alongside them. The new pedagogical learning I have embraced in pursuit of a better way to support and collaborate with children has resulted not only in the enrichment of my practice but in my blossoming indigeneity.

Mo‘olelo: My First Teaching Position—Beginnings

I stepped into my first classroom in October—the school year had already started. My classroom would be part of the teacher’s workroom; I would teach in a fishbowl. My first steps would be on rocky ground. Holomua.

Our principal led me back to where school photos were being taken in the teachers’ workroom.

“Your classroom will be in here,” she said, gesturing to the workroom. “We need to keep the ditto machine, the xerox machine, and teachers’ mailboxes on this side, but you can have the rest of the room.”

My mind raced ahead. How would this work?

“Where is the furniture?” I asked timidly.

“In the storeroom. John will take you in, and you can choose what you want.”

“Ok. Sounds good.” Someone led us into the storeroom to find furniture, toys, and materials that could create the classroom for the children who would arrive on Monday morning! We chose several round tables that were old and a bit rough.

“If we paint the tops, do you think we can smooth the tables out a bit?” I asked my husband.

“Yup. We can sand them down and make them work,” he said.

“Let’s take that tall, brown shelf. That can hold toys and books,” I was beginning to imagine the room.

“Look! There are paint cans. They’re light. Not a lot in them.”

“Take them all. We might need them,” I answered. “Each table can be a different color.” The colors would set the palette for this first classroom: a coral, a sunny yellow, a lavender, and a bright blue. I hoped the children would love them. “Let’s take those two shelves too. They can divide the room up, and what’s that?” I asked, pointing to a light-colored wooden piece of child-sized furniture tipped up against the wall in the corner.

“Oh! Look! Turn it over!” cried my husband. I hoisted it up and turned it upside down. It was a small boat; I rocked it gently. “That was in my kindergarten when I was little!” He was touched to see this sweet reminder of his childhood. “The kids will love it!”

We carried load after load to the classroom. He sanded the tables while I worked to figure out how to arrange the room. We walked in circles around the tables, applying paint. We hoped to make the surface as smooth as possible for the children. There were a couple of bulletin boards, blocks borrowed from another teacher, some books gathered from the library, and the sweet rocking boat. Eventually, we would order toys and supplies to arrive, but now we needed to make the room as ready as possible to welcome the children on Monday.

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Teacher as Learner: Analysis

My commitment to continual learning and innovation reaches back to those initial experiences setting up my first classroom. There was a need for flexibility and creativity to create a classroom environment out of thin air. This abrupt start to my career galvanized my position as a learner within my work as an educator. An openness that began out of my necessity to stay afloat grew into an internal drive to seek out learning and innovation in the service of children. As my master's research around Hawaiian Culture-based education and my understanding of Reggio Emilia philosophy came together, curiosity and the intrigue of powerful new possibilities for uplifting the voices of children set me on a path of inspired learning. The weaving together of these two philosophies has fueled my commitment to holomua to empower the child in our Hawaiian context and to embrace my growing sense of my indigeneity.

Mo'olelo: Our Deepest Fear

My phone rings. U2. The song "Beautiful Day" begins its refrain. I look forward to these meetings over Facetime, look forward to the conversation that brings me a step closer to what I am trying to do. When I finished my master's work, one of my cohort friends asked if I would continue into the doctoral program. "Not a chance!" was my instant response. I had no real reason to go in that direction. No need for further studies, no need to get another degree at this point in my career.

He shared a poem, *Our Deepest Fear*,⁸ with us that day before we headed to our graduation ceremony.

⁸ From Williamson, M. (2009). *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a course in miracles*. HarperOne, LOC 2107-2108.

Our Deepest Fear

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness

That most frightens us.

We ask ourselves

Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you *not* to be?

You are a child of God.

Your playing small

Does not serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking

So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine,

As children do.

We were born to make manifest

The glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us;

It's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,

We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we're liberated from our own fear,
 Our presence automatically liberates others. (Williamson, 2009)

This poem captured me at my core. Could I step forward to shine in whatever way I was meant? I tended to be the one to hesitate, to stay to the side. My master's cohort offered me a space to shine, to develop and strengthen my voice. They encouraged, nudged, and held me as I found my place amongst them. They shared their wisdom, they offered their insight, and they listened—letting me know I had something to offer—something worth listening to.

I held on to that poem. I revisited it over and over again, often reflecting on its lines. “It is our light that frightens us.”⁹ I had loved writing and asking questions that brought new thinking into the conversation. Could Hawaiian language and culture become a more integral part of what we do? Could my practice begin to shift with new understandings? Could I begin to take on the language and culture?

I had new relationships with kumu who could help me. Their support fueled my inquiry. I was grateful to those I visited in immersion and culture-focused schools for their encouragement. They could have told me to step back, but instead, they validated the idea of teachers as learners, stepping into this work. I had grown up thinking I needed to step aside, and here was the open door I was hoping for; the welcome I craved.

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Letting My Light Shine: Analysis and Literature

I believe each of us has gifts, and when we are able to let those gifts shine, we all rise. As educators, our ability to inspire new learning and deep introspection is a powerful kuleana we

⁹ From Williamson, M. (2009). *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a course in miracles*. HarperOne, LOC 2107-2108.

carry not only in our influence of children, but also in our interactions with our colleagues. In this mo‘olelo, the lines “I had loved writing and asking questions that brought new thinking into the conversation,” and, “They could have told me to step back, but instead, they validated the idea of teachers as learners... here was the open door I was hoping for,” underscore the impact each of us can have on the learning of others. When we are able to shine, we can also acknowledge the moments that challenge us and lay us bare. We learn to lean on each other to fill in our gaps and celebrate our struggles. Our work is to embrace and celebrate the powerful kuleana that we, as educators of young children, have chosen to carry.

As educators and scholars in the Hawaiian context, Sumida and Meyer (2008) suggested that if we “awaken our intellectual growth as teachers, we, in turn, do the same for our students, and for the larger educational community of learners” (p. 344). They stated, “education, in its highest form, liberates human potential through transformational teaching and learning experiences” (Meyer, et al., 2018, p. 17). Kaomea (2005) implored educators in Hawai‘i to think about how we may be holding on to colonizing actions or challenging them. This idea of continual professional development and reflective practice has proven to be a common thread in the kuleana of my work.

Continual professional learning is a critical factor in Reggio Emilia professional attitudes. Gambetti (as cited in Gandini, 2012) stated, “we have a responsibility to continue moving forward and to evolve by keeping in step with a changing society. We owe this to children, ourselves, our community and society” (p. 180). New (2009) detailed:

an entirely different vision of professional early childhood educator—one with a deep respect for and curiosity about children, an unquenchable curiosity about the teaching—

learning process, and a capability for exploration and innovation that could be sustained through collaborative relationships with other adults. (p. 10)

Teachers are considered researchers alongside the children in these settings. Gambetti (as cited in Gandini, 2012) believed educators should “observe themselves, observe their context, and take up an attitude of research” (p. 183). This notion of teacher as researcher offers a “reconceptualization of an early childhood education that nurtures and challenges adults as well as children” (New, 2009, p. 10). As Tzuo (2007) stated, “Dewey believed that teachers should use their craft to help children develop the freedom of intelligence through a number of ways, such as guidance and arranging good environments” (p. 37). Tzuo (2007) encourages us to look at the rich intellectual life of an inquisitive and reflexive educator by describing early childhood educators as “impressionist teachers” (Tzuo, 2007, p. 39) who:

include and reconceptualize multiple theories into their practices and have the ability to think, reflect upon, and alter (rather than merely follow) pedagogical theory and guidelines while simultaneously constructing teaching through engagement of their minds as well as those of their students. (p. 39)

Holomua for the Children: Summary

My kuleana, first and foremost, is to holomua—to go forward so that I am always ready to support and enrich the children and their learning. There are a grace and beauty to the work I am committed to as an early childhood educator. The innocence and eagerness of the children hold me responsible for meeting their thirst for learning with an equal thirst of my own. Children are replete with curiosity and wonder, and I welcome my role as provocateur, guide, and supporter. Within this context, I become a learner in my own right, enriched by the give-and-take of the relationships we have developed together.

Kuleana: Summary

As the second theme that emerged from the analysis of the mo‘olelo of this study, my kuleana to my haumāna is based on my deep, abiding love and appreciation for Hawai‘i, as well as a firm commitment to honoring the dignity of each child. The privilege of my role as an early childhood educator is that I have the opportunity to immerse young children in meaningful learning, rich with opportunities to engage in their home and culture. This is a time when they are open and receptive to all that surrounds them. In pursuing answers to the central research question of this study—how has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based educational philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a Kanaka Hawai‘i?—I can recognize the blossoming kuleana that I have integrated into my teaching of young children and my growing understanding of my own identity as a kanaka. I am committed to creating nurturing and caring spaces where children can open their hearts and minds to new learning, all the while knowing they are safe, known, and valued for all that they carry within them.

Placing these mo‘olelo up against each other has illuminated the sub-themes of aloha ‘āina, creating trusting and caring spaces for children, the importance of standing strong for my beliefs, and the need to continually learn, innovate and grow. These sub-themes clarify the kuleana that I carry into my teaching each day. My commitment to aloha ‘āina has grown over the years, and now creates a foundation for my professional practice. I intend to offer children opportunities to build a strong sense of who they are as valued and treasured individuals, as well as connected and caring nā pua o Hawai‘i. With ‘ike Hawai‘i and strong advocacy for children’s rights at its core, each development and shift are intentional in my practice.

In any community, its young children are the hope for the future. In our setting, we say they are a breath of fresh air to our school community. If those children are to grow strong enough to carry the kuleana of this place and become dedicated stewards of Hawai‘i, then we must model the strength, aloha, and kūpa‘a that we want to see reflected in their actions. If I truly hope that these children will grow to stand firm and raise their voices for what is right, it is my kuleana, my fervent responsibility, to create the safe spaces within which they can exercise and refine their voices and their guiding principles.

Chapter 5: Huliau

This chapter focuses on mo‘olelo of transformation and change. I have chosen the word huliau, hoping to evoke the feeling that accompanies a turning point, a coming of age, or a compelling change. In my efforts to understand this word and its complex set of meanings, I began with an exploration of its components.

The word huli has many meanings: “to turn, affect, to look for, explore, search, study, seek, direction, as of wind change, taro top, and curl over, as a breaker” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.) conjuring diverse images. I am immersed in thoughts of shifting tides, newly harvested kalo returning to the soil, winds that push us and shift our perspectives, and a wave that sweeps overhead, tossing and turning me until I am able to struggle to the surface gasping for air and opening my eyes to the world around. The concept of kilo “to study, observe, examine” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.) is closely related to huli as these actions often lead to new learning and growth. As I teach my haumāna to kilo in the world around them, their learning takes on properties of transformation and growth.

The second component of the word huliau is au. Au can simply mean “I”; however, it also speaks of “a period of time, current, flow, movement, stir, or train, as of thought” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). These varied meanings required me to think about myself, the *I* of this definition, and the currents that move within me at any given point in time. What does that movement look like? What pushes the current, interrupting its flow, or altering its direction? These are the underlying pursuits as I study the mo‘olelo of my life.

The word huliau can be defined as “turning point, time of change, think of the past, recall the past” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). As I began to let the words and imagery embedded in huli, au, and huliau flow in and out of my thoughts, the concept of huliau began to

take shape and gain clarity. The word *huliau* brings to mind the image of water in a river diverted and redirected as obstacles and opportunities interrupt its flow and change its course. It depicts change as a continual shifting or a significant turning towards new directions and new goals.

As Meyer (2017) challenged us to step forward for ourselves and our *haumāna*—to learn about our place, culture, and responsibilities—I can see the growth I sought through study and research has sparked shifts within me and my practice. I can recognize in the *mo‘olelo* of this study the moments of *huliau*, the change and growth in my learning as I observe, study, and explore new ideas and possibilities within myself and my practice. I firmly believe our most honorable teaching comes from a place of reflection, deep understanding, an acknowledgment of who we are, and the gifts we can offer our students. This study has given me the gift of time to consider the question “Who is the self that teaches?” (Palmer, 2017, p. 8), and how is my Hawaiian identity, or *piko‘u kanaka* (Seto, personal communication, May 3, 2020), as a Hawaiian early childhood educator evident in my teaching?

To understand how this idea of *huliau* relates to the idea of *piko‘u kanaka*, we must also understand the Hawaiian construct of *Nā Piko ‘Ēkolu* (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009). It articulates the relationship between our physical body and the more metaphysical *Piko Po‘o*, *Piko Waena*, and *Piko Ma‘i*. These ‘*ēkolu piko* are what “connect *kānaka ‘ōiwi* to those who come before us, those who are with us now, and those who will succeed us” (p. 35). Kame‘eleihiwa’s (1992) words hold particular meaning for my exploration of transformation, or *huliau*:

[I]n Hawaiian, the past is referred to as *Ka wā mamua*, or ‘the time in front or before.’

Whereas the future, when thought of at all, is *Ka wā mahope* or “the time which comes after or behind.” It is as if the Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the

future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas. Such an orientation is to the Hawaiian an eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge. (loc. 675)

This is the last chapter in the analysis of *nā mo‘olelo* of this study. The theme of *huliau* was present in 36 of the 73 *mo‘olelo*. In addressing the central question of this research—how has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based educational philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a *Kanaka Hawai‘i*?—I chose to utilize 14 *mo‘olelo* to describe the foundational influences on the transformation that has been occurring within my personal and professional identity over time.

The structure of this chapter must take on a different rhythm as we pivot to focus on the interconnectedness of my personal and professional journey of *huliau*. This demonstrates a shift in thinking as these two journeys of emerging identity and professional growth have become inextricably interwoven. As a researcher-practitioner, my search for meaningful ways to engage my *haumāna* in their place and their self-discovery has led to a profound personal transformation as I grow to understand my *piko‘u kanaka*, or Hawaiian identity, more fully.

“*Nā ‘Ao‘Ao ‘Eha o Ka Maui*” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 3) defines four aspects of *Mauli Hawai‘i* (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17) that must be tended. *Mauli Hawai‘i* is the life force that a *kanaka* must learn to *mālama*, as in tending a fire, if our *piko‘u kanaka* is to thrive (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009). The first, “*Pili ‘Uhane*” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17), is connected to the head, and acknowledges the

spiritual relationships and values carried within us. Second, “Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ōlelo” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17) relates to the mouth, ears, and tongue, emphasizing the importance of language, its flexibility, and its ability to pass maui to the next generation. Third, “Ka ‘Ao‘ao Lawena” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19) resides in the limbs, gestures, movements, and expressions and focuses on actions, facial expressions, and behaviors that we usually learn through observation and imitation. Finally, “Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ike Ku‘una” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19) resides in your gut and is centered around traditional knowledge that sits within the na‘au, such as “hula, poetry, and prayer” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19).

Nā mo‘olelo of this study lift up examples of the relationships and experiences in my life that have kept the embers of my maui glowing, waiting for the catalyst that would reignite them more fully. As Kanahele (as cited in Saffery, 2016) reassured us, “all we need to know about ourselves still exists, just beneath the surface, waiting to be acknowledged and honored once again” (p. 121). This is my time to fan those embers with the questions that drive my search for more.

“Ka Wā Mamua” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Past

Mo‘olelo from my past, *Kapoho: Relationships in Childhood, Quiet and Thoughtful, Parent Night: The Dot, The River Picnic, and Waimānalo: Kaiona*, will be clustered together around four themes—honua, pili, na‘au, and ‘uhane. These stories depict the kahua that has supported the formation of my piko‘u kanaka, and laid bare the questions that arise as my eyes are opened, turning my attention towards what I do not yet understand. These stories are the

beginnings of the huliau that is to come. *Kapoho: Relationships in Childhood, River Picnic*, and *Waimānalo: Kaiona* turn us towards my childhood, while *Quiet and Thoughtful* and *Parent Night: The Dot* are set within an earlier time in my teaching. These stories begin to pull towards each other, no longer able to remain wholly separate or unrelated.

In the Western tradition of research, there is a call for objectivity, for an analysis of the data in systematic and somewhat objective methods (Merriam, 2009). In this analysis, it has become clear that there is something more at work. There is an underlying current that has driven the clustering of nā mo‘olelo. There is a feeling in my na‘au as I read nā mo‘olelo, pushing me to look more carefully at what each one is trying to tell me. As data is analyzed to see what rises to the surface, even placing these mo‘olelo side-by-side, their beauty and unique attributes have revealed themselves as I explored a variety of combinations and patterns. The need to weave from the various threads of my life thus supports the idea that everything exists in relation to all that has come before, all that surrounds us in the present, and all that will come after. In seeking knowledge through an indigenous lens, I cannot separate one part of my identity from another; they are forever intertwined as each one nurtures and feeds the other.

Honua—Sense of Place

A Hawaiian sense of place makes the connection between our identity, our origins, and our genealogies. It acknowledges a passing down of connections and mo‘olelo from one generation to another, and it requires a relationship that is reciprocal (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992). *Kapoho: Relationships in Childhood* recalls the deep sense of place that was passed to me from my family. It makes the connection between ‘āina, ‘ohana, and spirituality that drives me in ways often hidden from view. There is an opportunity to pass this connection on to the children as I learn to understand this connection.

Mo‘olelo: Kapoho—Relationships in Childhood

My mother walked, hands on her growing opu, surveying the landscape, feeling the heat of the lava as it oozed forward, slowly but steadily, covering bushes, trees, everything in its path. The smell of burning ohi‘a filled her senses. She walked as close as she could, acknowledging the beauty and power of Pele as I waited to be born.

Years later, I would express concern.

“Mom! You were pregnant with me! What were you thinking?” I was always astounded by the danger of her proximity to the flow, but she would only laugh and say,

“We were fine. The lava moved so slowly! We just had to be there!”

Her father, my grandfather, worried, driving the jeep slowly alongside her, the lava’s path pushing towards his newly built home. Would the house be safe? Would he lose this place to Pele? Returning home, preparations were made. The car was packed, and children were gathered, My grandfather kissed my grandmother good-bye and, whiskey in hand, he would remain behind. To sit. To wait. Possibly to pray. He placed stones along the railing to track the progress of the flow.¹⁰ Would he show Pele his anger? Or his awe at the beauty of her power?

Their home would be spared. The ponds remained. I would come into this world a few months later, and my life at Kapoho would begin.

When I was four years old, my suitcase was one of my treasured possessions. It was a soft green with cream-colored trim and two golden latches that closed with a definite snap. When that suitcase came out of the closet, it meant we were going somewhere. As I opened it, the shimmer of the fabric interior thrilled my senses. I filled it with paper dolls, my bathing suit, my

¹⁰ Stoddard, 2012.

Humpty Dumpty pillow, and my blankie. I never went anywhere without that pillow and blanket. I was ready for the long drive to my Nana and Jim's house, my grandparents in Kapoho.

We stopped to pick up cone sushi. It was soft, moist, and dripping with ono sweetness. Then we were off. We drove past the turn to the zoo and then out of Hilo town toward Puna. Along the way, my excitement grew. I could see the tunnel of trees just ahead. The road became dark and cool.

“Stop! Flowers!” I cried. My dad pulled over, and I climbed out, picking my way through the wet leaves and ferns at the side of the road. I gathered bunches of the delicate, fragrant, yellow ginger that grew in profusion there. This was my ritual, my moment to ready myself for my place, to gather my gift to share with my grandparents when we arrived. I knew my nana would be waiting in the yard, arms wide, waiting for her beloved daughter and granddaughter to return home. There would be food ready, beds made, and the large cardboard box of odds and ends to play with would be waiting on the lanai. Beyond it all was our fishpond.

The pond called to me as I was left to my own desires; the adults moved on to conversations inside. I raced down the steps, a curve of lava stepping stones my grandfather had placed on the path, feeling the jagged a‘a under my bare feet. I traversed the rock walls, akulikuli crunching as I skipped. I looked for my favorite fish, the red and green wrasse that looked like Christmas and the Moorish idol whose delicate fins fascinated me. The pungent aroma of rotting naupaka leaves and sea grapes encouraged me towards the back corners of the pond. The day lengthened, and the tide pulled out, leaving the rocks drying in the sun. Crabs skittered from rock to rock. I was home. I was free to explore, free to run!

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Honua—Sense of Place: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

In the mo‘olelo of *Kapoho: Relationships in Childhood*, the initial grounding of my piko‘u kanaka is evident. This mo‘olelo helps me to grasp the idea of “Ka ‘Ao‘ao Lawena” (Kumu Honua Maui Ola, p. 19) as my family’s behaviors and teaching nurtured my sense of place and the relationships that were embedded in that place. I learned that the experiences I offer children and the behaviors I model would nurture their growing sense of place and kuleana to this ‘āina.

In looking at the mo‘olelo of my past, I am grateful for the deep aloha I feel for the places of my childhood, for Kapoho, Hilo, Kalapana, and the volcano area in particular. My memories of the broader district of Puna are faint and scattered at best. Names of towns and locations ring a distant bell when mentioned by others. The smell of the hala comes flooding back when I am reminded, but those early memories are mostly hidden, just below the surface, or perhaps lost forever. I grew up immersed in the land of Pele and developed a strong respect for her, but I want to know nā mo‘olelo of Pele and Hi‘iaka and the details of their relationship. I know in my na‘au that Puna is a place of renewal and rebirth as I experienced its raw and rugged beauty, but I want to understand the spiritual meaning behind that feeling (MacGregor, 2007), and the relationship Puna has to the broader island of Hawai‘i and even to the island of O‘ahu that is now my home.

I am still learning to see my relationship with all of nature as I would that of family or kūpuna. There are moments when I attend to that relationship, as I care for the ohi‘a in my yard or mele with the children to greet a place, and yet I wonder what it will take to fully embrace the behaviors, the appreciation, and the keen awareness that this relationship entails in order to be genuinely reciprocal (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992; Saffery, 2016). I know my inability to speak ‘ōlelo

makuahine hinders me in this relationship. I cannot greet the ‘āina in the language she deserves to hear, and I cannot hear and see all she wants me to know. Of course, I know that this must be my next step. If I am going to pass this maui on to my mo‘opuna attending to “Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ōlelo” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009) and “Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ike Ku‘una,” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009) learning to speak ‘ōlelo makuahine and studying the deeper nuances of the culture and language together will fill a deep and essential need within me.

Pili—Relationships

Pili can mean “to cling, stick, touch, join, be close, close relationship, a grass...formerly used for thatching houses, concern, or relate” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). In considering the many meanings of pili the word *ho‘opili* is uncovered, meaning “to bring together” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.) which describes the intentionality with which I work to structure my classroom community. In developing the relationships with children, their families, and the ideas we will explore together, I hope to touch, draw close, and even bring them together, as the pili thatching would form a tight clustering that protects all that is within.

The following mo‘olelo, *Quiet and Thoughtful* and *Parent Night: The Dot*, take us into my classroom to explore the beginnings of the relationships or pilina that are essential to learning at school. These are the relationships between child and teacher and between teachers and parents, which are keenly central to creating a positive environment for learning and growth.

Mo‘olelo: Quiet and Thoughtful

Nanea came to school well-versed in the ways of ka puna hou... having many siblings ahead of her. Nanea is a quiet, thoughtful child. A bit hesitant about school and about the work

of school. We were painting about the loveliness of our school environment and asking the children to tell us about their feelings. What did they love about this place? We approached Nanea.

“It looks like home. It feels like home,” she said quietly. Tears filled our eyes, both teachers stopped, looked at each other, with smiles that said... *we did it!* For a child who was so cautious, so tentative to feel at home in our classroom. We knew we had made an impact. We had created a space for that careful learner to feel good about herself and her place in this community. This was the greatest feedback we could receive from a child who took time to warm to this space, to this work. Nanea turned up on the lanai one morning before school quietly sliding open the door.

“I brought something to show you. I found it on the beach when we went hiking.” She had shells and dried branches. Each one was offering a glimpse into her thinking, what mattered to her. What resided deep in her heart.

When she began to write, she was frozen... hesitant... teary.

“Just play with it. I promise it will get easier the more you write.” I promised no judgment, celebrating each letter, each effort. And then... one day she found her voice... she wrote about those hikes, long walks along the beach and finding those shells and branches, about seeing a monk seal lying on the beach with her pup. Now we had her! She could see her capability, her entry into the world of writers... into the world of capable. Her posture changed, her hand moving quickly across the page.

“Can I stay in to write more?”

“Sure,” I said, trying to seem nonchalant about this request when really I wanted to jump and down! These are the moments! That full-body consciousness... when I want to leap up!

Cheer! Sometimes I put a child up onto the table, and we do cheer! Sometimes that is not what is needed. This moment called for quieter methods of celebration, encouragement, a willingness to give her more time, and a photo to show mommy.

Nanea went on to first grade but remained connected. She wrote letters during the summer, sharing her travels, her discoveries with me. She visited in the morning on her way to unpack, seeking a quick hug. The letters began the following summer again, before heading to second grade. I will always be connected to this child, having taught others in her extended family. Our family stories are intertwined. Her uncle, experiencing the beginning of my teaching, my experiments, my discoveries where now I was experiencing hers.

Mo'olelo: Parent Night—The Dot

It is Parent Night. The parents begin entering. Some were confident. A hand offered in introduction. Some are surprised when I lean in to offer a hug. Eyes roam the room, taking in their children's drawings of Night Blooming Cereus that fill the walls. As they begin to find places to sit, I welcome them.

“Come on in and find someplace that is comfortable for you. Feel free to move things or to come up and sit on the floor. You will learn that we are informal here,” I say, as I step out of my shoes.

“I'm going to read you a story. I think this story shares our philosophy, the basis for how we will work with your children this year... The Dot, by Peter Reynolds.”¹¹

Parents shift in their chairs, settling in to listen. We all love to be read to, to hear someone bring breath to the pages of a good story. As I reach the sweet spot of the story, there

¹¹ Reynolds, *The Dot*, 2003.

are gentle nods—a smile from one mother and a few looks of growing light just behind their eyes. My voice cracks as I reach the last line, “Now sign it.”¹²

“That’s how we will work with your children this year. We will meet them where they are and encourage them to go forward to wherever they can go. We are all learning together, to deepen our understanding of learning, of motivation, of ourselves and our mo‘olelo. Each of us will have an impact on the learning of those around us.”

This is my opportunity to reach out and extend my hand towards these families and offer to hold hands in conversation as we begin our year together.

Years later, colleagues are talking about Parent Night. What is most important... what ideas can be shared?

“If you can think back to Parent Night when you were the parent. What stuck with you? What was important to you? Was it curriculum? Schedule?”

“Donna reading The Dot¹³ to us. She told us it was basically her philosophy. I knew my son was in good hands. I knew she would care for my child.”

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Pili—Relationships: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

The idea of pili, something I value as essential to my classroom community, is deeply rooted in the past generations’ relationships. “Ka ‘Ao‘ao, Lawena” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009) acknowledges our actions and behaviors that are learned through observation and imitation of those close to us. I can see that the inherently Hawaiian attitudes of mālama, pili, and aloha were instilled in me by the adults around me as well as the generations past.

¹² Reynolds, *The Dot*, 2003.

¹³ Reynolds, *The Dot*, 2003.

My missionary ancestors came to Hawai‘i as outsiders, and many would say, intruders. They found themselves changed as they built relationships with Hawai‘i and her people, and were integrated into the fabric of this place, as kama‘āina. Lopes Jr. (2016) described the meaning of kama‘āina by deconstructing the word into its two components: “kama... means descendent or child... or to be bound or tied to something” (p. 34) and “‘āina... means land” (p. 34). “Kama‘āina, therefore, are genealogical descendants of the land, bound, secured to it and who benefit from a reciprocal relationship with her” (p. 34).

My foundational valuing of relationships is firmly embedded within the tenets of both my personal and professional identity. The pilina between teacher, haumāna, and ‘ohana is vital to all that I seek to accomplish as an educator. Kana‘iaupuni and Ledward (2013) stated, “great teachers have ample knowledge about content and instruction, and they also understand the fundamental importance of cultural relevance and relationships in their work with children and their families” (p. 155). I hope to help children build a relationship with their home that binds them to the land and to the culture and traditions that surround them, nurturing and modeling what it is to be kama‘āina. I continue to pursue a deepening of my understanding of culture and pili in order to find ways to incorporate these concepts into our classroom life. What relationships can I seek out that will help me broaden the exploration of my haumāna? Who can help move our learning forward? Are there friends, experts, and kūpuna in our community who would be willing to share their expertise and knowledge with us? Are there new places, educational kipuka, that can help me make my hopes into a growing reality?

The mo‘olelo *Quiet and Thoughtful* and *Parent Night: The Dot* remind us that each child and family craves connection, a strong pilina in order to *cling, touch, and be close*. The sense of pili that I hold firmly in my na‘au strengthens my resolve to extend an invitation to each child to

come close, and know that they are safe and valued for who they are within the pilina of our classroom (Kana‘iaupuni, 2007). I hope that in building this kahua in my classroom community, I offer the children and their families foundational experiences and relationships they will be able to pass on to others who are yet to come into their lives.

Na‘au—Foundational Learning

There are experiences and relationships that create the foundation for each of us as an individual and a learner. This helps to develop our na‘au. Na‘au is described with the words “intestines, gut, heart, affections, mood, of the heart or mind, temper or feeling” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). The strength of our na‘au and the power of those initial experiences ignite within us a curiosity that compels us to search for more. The following mo‘olelo of *River Picnic* depicts just such an experience. The world around me offered opportunities to explore and experiment, from which I developed a sense of wonder and an ever-present desire to learn, grow, and move forward. The journey of this research is the latest step in my continual pursuit of innovation, creativity, and learning.

Mo‘olelo: A River Picnic

The cut branches were long, measuring almost to my nose. I picked up each one, feeling its heft as I lifted it, placing it on my shoulder. The bandanas were stacked on the table, folded over, waiting to be filled. There was a plate of musubi, triangular with a juicy ume at the center, another piled with hot dogs wrapped in waxed paper, and a basket of apples. Everything was ready for our trip to the river behind our house!

It was my fifth birthday, and we were going to have an adventure. Each bandana was filled with my favorite lunch, tied up tight and fixed securely onto the branches, ready to go. My

friends and I bounced with delight as we hoisted the sticks onto our shoulders, ready for our trek to the river.

The sun shone through the trees here and there, and the river held its light, reflecting it back up to us. Some of us scampered down the slope to the river while others made their way carefully over rocks and branches. The water was low; ankle-deep. Wading out to a large, flat rock, we laid down our lunches. It was time to explore! We scrambled over the rocks, sometimes slipping into the water. Crouching low at the water's edge, we scooped our hands below the surface in hopes of catching a fish. Annie made a leaf boat, and soon we all were sailing them in the meandering current. Some boats gathered in the eddies created by the rocks, and others picked up speed as they were sucked into channels and pulled over tiny waterfalls. We carried smaller rocks, working our arms as we built dams and created pools. The rocks were smooth. Some were cluttered with small holes, almost as if air bubbles had popped along the surface.

Lunch was an adventure in itself as we untied our bandanas and began our picnic. The musubi was salty and slightly sticky; the tang of the ume puckered my mouth, making it water. The apples were crunchy, and the cores were fun to throw into the water. We would check to see if they sank or floated, watching them bobbing in the current. Hot dogs were devoured as we continued to climb over boulders, venturing farther and farther from our picnic spot.

“It’s time for cake!” my mom called, pulling each of us from our individual exploration, returning us to the idea of a birthday party. Children came tumbling over rocks from all sides, giggling as they clambered back to the group. We gathered our bundles, hoisted the sticks back to our shoulders, and headed up the slopes, running headlong towards the house and the cake.

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Na‘au—Foundational Learning: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

A childhood that encourages exploration and experimentation, asking questions, and taking initiative develops a mind that seeks out inspiration and connections. There is an ‘ōlelo no‘eau, “kūlia i ka nu‘u” (Pukui, 1983, p. 205) which translates as “strive to reach the highest” (p. 205), but Kawai‘ae‘a, Housman, and Alencastre (2007) offer a slightly different interpretation that speaks to my attitude on learning: “Never be satisfied with the status quo” (p. 217).

The turning of rocks in my hand, my attentiveness to the sounds of the river call me, compelling me to remember the deeper connections that have been forgotten or left unrecognized. As a young child, I was learning to explore and develop a love of that place, but I did not learn how to see through Hawaiian eyes. How can I develop a more indigenous lens in the children I teach? How can I raise their awareness of the depth of all there is to know about this place they call home? How can I begin to dig into all that I do not yet know to become more knowledgeable, more appreciative of what has come before? How can I translate the questions about my childhood into explorations for my haumāna, to build a stronger relationship with their home than I had built in my childhood? These questions have developed in me the “courage and confidence to imagine another world... and reach beyond the limitations of who [I am] now to stake a claim for new possibilities” (Pelo & Carter, 2018, p. 313) in the future.

‘Uhane—Spirituality

The concept of ‘uhane, or spirituality, is a more challenging theme to capture. It can be described with words like: “soul, spirit, ghost, and spiritual” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.) lifting my breath, stopping my thoughts for just a moment to ponder and listen. The connections we make that are inexplicable, or seem deeper and more significant than the literal or superficial meaning, are those spiritual moments of revelation and inspiration. “Ka

‘Ao‘ao Pili ‘Uhane—the spiritual element... which is seated in the head... creates a relationship with everything in the universe, both seen and unseen” (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17). The following mo‘olelo, *Waimānalo: Kaiona*, was written in a time of wana‘ao, or dawn, and gave rise to my learning about moe ‘uhane, that time between sleep and waking, when our kūpuna come to us in our dreams.

Mo‘olelo: Waimānalo—Kaiona

It is the time of wana‘au, the sun considering its path for the upcoming day. I sit looking at a painting done in many shades of blue. A teenager stands on the beach, looking out to the rolling waves offshore. The wind blew my hair in my face as I stood there that day. The breeze was warm. The waves rolled in the distance. This was a familiar view, the view from Shriner's beach home.

Our family knows this place as Waimānalo or Shriner's. Our family came here often to swim, to play, and to picnic. We came for lu‘au and parties in the evenings. We celebrated birthdays here, swam through the concrete block just offshore, and played with trucks and shovels in the sand. We brought cousins, aunties, and Grandma and Grandpa to explore our favorite spots, introducing them to our life. This place was like family, part of the ritual of our lives.

I stand at the side of the road, cars passing by. We carefully help the children off the bus. “Stand by the fence. There are lots of cars.” We wave to parents as they begin to help us unload our supplies.

“Here, we are!”

“Hello!”

“Aloha!” We lead the children safely away from the road and down to the edge of the beach. It’s a beautiful day, the turquoise of the water is striking, and the unblemished sand stretches out along the shoreline. There is a community here. It shows in the mown lawn that is green and lush. There are kūpuna at the fence, smiling as they welcome the children. They are curious to see what we are going to do.

“Aloha. So sorry to...” our voices trail off with concerns of intrusion left unsaid.

“No worries,” they interrupt our apology. “What are you all going to do today?” They reassure us that we are welcome.

“We are going to paint. To look closely at this place. The children are learning a hula telling about Kaiona, so we wanted them to know the place they are dancing about.”

We gathered there on the grass and collected ourselves. We mele to greet the space. We express gratitude for the learning we hope for. Then we got ourselves ready to start putting together our project for the day. I looked out at the water a bit teary. Breathing in the beauty of this place. My mother's ashes were here, in the waters just offshore. In the waters where children were splashing and laughing.

We carried her ashes out into the shallow water with lei swaying on our arms. We pushed blossoms from the thread. Purple orchids floated out around us. We shared thoughts of a devoted grandmother, a strong mother, a wife who was adored by her husband, and a graceful hula dancer. We prayed for her and said good-bye... aloha. We scattered her ashes as the water lapped at the shore. The air was still, no wind to stir us. The gray clouds of ash sifted slowly to the sand beneath our feet, moving with the rhythm of the waves. As we made our way out of the water, we looked back to see a honu raise his head at the center of the ashes. He was there to greet her. She was home at last!

We began to fill palettes with colors, turquoise, yellow, and magenta... to offer the children a bright palette to match the day. Children and families began to settle, some on the grass, some under trees, and others out on the sand. The horizon was clear; the many shades of blue deepening the further out the eye traveled. Gentle waves lapped the shore. Children stopped from time to time to run through the shallow water. Someone called out *honu!* And we are reminded of the mo'olelo of the ali'i and the honu of this place generations ago, as the children worked to tell the story of this place with their paints.

As the canvases lined up along the fence, we collected dirty brushes and supplies. There was a feeling of satisfaction as the paintings caught our eyes. An array of colors, mixed carefully by artists, both children, and adults. Each image was telling the story of this place from the particular perspective of the painter. We walked down the beach. We danced hula on the beach that day. The children had learned a song about Kaiona. We honored that place with our hula and our voices.

There is a new painting now that sits facing me as I write. Its colors are vibrant and varied, reflecting the bright palette of the day. There are mothers under the tree with their children. I see myself standing at water's edge with a child at my side. I can see my nana running on the beach as a toddler, sun-kissed and joyful. I see my mother looking out at the horizon, dark glasses shielding her eyes, splashing in the shallow water with my babies. I see myself as a teacher walking with a child. We explore Kaiona eager to share the story of our day. I see myself in another painting, shades of blue, a teenager on that beach, looking out on the horizon. I am looking out towards a future I could not anticipate, with no idea of whom I would become, or the lei I would weave. I wonder to myself, how will my children embrace this transformation and

acknowledge what they hold within them?

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‘Uhane—Spirituality: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

This particular mo‘olelo embodies this sense of ‘uhane for me. The connections to that day came flooding in from all sides—the painting, the hula, the children, my mother's ashes mingling in my thoughts. The line “we looked back to see a honu raise his head at the center of the ashes. He was there to greet her. She was home at last!” captures my sense of ‘uhane, my belief that there is more than what lies on the surface. It indicates layers of meaning that I can feel more easily than I can articulate in words. I believe that honu has something to do with the idea of ‘aumakua, and yet I have no idea of how to study that possibility. I feel something, but I do not yet fully comprehend it. I cannot articulate it for others, which means I cannot pass it on. I believe in continuity and connection to people and places that are passed on, and yet as Kanahele (cited in McGregor, 2007) explained, until we gain spiritual understanding, we cannot fully gain a genuinely spiritual sense of place. Again, ‘ōlelo makuahine comes to mind. Within the metaphors of the language sit rich cultural understandings that I hope will help me to understand more fully.

I know having children paint at the beach is not a significant step into cultural understanding or real Hawaiian sense of place, but as I have learned, small steps must be taken to forge a path into new territory. Significant shifts in practice often begin with initial steps that seem almost insignificant. Asking children to kilo and to immerse themselves in the spirit of a place helps them to develop an aloha and respect for their surroundings (Louv, 2008). We must be intentional in our efforts to develop this attitude of curiosity and observation.

In this spirit, I have tried to give the children whatever new learning I gather, and that means going step by step. If I wait until I can offer large, significant pieces, then generations of children year after year will pass through my doors with no seeds planted, no chance for inspiration for later learning, or feeling that they have at least begun something valuable and meaningful. If the children and their families can begin to feel a connection and aloha for their home and this culture, they can develop an interest, empathy, and a desire to know more.

As Scarry (1999) taught us, beauty creates a desire within us to replicate and recreate. If we provide the children with beautiful, powerful connections, then we offer a way in. Lipe (2016) invited us “to sing, chant, dance, and tell stories—and as you do so, listen to the ‘ike your kūpuna are gifting you” (p. 68). This is my intention, to offer opportunities for myself, the children, and their parents to open our hearts and minds to all the kūpuna have to offer us, seeking out places, experiences, and traditions that can enrich our foundational understandings.

I am not sure how I can raise the awareness of the spirituality that surrounds us, as I am still trying to understand it for myself. I wonder about hō‘ailona. As we recognized nā ānuenuenu that greeted us on a trip to the Mānoa Heritage Center, were we already exhibiting an awareness of a more spiritual aspect of our surroundings? Could this be the next step in our learning? As an early childhood educator, I exist at the beginning of a much longer journey. I can plant seeds with my haumāna and with my colleagues in hopes that we will create a better foundational experience, perhaps increasing the expectations for more as children and families travel through the school.

“Ka Wā Mamua” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Past: Summary

A deep valuing of honua, pili, na‘au, and a sense of ‘uhane are aspects of Hawaiian culture that I find embedded in the kahua upon which the rest of my experiences and

relationships have been constructed. It is this kahua that inspired me to seek beauty and connection to our place for my children and now for my haumāna. The sense of pili that grew out of those early experiences has become a core tenet of my teaching, as I build a classroom community with a definite feeling of ‘ohana.

I have questions that have demanded that I pivot and turn towards new learning to deepen my offerings to the children. How will I explore spirituality with the children more fully in the future? How can I share my drive to ho‘ona‘auao with my haumāna? How will I learn enough to reciprocate all that I have been given? As Smith (1999) wrote, there are projects that can inspire us to tell stories, remember, indigenize, revitalize, connect, and envision. As my mo‘olelo come together to weave the moena of this study, this study will leave me on the precipice overlooking a new set of questions that will push me deeper into inquiry and reflection—just as any good learning experience does.

‘Ānō—Present

The mo‘olelo that speak to the present, *Kapoho: Walking in the Footsteps of my Kūpuna, Materials are Appealing, The BHAG Assignment, Reggio Emilia: Solo Trip, and Ed.D. Journey*, illustrate the moments of huliau in my journey within which four themes—pu‘uhonua, ho‘opili, ho‘ona‘auao, and ‘uhane kia‘i—are embedded. These mo‘olelo depict moments of turning, shifting, and transformation that led me to where I am today.

In reflecting on the mo‘olelo of the present, I begin to imagine the possibilities of what the future could hold for me, my ‘ohana, and my haumāna. These stories are set in the ‘ānō, the present, and yet they span several years. They are indicative of my current state of understanding, and offer inspiration for self-reflection on the transformation that has occurred up to this point.

Pu‘uhonua—Sense of Place

In replacing honua with pu‘uhonua, I am suggesting we shift our view to a “place of refuge, sanctuary, place of peace and safety” (Pukui & Elbert, 1986, p. 358). Kapoho and Hawai‘i Island play a recurring role in nā mo‘olelo of my life as they hold a unique and distinctive space in my na‘au. This island is the place of my family, where generations lived and raised their children. It is a pu‘uhonua for my immediate family and me. The following mo‘olelo of *Kapoho: Walking in the Footsteps of my Kūpuna* is a returning to Kapoho more recently, as reminiscences and new relationships offer a more developed view of the role place, pu‘uhonua, has had in my life.

Mo‘olelo: Kapoho: Walking in the Footsteps of my Kūpuna

We packed snacks and drinks in the car and headed out along the coast. We had no real plan except that we would try to go to Kapoho and end up in Hilo in time to fly home. As we drove, we stopped at spots that were beautiful, or places with names that sparked memory: Nā‘ālehu, Waiōhinu, Pāhala. We talked about memories, stories from our childhoods, and noticed the simplicity of the ‘āina that lay before us. There were lava fields and ohi‘a lehua as we approached the volcanoes. A seemingly endless landscape of undulating black rock, dotted with trees and fern. This expedition was familiar. The car was packed: snacks, candies, and even colored popcorn from Kress, which was my favorite! Time blurred between the present and the past. We headed towards the Volcano House to see the crater, maybe eat lunch in the restaurant, and definitely visit the sulfur pits that smelled of rotten eggs and walk bravely through the lava tube. Sharing some of what sits deep in my na‘au with my husband, I tried to help him know this place through my experiences and stories.

Then we went down the road continuing through the lava fields, now more overgrown with lehua and grasses. There is a softness that has come after years of rain, wind, and growing plants. We drive along the coast, beginning to see the black sands of familiar beaches. We stop to walk along the shore, awestruck that we are here. I am captured by the feeling that this is my beginning, part of who I am, part of my history. I do not yet understand the idea of mo‘okū‘auhau ‘āina, but this will become pivotal in my path towards transformation.

Weeks later, sharing a bit of this trip with my new cohort friends, I was struck by the impact made by a friend’s simple comment about walking in the footsteps of my kūpuna¹⁴ that shifted my thinking, and turned my attention towards what was right there in front of me. A new perspective came flooding in—that my kūpuna were there with us, offering the connections, the beauty, the appreciation that was within us.

That conversation brought back images of dinner at the edge of the water at Waikōloa. We watched the waves roll in, one after the other, foam breaking up at the rocks. It was the work at Waikōloa that brought us home! It was Hawai‘i Island that made it possible to return home from Colorado. It was Hawai‘i Island that introduced my husband to my home, and encouraged him as he worked to put his home in the distance and embrace this new place.

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Pu‘uhonua—Sense of Place: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

In the above mo‘olelo, my relationship with Kapoho begins to mature, taking on additional layers of meaning. The nurturing of Kā ‘Āo‘ao Lawena (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19) returns, as I become the learner striving to see the world through the more knowledgeable eyes of others while being taught to

¹⁴ Keliikipikaneokolohaka, personal communication, June, 2017.

see on my own. Just as children imitate the behaviors of those around them, I seek to learn from the behaviors of those around me. The title of the mo‘olelo gives away the huliau of that time. It is in a single moment of conversation that I begin to recognize the connection between my actions and the footsteps of my kūpuna. My mind shifts at that moment to see the path my life has taken as connected to something beyond myself.

My cohort friends have knowledge they have been willing to share, and I am learning while surrounded by loving mentors. The idea of Ka ‘Ao‘ao Pili ‘Uhane (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17) emerges in this mo‘olelo of Kapoho, depicting a connection to the ‘āina that had the power to draw us home, to change our course, and to forge a new path; a power that comes from our kūpuna and our relationship to that land. The conversations with my new cohort friends are the beginning of the possibilities that can emerge from spending time with generous mentors as we create a honua for further learning (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 23).

Oliveira (2014) offered the idea of “sense abilities” (p. 94) as a way to appreciate the depth of knowledge that grows from our sensory observations and experiences of the world around us. To observe deeply—to know the winds, the rains, and the tides—are all ways of becoming more connected with our place and with our kūpuna (Oliveira, 2014). As I explore Mānoa and our island of O‘ahu with my haumāna, I have learned to integrate Hawaiian mo‘olelo of the places we travel into our work. We learn the story of Kahalaopuna as we travel into the valley. When a rainbow greets us, the children call out with the joy of greeting an old friend. When we hike Pu‘u o Mānoa, the children learn the story of Kapo‘i and the Pueo. We oli to

honor the ‘āina as kumu teaching us on our trips. We take time to notice our surroundings, learning to kilo with focus and intention.

This deepening of my understanding of place supports my search for a connection to my kūpuna and causes me to wonder about the layers not yet imagined. Continuing to ho‘olohe, to kilo, and to open my heart to this learning offers me endless possibilities for future growth. How can I help the children deepen their connection to place in a way that it becomes a sanctuary, a place where they feel whole, loved, and connected in a way that plants the seeds of a deeper love and sense of stewardship?

Ho‘opili—A Bringing Together

There are many types of relationships in our lives, those with our ‘ohana, our friends, and colleagues, those with places that are dear to us, and those relationships that come from unexpected connections and juxtaposition of ideas and concepts. The word ho‘opili signifies a bringing together (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.) which, in the following nā mo‘olelo of *Materials Are Appealing* and *The BHAG Assignment*, describes two different experiences that came together with unexpected results.

These mo‘olelo take us to a time of huliau, when a study trip to Italy and a simple assignment to dream came together, which launched a research journey that would change my practice in significant ways, and eventually led to a meaningful personal transformation as well.

Mo‘olelo: Materials Are Appealing

Materials are appealing. My fingers ache to touch the colored plastic cylinders, the slices of gnarled wood, and the flower heads that are drying on the table. They make me want to collect and to build. The colors are rich and vivid. It is easy to see the appeal for children. No photos are

allowed, so I am sketching and capturing the mood, the layout, and details of all that is around me.

That's when it hits me! There is very little work by the children displayed. There are a few clay pieces on a shelf, but no paintings, no drawings, no leftover remnants of block buildings or sculptures formed out of wood. I suppose they would say it is about the process rather than the product. I understand, but where is the statement of appreciation for the beauty created in the colors the children have mixed? Where is the evidence of their effort, their care, and their frustration? Documentation panels capture the process but I wonder—I think I need something more.

My classroom creeps in at the sides of my view. Oil pastel drawings of Night Blooming Cereus created so carefully by the children in the first days of school. Their bold strokes are standing out on a black background. A hint of pink tinges the edges of some petals. A bee climbs over a stem. The children are learning to observe closely. We display their work as important pieces of art so they will see their capability. The beauty of their efforts lifts their shoulders and brightens their eyes.

A photo captures a child looking intently into the center of a blossom growing on the rock wall surrounding our school. Time mingles. My Tūtū as a young girl, laughing with friends just inside that wall; the blossoms wilting as the sun rises in the sky. I see her long skirt swaying as she makes her way to the classroom carrying books clasped to her chest. These drawings and the huaka'i across campus tell the children they are part of something larger, deeper than they fully comprehend. They are connected to those who came before them and to those who will come long after they have left this place. They are nā keiki o ka puna hou.

The chatter of our group of visitors brings me back to the strange and inspiring setting. I realize I have been gathering experiences, coming to Italy to seek out blossoms that will add texture, color, and fragrance to the lei I have been weaving. My lei is my own, uniquely woven, intertwining my experiences to create my particular view of the world. I am aware of the blossoms, the beauty I am taking in; however, I am oblivious to the seeds that have embedded themselves in my heart, waiting for a later date to unfurl. I am unaware of the lei that is yet to be brought out into the light.

As I chat with others in my study group, some are making lists: lists of what they will need in order to recreate a Reggio look in their classrooms or to replicate projects we have seen represented here. I know we cannot recreate Reggio Emilia in our own schools, but we can be inspired to create our own schools for the democratic education of children within our own contexts and our own culture. Schools where children are researchers, autonomous learners in their own right. Schools where beauty, nature, the arts, and community sit at the center of learning environments to inspire and capture the learners' imaginations. Schools that embrace their place, the community, and the culture within which they exist.

Imagining a school that embraces those values, I run straight into a wall of frustration and anger over educators who forget the children, remaining entrenched in worksheets, pre-determined outcomes, and teacher-led inquiry. Those educators who are caught up in the bureaucracy and compliance that has nothing to do with how children learn or who they are. Reggio Emilia reminds us that learning is a collaborative endeavor. Everyone in the educational environment takes on the role of learners, continuing to grow as they co-construct new ideas and understandings. I realize I am not here to bring home a particular pedagogy, but rather to be inspired to create one of my own that ensures each child will be heard, acknowledged, and

celebrated for all that she carries within her. This idea of creating a pedagogy of my own is what spoke to me, what drew me to study in this place. The educators of Reggio Emilia serve as a provocation to envision the role of an early childhood educator as a researcher and intellectual, learning alongside the children.

As you reach the front door to our classroom, your eyes scan the photos around the door. Children laughing in the lo‘i, a look of concentration as a child counts multi-colored buttons, parents and children crossing a river together, a tiny hand exploring the texture of a yellow-green kalo leaf, two boys building a dam with smooth stones in the ‘auwai, and a child beaming with pride at the top of the pole. The word *inspire* prominent with its definition “*to fill someone with confidence and a desire to do something, to breathe, to give breath to life.*”¹⁵ The tone is set. The identity of this space is clear. This is a place of children. They are encouraged to be adventurous, creative, independent. There is a joy on their faces, light in their eyes. Process documentation dots the cabinets sharing their work, their wonderings, and their explorations.

Entering the room captures the senses. Bold paintings of kalo line the walls. Close observation drawings of leaves hang from the ceiling, displayed in family groupings, sometimes three generations together. Their perspectives are often shared, each artist creating their own interpretation of the leaf in front of them. The room is set up for exploration, where materials are appealing, inviting small hands to turn sea glass over, noting its uneven shape and heft, or experience the texture of monk seal fur. Rich to the senses, enticing the eyes and hands, this environment invites builders, observers, experimenters, artists, and creators.

Children are playing. Some children are drawing and chatting with friends while others are outside gathering leaves to create designs around rock sculptures in the ‘auwai. A pair of

¹⁵ Definition found at <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=inspire+definition&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

boys carry geometric creations across the grass to share with friends in another classroom. The teachers are difficult to spot. One is in the studio helping children cut cardboard with an electric saw, and the other is playing a game with a small group.

There is an energy that a visitor might not notice at first glance. The children gather supplies for themselves; some are active with friends, while others find time alone with a new book to be satisfying. The visitor lingers near the door, happy to be an observer, but if he lingers long enough, he will be eagerly invited to become a part of the play. He will lean down to pick up a block and add it to the top of a tower, and laugh as a child tries to build on from this new height. He will find himself in the midst of this play, no longer an observer but a participant, a fellow learner engaged in the exploration of that moment.

Mo‘olelo: The BHAG Assignment

“I have some work I would like you all to think about for tomorrow’s class.¹⁶ We are going to think about what I will call a BHAG.¹⁷ That stands for a ‘Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal.’ Think about one for your school and one for your direct area of the school.” My mind begins to fire off ideas: professional learning communities, mentoring programs, integrated curriculum, and hmmm... I know. What about Hawaiian? Could I figure out something around bringing in Hawaiian language and culture?

I sat at my computer, trying to start my paper. But I don’t want to introduce the idea of another 30 minute pull out class. What would I dream of? My heart pounds, my mind races ahead. What if we could really bring in Hawaiian to K-6? How amazing that would be! If only it could really be something to consider.

Class begins. Everyone settles into their seats.

¹⁶ Scott, J., personal communication, July, 2015.

¹⁷ Collins & Porras, 2002.

“Let’s start with the BHAG. Take the next 15 minutes to share your ideas with your table. Ask each other questions, talk about what might work and what might be challenging.”

We turned to each other, everyone taking a minute to think about what they wanted to share. There is that moment of quiet at the table; who will begin the conversation? Who wants to kick off the discussion? Harlan shares an idea for an evaluation cycle for administrators. Mark is interested in an idea for a new outdoor education opportunity at his school. And then it is my turn. I explain my wish to integrate Hawaiian language and culture K-6 and the friends at the table erupt. Jessica says,

“That’s your paper! That’s your Plan B!”

The others chime in. “Yes! That’s it!”

“I don’t know” I respond. “Do you think I could step into something like that?” In my mind, I was questioning how appropriate it would be for me to approach the idea of Hawaiian language and culture as an outsider, as someone who had no real knowledge around Hawaiian culture or language. Could this be the work I was meant to do?

This would become my Masters work. The idea of how we could bring Hawaiian culture and language into our program. I had no idea where it would lead. No idea that it would become the slow-burning ember that would ignite my doctoral journey.

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Ho‘opili—Relationships: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

As I returned home from Italy, I began a Masters program. *The BHAG Assignment* represents my initial steps into research that would cause my classroom practice to pivot in directions I could hardly imagine. Everything I did began to take on a new texture and tone as I learned to approach my work through an increasingly indigenous lens. As I began to see myself

in this work, to reconnect to my own identity and heritage, I found I was inspired to forge ahead and see where these ideas might take me (Palmer, 2017). That group of colleagues supported me past my initial insecurities around belonging and being an outsider, leaving me open to new possibilities. This was an opportunity that would allow me to understand more deeply who I was, to clarify what I was doing (Newkirk, 2015), who I might become in the future, and how my practice was shifting as I took on new attitudes and expanded knowledge. I was beginning to hope that I might have something to contribute to the conversation around early childhood education in Hawai‘i.

In *Materials are Appealing* we are drawn into the school environment, our senses enticed by images of children, as my classroom asserts its identity as uniquely set in Hawai‘i—with paintings of kalo and an ‘auwai for children to explore. These images remind us that the learning environment we create reflects our values and our beliefs (Biermeier, 2015). These images are meant to provoke and inspire rather than imitate or recreate. This mo‘olelo moves between the present and the past, as my Tūtū drifts in at the edges of my thoughts, and my haumāna walk the footsteps of generations that came to learn at ka puna hou long before these children were born. In our school setting there are traditions to nurture, histories to share, and pili to pass on. As a Hawaiian, I am only learning how to nurture Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ike Ku‘una (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19); however, in our school context the traditions and connections to the past are something I nurture instinctively with my haumāna.

We have begun to learn some Hawaiian traditions as we develop protocols within our classroom community. We use ‘ōlelo no‘eau as agreements on how we will act as a group. The children learn to carry ho‘okupu to places and people we visit, and express gratitude to close each day. I think those who traveled this path before me, and my awareness of the connections to

our collective past, encourage me to continue to pursue ways to honor more Hawaiian traditions within our setting.

These mo‘olelo represent a sense of provocation, inspiration, and collaboration, as educators in different settings inspired me to observe, listen, reflect, and grow within my own context. Ho‘opili conjures the sense of community that develops when educators come together as learners in search of more authentic ways of serving children (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

The educators in Reggio Emilia open their classrooms and their hearts to others across the world in hopes of fostering a pedagogy that centers on honoring the dignity of the child and the culture they are growing up in (Vinton, 2015). My colleagues at the table here in Honolulu opened my eyes to the worthiness of a dream to honor the dignity of the culture and the language of this place. In both mo‘olelo the child is the center, the protagonist of a story to celebrate the particular gifts of the individual and their heritage.

Ho‘ona‘auao—Learning and Innovation

In honor of my continual pursuit of new learning and development ho‘ona‘auao is an essential theme to discuss. The word ho‘ona‘auao can be deconstructed into individual components of na‘au, meaning “intestines, gut, heart, affections, mood, of the heart or mind, temper, or feeling” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.), and ao, meaning “light, day, dawn, enlightened, to dawn, world” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). When na‘au and ao are combined, the word na‘auao can mean “learned, enlightened, intelligent, wise, learning, knowledge, wisdom, daylight mind” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). And ho‘o changes the word into an action, leading us to ho‘ona‘auao, meaning “to educate or instruct” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). Ho‘ona‘auao creates the image of the enlightened mind or expanded na‘au.

In order to educate, we seek to explore, experiment, and broaden our ideas. As my kindergartners struggled with the abstraction of wisdom in preparation for chapel, they defined it as “thoughtful and smart but in your heart instead of just your mind” (Nā Ānuenu haumāna, personal communication, February 27, 2019), which offers their understanding of the more internal, gut-level nature of the concept of na‘auao than the more Western idea of intellectual growth.

This theme of learning and innovation was a focus of analysis in Chapter Four, as it related to a sense of kuleana. We return to weave learning and innovation into this chapter as an essential component of my kahua, acknowledging that an openness to new ideas is essential to huliau or transformation. There is an energy and a light that grows with each new experience and challenge that comes across our path. The following mo‘olelo *Reggio Emilia: Solo Trip* gives dimension to the ideas of Hawaiian culture and Reggio Emilia pedagogies, as they begin to merge and uplift one another within my teaching environment.

Mo‘olelo: Reggio Emilia—Solo Trip

Reggio Emilia... a feeling of familiarity comes over me. I’ve been here before. I know my way to the Loris Malaguzzi Center. Straight out of the piazza and all the way down the street with the colonnade. Left at the busy intersection and then across to the tree-lined street. Past the Asian restaurants, the surroundings a bit sketchy with groups of men loitering here and there. Then across the street, down into the tunnel under the train tracks and up into the bus station. But I am alone this time, no friends to walk with me, to explore, to search for gelato, or go to dinner.

I step outside my usual and email the study group that I will be joining. Would anyone like to walk over together? One reply... another timid soul happy for company to walk with to the first meeting with the study group. We meet in the lobby of our hotel.

“I’m Donna.”

“I’m Kristen.” We begin to walk, sharing our stories of family, home, teaching, and excitement for the upcoming week of inspiration. We walk briskly with intention and the awkward silences of a new relationship just beginning.

The gentleman who greets us defined the word “inspire” as “having to do with the first breath a baby takes”¹⁸—that initial breath in—and my mind turns to my first visit... breathing in the air of the tiny school. Breathing in the environment, the beauty, the scent of busy children, of freedom and respect. Breathing in the fragrances of cooking pasta and sunlight and joy. These fragrances blend to inspire. They help me see the simple beauty of the spaces created for children to thrive and be fully present in the life of their place. Sounds captured my imagination: a piano, its innerworkings exposed, laying open on the floor, a toddler gently plucking the cables within. Head cocked to one side listening, feeling the vibrations of sound. Building her understanding of how sound is made.

My mind races home: a child crouched facing a waterfall, head cocked, trying to capture the shape of a rocky outcropping with his paintbrush. Immersed, breathing in the beauty of his surroundings. Present in this place. Unaware of anything but the sound of the water falling, sunlight held suspended in the spray.

Inspire... to breathe in... a first breath... often a gasp... a sudden inhalation... that moment where pieces fit... where things fall into place... where something speaks to us.

The teachers in these classrooms seem small, almost invisible. Children are engaged with each other, with materials, in conversation, interacting. Oh! I see the teacher with a small group intently drawing together. Trying to recreate an image from a photo, their class sitting in a circle.

¹⁸ Robin Duckett, personal communication, March 31, 2019.

“How do you draw what is happening here?” is their teacher’s question. She acknowledges the challenge of this task—creating a sense of perspective—some of the children in the photo are facing forward with legs outstretched in front, while others are facing away from us with only their backs showing. A child explains that the squiggles in the middle of the drawing are the ideas that are being shared in their group. Another shows the ideas as shapes and lines scribbled inside the circle of the heads on her drawing. Their teacher asks how to begin... what might they try? She honors all efforts as an important step in their learning.

A recent trip to the lo‘i comes to mind. Sitting so still at the edge of the lo‘i... mixing brown with more and more white. Then a bit more until finally he explains, “I’m trying to figure out how to paint the water over the mud.” “Hmmm,” I answer, “That’s a challenge isn’t it? How do you get that clear layer?” He looks up at me, hoping I have the answer, the solution to his problem. “I guess you just have to try it... play with it and see what happens.”

He trails his brush, loaded with a sort of pale brownish white across the canvas, leaving quiet horizontal marks across the darker brown of the mud. Eyes darting back to the lo‘i as a point of reference. As quickly as these brushstrokes began, they are over and Ryan sits quietly. He seems satisfied with this work. Coming to the lo‘i is always a powerful; I believe the children feel it at a spiritual level, deep within them.

Eyes wide, Jenny stepped towards the lo‘i, clearly uncomfortable, hesitating... I know she doesn’t like to get dirty. She looks to me, and out towards her friends already splashing and steps in. Her toes sink into the mud, and the coolness of the water surprises her! She expects warmth and finds an icy cool... a firm bottom of rocks and twigs. She wades out, thigh-deep, trailing her fingers in the muddy water at the surface. Then she lets go and sinks in! She crouches and the mud and water rise up to her chest. Throwing her hands high into the air she begins to

laugh. A full-bodied belly laugh. Her joy is audible, concrete, and spreading. The laughter resounds as I drift back to the present.

Kristen and I meet up again at the end of the gathering, now joined by a handful of others to walk back to the hotel. We retrace our steps, now more sure of where we are headed. Pairs chat quietly about what we have begun. The leaves are beginning to fill out in the trees overhead and the wind offers a slight chill. We pull out coats tight and continue on. I slip back into my solitude as we enter the hotel. I will head out into the town to explore, to learn my way around, to seek out gelato, and to have a fabulous Italian dinner on my own.

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Ho‘ona‘auao—Learning and Innovation: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ike Ku‘una (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19) and Ka ‘Ao‘ao “Ōlelo (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17) emerge in this mo‘olelo, as moments of Hawaiian tradition and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i are held up against experiences in an Italian school. In each setting children are learning to kilo, to listen, and to express their understanding in unique and meaningful ways. Each environment provides inspiration and materials that encourage relationships to form. Collaboration and conversation emerge as a natural byproduct of curiosity (Biermeier, 2015).

Traveling alone in Italy I tested my own resolve to ho‘ona‘auao—to expand my horizons and understandings and grow into emerging ideas and possibilities (Mills, 2015). As I stepped forward with new colleagues in this foreign city, I took hold of a courage that would carry into my work after I returned home. Emboldened by those experiences, I was ready to take on the self-exploration and reflection that would inspire this study.

We model courage and flexibility for children as we step into the lo‘i or try to express its story with paint. As the setting of *Reggio Emilia: Solo Trip* moves from the Italian to the Hawaiian and back again, my own ideas were moving fluidly between the two, and each began to influence the other. The portions of the mo‘olelo set in the lo‘i offer glimpses of the shifts that are occurring in my practice, as children are more intentionally placed in cultural contexts in order to learn traditions and protocols from kumu with deep knowledge. Educational kipuka, like Ka Papa Lo‘i o Kānewai, Papahana Kuaola, Kako‘o ‘Ōiwi, and Paepae o He‘eia, are now essential components of the experiences of my haumāna. We seek out relationships with kumu on our campus as well, learning mo‘olelo, listening to stories in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, and adding to our collection of hula and mele. My intention is to continue to find opportunities to grow our interactions within our own ahupua‘a of Waikīkī, in order for the children to deepen their pili with the ‘āina of their school (Kana‘iaupuni, 2007).

‘Uhane Kia‘i—Guardian Spirit

It is in those times of inexplicable beauty and connection that I stop to consider the spiritual nature of all that surrounds us. There are moments that are not logical, and yet we know the pieces fit together to form something powerful and impactful. The word kia‘i can mean “guard, watchman, caretaker, or to watch” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). When kia‘i is combined with ‘uhane it connotes a “guardian spirit” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). There are times in our lives when people and events seem to be placed in our path at just the right moment for our growth and enlightenment. We often comment that someone is watching out for us, or something more powerful than ourselves is at work.

The following mo‘olelo *The Ed.D. Journey* captures a set of relationships that have left me forever changed. It describes how my doctoral journey and this particular group of educators

came into my life at just the right moment to support this inquiry into my piko‘u kanaka. This journey has placed me in relationship with mentors who have become pivotal to my learning and development as a kanaka Hawai‘i.

Mo‘olelo: Ed.D. Journey

We began our doctoral work over the summer of 2017. At the end of that summer a professor asked me if I had gotten what I needed from the course. For me, these people, this class, and the work that we were asked to do, were just what I was meant to do. It had changed my path. These people and their encouragement, their acceptance and their willingness to offer me their aloha, left me breathless. I knew I had to make them proud, not only my ‘ohana but my cohort, *the best cohort ever*, was expecting me to step forward, to take their mana‘o and do something meaningful with it.

Arms enfold me, the hug is genuine, the smile of greeting is meant to warm me. My dear friend, a new friend, holds out a gift. Carved lehua blossoms, she acknowledges me, my ‘ohana, my growing understanding of who I am, who I have always been. I feel like a small child, so grateful to my sister for taking the time to encourage my learning. It may seem a small thing, but I feel she knows it is much more. Grateful... I am forever humbled in the presence of this generosity of spirit, of her ability to know that her acceptance, her acknowledgement was what I needed.

The phone rings... U2... Beautiful Day... I respond by opening my phone to begin the meeting. We talk logistics... flow charts and bubbles. “What do the bubbles mean?” I ask. I am not really a flow-chart type of person. I am more of a draw-it-to-think type. We talk of past coursework, of mo‘okū‘auhau assignments that had shifted my thinking, that landed me squarely on two feet in a new space with new ideas emerging. I speak of my professor, the provocation

that had been placed in my path. When that summer began, I had had difficulty pronouncing mo‘okū‘auhau, wanting to be sure I had not missed a syllable. And yet here I was explaining that this was my path—this was the concept that would support my research. This was a new way of looking at what I had always believed... that everything, EVERYTHING is built upon relationships. That those who came before us and those who come after us are connected in this continuing thread of our lives.

We speak of grace and the acceptance of those in our cohort to honor each voice, each learner wherever they are. They have opened their hearts to me and my learning, never belittling or pushing me aside as ignorant or lacking in any way. This welcome speaks volumes about who they are and how they see the world.

We speak of autoethnography as a jumping off point, of using mo‘olelo as data. Seeing the world through indigenous eyes will nurture and honor the transformation that is occurring within me and within this work. My lens has shifted. My worldview has expanded. I am beginning to embrace the light that is shining through.

Just keep writing... Don't... I want to caution you... don't try to get to the end zone... trying to determine what theme is emanating... this process is so personal. Wherever your writing takes you is where it is supposed to go. Don't worry about the data analysis; it will all come later. (W. Kahumoku, personal communication, October, 2019)

We are connected, my chair and I, our mo‘okū‘auhau interwoven years ago as our paths crossed and our ‘ohana connected. In many ways, teachers become part of the ‘ohana of those that they teach. There is a closeness, a relationship built around aloha and trust that offers safety and comfort to all within the relationship. It is the only way I know how to do this work. There are teachers throughout my ‘ohana. I know I come by this calling naturally. It is in the personal

that we can support the child, know them, become kama‘āina¹⁹ to their experience, to their lives, and their worldview. In this closeness we can reach out to support, to push, and to celebrate their exploration and growth. There is beauty in the space between children and teachers.

Waiting, spending time with my kūpuna through journals and dreams, pondering questions so that I can know them better, has led me down a meandering path. I have explored my mo‘olelo with a more indigenous lens and developed a broadened perspective. Understandings, mo‘olelo, mana‘o each came in their own time. I could not summon this learning or this writing. It came when it is meant to come. It came through tears, often tears running into the lines of my smile. I came home to work on a chapter and found notes from a phone call. And here I am, hours later, my heart full, immersed in the sounds of the Hilo March playing in my mind, as I see my dad standing proud. I feel the arms of a dear friend embracing me in a hug that does not let go.

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‘Uhane Kia‘i—Spirituality: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

I struggle with the idea of spirituality, as I am ignorant of traditions of Hawaiian spirituality, but I do believe that there is something greater than ourselves at work in our lives. As I read Chun (2015), I am beginning to see that there are things I have within my experience that connect to aspects of Hawaiian spirituality. I am awed by moments of inspiration upon waking, moe ‘uhane, and my breath catches as I notice hō‘ailona. I cannot claim any depth of understanding, but I can acknowledge a feeling, an appreciation, and a gratitude for those moments and that feeling.

¹⁹ Lopes Jr., 2016, p. 34.

Within this doctoral journey I felt I was placed on this particular path within this unique group of people for a reason. In retrospect, I can see I have been seeking to belong all along. Chun (2015) emphasized that being in relationship with others is a key component of belonging. He described a native people as having “an identity and culture that distinguishes them from others. By belonging to and identifying with this group, they also are able to receive, contribute, and be valued” (p. 2). I did not know that I was seeking the relationships that would be placed in my path, but they were there. My search has allowed me to receive boundless gifts, and I hope I am able to offer something to the next generation. I strive to find a way to be an engaged and active member of the community of kanaka ‘Ōiwi educators. As Malo (cited in Chun, 2015) stated, “a person with knowledge and skills who contributed to the community was a kanaka or person” (p. 2). My hope is to truly earn the right to carry the privilege of kanaka.

How can this struggle enrich the experience of the children in my classroom? For now, we learn the mo‘olelo of Hāloa and the pili the kalo has with the Hawaiian people (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992). The children learn to kilo, they learn to explore the native plants in our environment and often learn their uses. We look for ho‘ailona as we travel the island, and we pule each day to offer gratitude for all that we have. Mills (2015) suggested that children seek to embrace the beliefs that are modeled by their teachers, so it is imperative we begin our work with a strong knowledge of our beliefs. As I ask myself what beliefs I want to nurture about learning—place, identity, and self-efficacy—I want my understanding of the spiritual nature of our place and our culture to be as strong as it can be, so that the children can take hold of it for themselves.

‘Ānō—Summary

The mo‘olelo of the present are reflections of my growth and development as my knowledge increases. Chun (2015) described the four facets of traditional Hawaiian education as “observation or nānā or ‘ike... listening or ho‘olohe... reflection or pa‘a ka waha... doing or hana ka lima, and questioning or nīnau” (pp. 85-87). *Kapoho: Walking in the Footsteps of my Kūpuna* signified a time of observation as I began to pay attention to the signs in front of me, illuminated by my kūpuna and by my mentors. *Materials are Appealing, BHAG Assignment*, and *Reggio Emilia: Solo Trip* described times of listening and reflecting on what was within me, to understand how my collective experiences were influencing my practice and my piko‘u kanaka. *Ed. D. Journey* carried with it a time of questioning, of further inquiry into what my future might hold. Key to this huliau has been my ability to reflect on my inner self as well as the world around me, in order to understand how they affect each other (Robinson, 2015).

“Ka Wā Mahope” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Future

As Kame‘eleihiwa (1992) described the Hawaiian view of “seeking historical answers for present-day dilemmas” (loc. 675), I looked to mo‘olelo that offer past experiences as a way of looking towards my hopes and dreams for the future. The following mo‘olelo, *Kapoho: It’s Gone!*, *Dad’s Ashes*, *Paepae o He‘eia*, and *Wedding Hula*, all include glimpses of the future within the mo‘olelo of the past and present. Benham and Heck (2013) noted that as we create and reflect upon our mo‘olelo, there will come a time when our thoughts are clear, so next we must look at the inevitability of action. In reflecting upon nā mo‘olelo of this study, I have hopes and aspirations for ways I might be able to contribute to early childhood education in Hawai‘i.

Ku‘u Home—Sense of Place

This mo‘olelo evolved as I did over the course of its writing. It began with a feeling of devastation as I wept over the loss, the erasure of a place so dear to me. Returning to the story to add another section, I found that my attitude had changed. The words ku‘u home are used here to offer a feeling of comfort, of being at peace with whatever comes, as I am at home. It is my way of acknowledging Kapoho as a place of sanctuary, the place that developed in me a sense of belonging, of kuleana, and now, of transformation just as that ‘āina has been transformed.

Mo‘olelo: Kapoho: It’s Gone!

“It’s gone” reads the subject line of the email. I have been dreading this impending reality. Trying to fool myself into thinking it would stop, that I would be spared the loss. I open the email with tears streaming! Heart pounding. I know the devastating news I will read... my place of refuge, the ‘āina that sits in my na‘au, has been erased, cleared of all vantage points, cherished views, and beloved spaces. Pele has reclaimed them, covered them over to begin again. My heart is broken. Never again will my children see my most sacred place, the ‘āina that formed me as a mother and a teacher... the place that grounded me in Hawai‘i and in ‘ohana. That summer I had wished for my grandfather’s bravado, sitting out on the front step, a bottle of whiskey in hand, white flags lining the property of friends down the road,²⁰ and prayed for the devastation to stop as it had all those years ago. She would choose not to stop this time; our ‘āina would not be spared.

The place of my childhood wiped clean by molten lava. Steam billowing from the ocean. A new shoreline created, obliterating the beautiful ponds, covering my refuge, reaching its fingers out to envelop all that I loved in that place. No trees. No house. No lava rock stepping

²⁰ Stoddard, S. (2012).

stones. No naupaka rotting in the corners of the pond. Had someone sent our honu out to sea? Or had she stayed, as this was the only life she knew? White flags,²¹ whiskey, prayers, and offerings had appeased Pele once years ago. The year of my birth... leaving this place for me, offering me ‘āina, a place to grow, and develop my love for this land.

The next generation will know this place through stories and photos. Will we one day be able to walk that land? Or will I never see the horizon from that particular place again? Would I be able to find it? Would I know when I reached that beloved spot? It is no longer the coastline... it's now an inland piece of lava. When will the ohi‘a lehua begin to inhabit that land again? Will it make its way into the rock breaking down the lava to create rich soil for other plants to flourish? Will it become a place for another generation's childhood? Will it instill wonder and aloha in another child?

In time it will thrive again. Ohi‘a lehua, kupukupu, bees, pināo, and an occasional tiny, orange orchid. The cycle will continue... people will come. New generations will walk that ‘āina, listening for their kūpuna to share their mo‘olelo.

We left KTA with snacks; kaki mochi, two bottles of coke, a Hershey's bar, Stone cookies, and cone sushi. Perfect! We were headed to Kapoho. My thoughts swirled. I had wanted this, had asked for this but now that it was upon me... tears. What would we find? What would I feel? Would I be devastated yet again, or would I find something? Something to know that this was still the place of my kūpuna?

I was ready for the long drive, hoping to see familiar landmarks along the way. We drove past the turnoff to the zoo, then on out of town towards Puna. I could see the tunnel of trees just ahead... they seem smaller now... less imposing. The road got darker, shaded, and cool. “Stop!

²¹ Stoddard, S. (2012).

Ginger! I need to pick some,” I say to my husband. This is my mo‘oki‘ina, my moment to breathe in the fragrance, to ready myself for this place. My husband knows his role today is one of support... strength for me as this story unfolds. We have traveled these roads before but with happier anticipation. Today, we can only imagine what we might find.

We drive through Pāhoa on our way to Kapoho. The road is newly paved. Lava fields surround us, dotted with new ohi‘a growth, which brings smiles to our faces. The new trees are stretching to the sky, roots pushing outwards, breaking through cracks in the lava. There is hope that there is life here. Kupukupu thrives in patches, pushing up through crevices in the lava. We get closer to where we think our journey will end. There are small orange blooms on the horizon; those tiny orchids I remember so well. We use the GPS on my phone to help us locate our spot. With our best guess, we are here. Where? Here. The land no longer ends at the ocean, waves breaking along the rocks. The horizon is further on, but this is where we are meant to stop. To linger.

“Aloha! Nana and Jim. We are here,” I whisper to myself as I lay the ginger at the base of a young ohi‘a lehua. Images of the autograph tree in the yard, the lava stepping stones, the pond with its small island, our honu swimming lazily in its waters, the coconut trees, and the naupaka come flooding back. Nana, arms outstretched, Jim standing tall and severe, yet a hint of a smile to welcome us. We are here. We have found our ‘āina, the ‘āina of our ‘ohana.

Our mo‘olelo are here... covered over by new lava, but still here, just as our kūpuna are here, carried in our hearts, in our memories, and in the mo‘olelo we share with our mo‘opuna. We are now kūpuna in our own right. We have shared the mo‘olelo of this ‘āina with many who want to hear about a place that no longer exists as it was in the past. It remains at my na‘au, the

kahua upon which so much has been built.

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Ku‘u Home—Sense of Place: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

At last, I could embrace the idea of that ‘āina existing within its new form and continuing on in the patterns of life. Maybe it is a general sense of maturing, a wisdom that approaches as we grow older, or maybe it is more about understanding who I am and how I am connected to so much more than any particular form in that landscape. I have passed on the stories of Kapoho to my haumāna and to friends and family. It is a place that will live on through those stories, and through the deep abiding aloha I have for that place and all that it has formed in me.

What can I learn from this? What can I pass on to those who come next? For my own ‘ohana, there are many possibilities. Our mo‘opuna should know about our roots on Hawai‘i Island. They should learn the mo‘olelo of Puna, Kapoho, and Pele. They should know the stories of their kūpuna, the mo‘olelo of the places we have lived on O‘ahu, and the beaches our children ran on as little ones.

I am conflicted as I write this. I cannot make grand statements of what I will do. There are many dreams, many opportunities for learning, and I can only hope that I will find ways to make some of this part of my future learning. Life is complex, and as we know, the future is not ours to predict. I will carry my questions and my learning from life thus far close at hand, in hopes that I will see opportunities to share and pass my learning on. I do know I will share stories, the mo‘olelo of my life, of the lives of my children, and of the places we have held dear. It is a start, a beginning, and a way to introduce others into a valuing of place, ‘ohana, and continuity.

This year we began asking our haumāna to interview members of their ‘ohana to gather family stories. This revealed a wellspring of new learning around family and place. I hope to continue this into family projects to learn about their home. Where is your home located? What is the Hawaiian name for that location? What is the name of your ahupua‘a? What are the names of nearby streams or mountain peaks? What mo‘olelo can you uncover in your place? There are connections to be made to landmarks, geographies, and events in the history of each place. Building a relationship to place and our environment says that “who you are, where you are, and what you experience has value and is worth knowing” (Kesler, 2015). Beginning to notice all that surrounds their home encourages a deeper interest into the mo‘okū‘auhau of a place, and can lead to a growing sense of ku‘u home (E. McGuire, personal communication, June 3, 2020).

He Pili Wehena ‘Ole—Inseparable

He pili wehena ‘ole turns our thinking toward those relationships in our lives that remain constant and intimate, even as their form changes. Wehena can be described as “opening, fastening, taking off, solution” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.) and wehena ‘ole can mean “closely related” (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n.d.). The word fastening brings up images of a young child literally attaching herself to her parent as an opihi to the rocks. The opening speaks to a feeling of safety we have in the presence of the close relationships of family, as we open ourselves up to the broader world.

The loss of a parent is like no other experience in our lives. I walked through my days as a daughter who adored her father, and then one night, he was gone. The following mo‘olelo of *Dad’s Ashes* describes a time when my life was turned upside-down, huliau. I was heartbroken and thrust headlong into my familial responsibilities without time to prepare. This mo‘olelo has resurfaced more than 20 years later to help me understand how to bring together my learning

from the past with new knowledge in the present, in order to move into the future with purpose and action. I will need to seek out mentors and kumu to help me answer my continuing questions.

Mo'olelo: Dad's Ashes

“Could you ask your aunty... I need some help.” I tried to get the words out, “my dad passed away.” I hear her breath catch as she tries to think of what to say. I continue on with my request knowing I cannot stay on the phone for long. “We need to carry his ashes out to sea. I don't want to carry a box or an urn. I want something more Hawaiian, more beautiful. I was wondering how to make a pū'olo.”

“I'll check with her and get back to you.”

“Thank you.”

The answer was not what I had hoped for.

“No. She said it wouldn't have room since the stem goes up the middle of the pu'olo.”

“Oh!” I hadn't thought of that. My heart sank.

“But she says she will make a haku lei for you to use on a basket. Will that help?”

“That would be beautiful. Are you sure?”

“Absolutely! She is happy to help.”

The lei was perfect; a pattern of lehua, liko, and palapalai. Each blossom was honoring the man we loved so deeply, acknowledging the loss that sent us reeling. We wrapped the lei carefully around the handle of a lauhala basket. The basket was heavy, much heavier than we had anticipated. I carried it on board, and the tug headed out to sea. We sat quietly, each of us in our own thoughts, looking out past the harbor markers. I thought about how much dad would love

this trip. Waves rolled; the tug pushed steadily through the water, the wind buffeted us, the salt misted our faces. It was a gorgeous day, bright and blue.

Eventually, we slowed, the boat rolled gently, settling into its natural rhythm. The kahu spoke, honoring us all with his words and his prayers. I couldn't tell you any of what he said that day other than the twenty-third psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...". It was a psalm that dad and I had repeated many times, one of the few I knew by heart.

It was time to say aloha. To scatter his ashes to the winds. We were in the shipping lanes now, one of the places that made him happy. One of the places that helped to shape the man that grew to become my father.

Handfuls, gritty and gray. Tears streaming down our cheeks, clouds of gray sinking beneath the waves. Clouds of ash blowing back in our faces, caught in our tears, caught in my mouth as I silently prayed. We returned to shore in silence and somehow made our way home. Three little boys ran joyfully out to greet us! Smiles and hugs. His proudest moments!

He Pili Wehena 'Ole—Inseparable: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

As I sought the advice of a kūpuna as to how to carry my dad's ashes, I was acknowledging the protocols deep within that were calling to be rediscovered. The kahua built years ago was asserting itself in this moment of distress, just as the devastation of the lava flow inspired new understanding and deeper connection with the 'āina and my kūpuna. It was only much later that I could begin to see the true impact of that time. This was the beginning of my transition to adulthood. In this mo'olelo, the line "I was thrust headlong into my familial responsibilities without time to prepare" (Mo'olelo: Dad's Ashes) holds up my lack in learning the rituals that I would need to uphold.

Chun (2015) spoke of a passing on of cultural skills and knowledge. In this case, I had only vague inner whisperings to guide me. It was up to me to seek out mentors and learn whatever I could. My heart searched for more, but with three small children at home, this one simple plea for help was all I could manage. It would have to suffice for the time being. The traditions and deep sense of aloha would continue to thrive, slightly out of focus, waiting for a time when I would be ready for more.

That time is now. This research will end, and new questions will carry my learning into the future. What mentors can I seek out? Who can help me bring a deeper experience to my haumāna? I will continue to ask others to share their expertise with all of us. I will also persist in encouraging and assisting those around me to take those initial first steps into building this deeper connection. I have discovered that small steps in, as in the *BHAG Assignment* or Jenny stepping into the lo‘i (Mo‘olelo: Reggio Emilia: Solo Trip), can have a tremendous impact on our lives.

Ho‘omohala—Blossoming

Paepae o He‘eia is a glimpse into what the future might hold for my work with children. It is a story of hope and inspiration as our classroom community pivots into a deeper sense of Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ike Ku‘una (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19) and Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ōlelo (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 17). There is a ho‘omohala, or blossoming, that is occurring as this story captures a powerful shift in learning, recognizable to those with knowledgeable eyes.

Mo‘olelo: Paepae o He‘eia

Never have I considered myself as teaching Hawaiian language, and yet today, my haumāna use ‘ōlelo throughout their day. They have begun to hear the sounds, taste the words... feel the vowels forming in their mouths. They introduce themselves, starting to understand the importance of carrying their family name to honor their ‘ohana. They hear songs, find familiar words, pick out what they know. They notice words around them, asking questions.

“How do you say...?”

My answer is often, “I don’t know. I’ll go find out.”

They listen and try to pronounce. Their ears are familiar with the sounds. They notice the ‘okina in the name of a friend. They are aware that this language, the language of their home, exists for them. They use many words as first words for things... knowing their meaning rather than their translation. Words and phrases like: makahā, i‘a, mahalo, helu helu, e ke akua, noho ilalo, kū iluna, e pa‘ani kākou, mele, piko, and oli. Some of these words are now familiar, old friends, comfortable on the tongue. Memories may waver when not part of their every day mo‘oki‘ina, but they have already stepped over the threshold, never to feel left outside. They know they can enter, that they are welcomed into this space and this learning. They know they have a place in this work. There are children like me, blond, blue-eyed Hawaiians. No one would guess, but they are proud of their heritage, eager to embrace any learning that comes their way. Parents express appreciation for their child’s new perspective, new ideas, and understandings.

We tumble off the bus... the air is charged with the energy of eager five- and six-year-olds. We are heading to Paepae o He‘eia. The children recognize the loko i‘a, from books in our classroom, as we head down the long driveway. We gather together as a group.

“Aloha!”

“Aloha,” with hugs. The kumu stands before us; the children stand, shuffle, then stop... stillness, calm takes over. Parents notice and remove their hats. The sun is in our eyes as we lift them to scan the horizon.

“Eia no mākou... pā!” offer two small voices with a strength we are proud to hear. The mele is pure and strong.

Eia no mākou

Nā keiki o ka Punahou

Ho‘omālamalama e mōhala ai

‘Umeke ka‘eo

Loko maika‘i

Mahalo i nā kumu alaka‘i

Mahalo i nā kumu alaka‘i²²

The keiki ask permission to enter, to seek new knowledge, and new understandings. They express gratitude to their kumu, who are there to help them learn. The kumu responds strong and proud. As he finishes, he commends the children for their mele and their strength, and the huaka‘i begins.

We walk the walls of the pond. The children marvel at the stories of how it was built long ago and rebuilt over the last decade. They think back to the stories read at school and how the people hali hali the stones, hand to hand, from the mountains all the way down to the shore to form the walls. This is how they learn the idea of “ho‘omau ka hana a pau.”²³ The concept of ahupua‘a becoming real for them in this collaborative act. The makahā fascinates them, and they try to imagine the fish entering the loko i‘a in pursuit of food rather than being caught and

²² E. McGuire, personal communication, 2010.

²³ Armitage, Hale, & Enos, 2001, pp .20-23.

trapped. The intelligence of our kūpuna illuminates the faces of the parents as they learn alongside their keiki.

The children are particularly excited to climb into the hale at the outer edge of the pond. They sit entranced by the mo‘olelo of this place. They hear mo‘olelo of siblings who forgot to care for their relationships and learn of the consequences this can have. They are captured by the language, the rhythm of this place, and the generosity of their kumu. He is captured by their interest and their eagerness to understand and connect. Ideas of sustainability, community, and relationship are illustrated again and again with each story kumu shares.

Another trip, years ago, lingers in my memories.

“We are going to have you all do some work here at the fishpond. This big pile of coral needs to get loaded into these buckets,” directs the kumu.

“Can you guys help us with that?”

“Yes!” shouted the children. The children scramble towards baskets of gloves and begin to stretch their fingers into the tangled fabric. Each child has his own way. Some are careful, placing each finger in cautiously. Others work with force, pushing hard against the stiff, salt-soaked fabric and need help to slow down and orient fingers into the right spaces.

The children return eagerly to the pile of coral to gather handfuls, or armloads as full as they can manage. Thud... clunk... the pieces of coral crunch together as they land on previously dropped rocks in the bucket.

The work is done. All are satisfied with a task completed. But as we return to school, we see that the purpose was missed, not fully understood by the children. Why were we putting coral in the buckets? What did that mean? So the work began, back at school, to help them understand their place in that work.

We began by reading ‘Ōlelo No‘eau No Nā Keiki.²⁴ The children learned the ‘ōlelo no‘eau “E ho‘omau ka hana a pau.”²⁵ There was a painting of people passing stones, hand-to-hand, in order to build the walls of the fish pond. We read, we talked, then we gathered stones from our ‘auwai, to build our own fishpond walls and with it our own understanding.

Now they understood! We had loaded the buckets so the grown-ups could take the rocks out, to fill the holes in the wall of the fishpond... to repair that ancient site, to make it whole again. We had been part of that work.

That memory strengthens as I stand in the present, walking the wall that continues on past where those holes used to be. Those children years ago were a part of that rebuilding, of that hali hali, that collaborative act. We gather to end our time with kumu. The children face the loko i‘a to express gratitude to this place, the kūpuna, and to this kumu. A Kilihune hula is their mahalo. They are learning that their voice, their breath, and their hula are gifts they carry with them always. Again kumu is moved by their learning, their understanding that is growing.

As we climb the hill pushing slowly upwards, one of the moms places her hand on my shoulder.

“I want to thank you for this trip.”

“It was wonderful, wasn't it?” I respond

“Thank you for creating a protocol for them,” she adds.

“I‘m trying,” I say, “I‘m learning more each day.”

“As a people, we are learning... we are figuring out how to do this,” she says quietly, affirming my efforts and my place in this work. Tears blur my walk to the bus. Each trip to this place has been more than we had imagined, more than we had planned for.

²⁴ Armitage, Hale, & Enos, 2001.

²⁵ Armitage, Hale, & Enos, 2001.

The feeling inside me as we drove out, the Ko‘olau's watching our progress, was warmth and gratitude. It's coming; it's strengthening. What I am trying to create, the kahua I am seeking to build, is starting to take shape. The seeds that have been planted are beginning to sprout, and the new stems are stretching towards the light. There is hope that this work will flourish and bloom.

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Ho‘omohala—Blossoming: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

I have learned that including families in our cultural learning trips enriches their understanding and deepens the experience for their children. “The intelligence of our kūpuna illuminates the faces of the parents as they learn alongside their keiki” (Mo‘olelo: Paepae o He‘eia). This identifies our opportunity to extend the parents’ education and offer them more informed views regarding Hawaiian culture and practices. The idea of Ka ‘Ao‘ao Lawena (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19) encourages me to find positive models for parents, as well as for the children.

My hope is to continue to push forward into new territory, broadening the impact of the culture-based work that is present in our communities (Kana‘iaupuni, Ledward, & Malone, 2017). We have a strong experience in the ahupua‘a of He‘eia. The cultural sites there are rich and connected. We have benefitted from sites in Mānoa ranging from removing invasive species in Mānoa stream to hiking Wa‘ahila Ridge, from visiting a heiau to weeding the kalo at Ka Papa Lo‘i o Kānewai. There are mo‘olelo of Kāne and Kanaloa that connect to the waters of Mānoa that we have heard on our visits to the lo‘i. Taking the time to learn to retell those mo‘olelo will be work for my next school year. The mo‘olelo of ka puna hou connects us to the area of Mo‘ili‘ili. I hope to find mo‘olelo that will enrich our understanding of this area near our school,

extending our learning towards the ocean within our own ahupua‘a. Finding cultural sites in the more urban areas of our ahupua‘a has been more challenging, and this will be an ongoing search going forward.

What will this look like within my own ‘ohana? I am not sure. My adult children exploring the history of our island and sharing the explorations of my haumāna have led to exposure and broadening of our conversations. Lei making and studying native plants have taken on new interest as we develop our own yards and gardens. The mo‘olelo I internalize with my haumāna are being tucked away for another day when we might have our own little ones to share stories with. For now, I need to remain open to the possibilities, to the questions that arise in order to see what pursuits will be needed for our continuing development.

This mo‘olelo captures the development of protocols around mele and oli, as my understanding of their cultural importance and meaning encourages my intentionality to develop these rituals within my classroom community. As we left Paepae o He‘eia, a mother’s comment, “As a people, we are learning... we are figuring out how to do this” (Mo‘olelo: Paepae o He‘eia), awakened me to the transformation that was occurring within my practice and my own identity. My hope is to continue to create an environment “where families, teachers, and communities work together so that all children blossom from the roots of their cultural homelands” (Lee, 2017, 342S).

It has become increasingly clear that my lacking ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, the language of this place, and my heritage is a key factor that has limited my sense of belonging and sense of being *Hawaiian enough* (Wright, 2003; my emphasis). There is a depth of cultural understanding that goes hand-in-hand with speaking the language, and this has felt like a wall I could not scale. An

opportunity to learn in a series of workshops entitled “‘Imi ‘Ike”²⁶ was placed in my path at just the right moment. This exploration invited me to take my first awkward steps into language learning.

Beginning with single words and small phrases, my learning began to grow exponentially as I worked to integrate this knowledge into my classroom routines. I wanted to be sure the children would grow up knowing that invitation is theirs, the door is open, and that “they have already stepped over the threshold, never to feel left outside... know[ing] they can enter” (Mo‘olelo: Paepae o He‘eia). Each new step became a step closer to uncovering a stronger and more connected self. As Kaomea (2009) advised, I have continually asked myself, “What is my place in this setting? What is my role or kuleana here? And is this the time and place for me to step forward... to step back... or to step out?” (p. 95). For the first time, I felt my answer could be to step forward into my heritage, my culture, and my piko‘u kanaka.

A‘o Kahua ‘Uhane: Spiritually-based Learning

Shifting the idea of ‘uhane to a‘o kahua ‘uhane (“Nā Puke Wehewehe ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i,” n. d.) encourages us to think of learning that is spiritually grounded. *Wedding Hula*, is a story that captures a view of the future that shifted as we welcomed a daughter into our ‘ohana.

A wedding is a ritual that holds within it many traditions and dynamics that crystallize in one poignant and finite celebration. This story captures a coming of age for our family as we each stepped into new roles and new responsibilities.

Mo‘olelo: Wedding Hula

The group gathered, one person at a time, entering the room, putting shoes aside, dropping a purse on a table or a backpack on a chair at the side of the room.

²⁶ ‘Imi ‘Ike Series, Punahou School, Nu‘uhiwa & Reppun.

“Aloha, everyone. Let’s go ahead and get started.” The ipu signaled our opening rhythms as we warmed up our bodies and our spirits. “Today, I want you to dance for someone. Have someone in mind when you dance,” our kumu suggests.

Mom. No question. I wanted her here with me. The music began... Lei Ho‘oheno. I love this hula. It begins arms wide, gentle movements of the hands gather in with aloha... a lingering ka‘o as my hands bring a lei to rest on my shoulders. There are gestures I love: onaona with a gentle roll of the fingers to bring an enjoyable fragrance up to the nose, nohea i ka maka with graceful hands near the eyes and turning. Thoughts of my mom bring a smile to my face as I dance. I realize I am grinning, almost laughing out loud. I can feel her with me.

I imagine us dancing in our living room in Hilo, my feet trying to follow as I concentrated on my hands. I see her graceful hands telling a story alongside a table at dinner with family and friends. I remember her dress moving gently as she dances for us at our wedding reception, her beautiful hazel-green eyes glistening, and I see her in a blue mu‘umu‘u, a white carnation lei swaying as she dances at a lu‘au for my dad. The song ends, but she remains there in my smile.

There was a wedding day on the horizon. We were thrilled for our son and his bride-to-be, his dearest friend. We knew this was right. We were eager to help and to celebrate with them. If mom were here, she would dance. Almost surely it would be Lovely Hula Hands... her favorite to share at parties and celebrations.

But she was not here. It was my kuleana to step into that void. I was not usually one to step up at a party. I was less sure of my abilities than she was. I sought advice from my kumu and friend.

“Can I do it?”

“Yes.”

“Will I embarrass myself? Or them?”

“No!” she laughed. “You won’t.”

I had a song in mind; Lei Ho‘oheno. Hula class came drifting in at the edges of the conversation. I shared my thought, telling the story behind my choice.

“Is it an appropriate song choice?”

“Yes, it’s perfect... the love for a beloved child. Yes. Perfect.”

“Will you help me?”

“Of course.”

The wedding day is bright. It's perfect. The ocean rolls gently, and children laugh at the shore. Friends gather. Our children are gorgeous. The tropical colors and textures of the flowers arranged by dear aunties add a lush quality to the setting. Everything is just as it was hoped to be.

Brothers and sisters celebrate their siblings. We have already cried together in rehearsal for this evening. There are words of love. We are so proud. This younger generation has made this day unique and special. We sit back and revel in their coming of age. This celebration was more than a uniting of bride and groom. It was a reminder of family—a joining of hands to celebrate all that we share.

It was time to offer my gift. My mind raced. I hoped mom would be by my side. This was a first for me... to stand and dance alone. I wanted our family to know that the Hawaiian in us mattered and needed to be intentionally nurtured. I needed to remind myself of my role in that kuleana. I began, arms wide, with gentle movements of my hands gathering in with aloha... I danced for our children, for our ‘ohana, for my mom and dad, and for all who were there with us

in spirit.

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A‘o Kahua ‘Uhane—Spiritually-based Learning: Reflection, Analysis, and Literature

The mo‘olelo of *Wedding Hula* captures a moment when the meaning behind my gift of hula overwhelmed me. “It was my kuleana to step into that void” (Mo‘olelo: Wedding Hula) explains the source of my trepidation. I was admitting to myself that our culture and the traditions we would carry into the future were now my kuleana. We were now “kūpuna in our own right” (Mo‘olelo: Kapoho: A Vision For The Future), and that tradition was now mine to uphold or to let slip away. The gift of hula was one that the bride and groom did not expect, and in that moment, everything shifted, huliau, and began anew as I stepped forward to dance into the future of our ‘ohana and our continuing efforts to embrace our evolving piko‘u kanaka.

This modeling of behaviors and expressions, Ka ‘Ao‘ao Lawena (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009, p. 19), will be what pushes my future learning forward. What are the behaviors, rituals, and traditions I want to pass on to our children and, hopefully, our mo‘opuna one day? What role will I play in the tending of the traditions of hula and lei making? Will I learn to speak ‘ōlelo makuahine? I dream of giving the gift of language to my mo‘opuna, and I know that it is time to take on that learning. I know that first, I must dream it, and then, I can begin to seek out those who can support my learning.

“Ka Wā Mahope” (Kame‘eleihiwa, 1992, loc. 675)—Future: Summary

These mo‘olelo describe growth and movement. They highlight the growth that is happening within me and within my practice. They offer a sense of hope and progress. What will I do next? How can I continue to be useful in my learning?

There are two ways I hope to act on the beliefs and understandings shared in this research study. First, I hope to write a book for early childhood educators that focuses on how to create their own pedagogy, focused on the beauty of childhood and the value of culture-based connections in their everyday teaching. Through this research, I have found authors that inspire and provoke, but I have often needed to translate their ideas into the language of the early childhood environment. I can imagine offering the stories of an emerging pedagogy that began with a trip to learn in a small Italian town, and my first tentative steps towards an emerging piko‘u kanaka as an invitation for others to join in this critical and joyful work.

My second hope centers on the creation of literature for children. In my daily interactions with children, one of the most powerful ways to embed interest, curiosity, and beauty in their learning is through well-crafted literature. There are authors who understand and respect the intelligence of the young child and the early childhood setting, and there are others who pander to the child with simplistic and stereotypical characters and messages. The quality of literature embedded in the beauty of our island home which includes the more subtle nuances of culture and tradition is sorely lacking. My dream is to create children’s picture books that offer mo‘olelo in our context that are unique, meaningful, and grounded in authentic attitudes and ways of knowing. My hope is that whether the mo‘olelo is centered on a life lesson or the simple joys of childhood, they can be more authentic and more respectful of the young child's ability to engage in deep thinking (Kaomea, 2005).

Two mo‘olelo of this study not included within this dissertation dealt with my dreams for the future, my future as a kanaka early childhood educator: *More ‘Ōlelo* and *School in 10 Years*. These mo‘olelo explore the possibilities of what my classroom could grow to be. My hope is that now that we have ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as a “special” class, I can begin to work with our kumu to

incorporate her teaching into our daily work. We began by adding phrases to our daily schedule, labeling items in our classroom in ‘ōlelo, and adding simple phrases to our greetings. This was another small step forward, but now it is time for bolder moves. Our ‘ike Hawai‘i kumu suggested as the children learn of the importance of their ‘ohana we can work to extend their ability to stand and introduce themselves, their parents, and possibly their grandparents in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (E. McGuire, personal communication, June 3, 2020). How can we use the questions our kumu raises and nurture her teaching in other parts of our day? In my mo‘olelo depicting dreams for the future, I see myself as able to speak to the children in simple sentences, and able to broaden my repertoire of literature and mo‘olelo to deepen my classroom library.

Another dream that emerged in the mo‘olelo *School in 10 Years* envisions a much larger project. I would love to develop a bank of literature that would incorporate Hawaiian mo‘olelo and local authors into our Reading Workshop curriculum. Kaiwi and Kahumoku (2006) articulated the power of offering children an indigenous lens in the exploration of literature. In my kindergarten setting, the children could be better served if we were to incorporate literature that comes from a more relatable context. Literature that utilizes vocabulary and settings that are within reach of the children’s everyday experiences will enhance their developing comprehension skills, as well as their sense of belonging. If we are to create a truly integrated experience that is grounded in Hawai‘i and Hawaiian culture, the use of standardized, Western-focused curriculum must at the very least be adjusted in ways that can speak to the population within our classrooms and the place within which we teach.

This chapter began with the mo‘olelo that develop a sense of what grounds my identity, and it ends with a mo‘olelo that depicts my stepping into my own future identity. As I develop a stronger sense of belonging, I will need to strengthen my skills in order to pass my learning on to

others with a generous and open heart (Chun, 2015). The questions are endless and the pursuits are daunting, but there is a feeling that this work is what I am meant to do. So holomua!

Chapter 6: Implications and Recommendations

“E mau: No lei lasts forever, process over product” (Vaughan, 2019, p. 36)

Throughout this dissertation, I endeavored to weave nā mo‘olelo of my life—intricate and layered with meaning, subtle at times, strikingly bold at others. As a part of closing this lei aloha, this study, I return to the first few pages of this journey that captured the unfolding pages of my past, my present, and, hopefully, my future:

[T]he hike deep into the valley, the asking for permission to gather just what she needs, Vaughan (2019) recognizes that researchers—especially those here in Hawai‘i—must follow a similar protocol in preparation for data collection. As the lei maker carefully picks pua, liko, and palapalai, mindful not to take more than is needed, qualitative researchers, in particular, are selective and purposeful in whom they interview or observe. Even beyond the process of picking, a lei maker knows that flowers must be cleaned, stems cut, leaves set aside, ferns trimmed, and materials for binding set out at the ready, surveying all that has been gathered in order to see what groupings emerge, what intricate patterns can be created from this particular collection of foliage. Once the pattern is discovered, strong but gentle hands work tirelessly to weave or string the mixtures into a lei that is both pleasing and balanced. Each product is unique, authored by the maker to be an embodiment of new experiences and new learning (Vaughan, 2019) (chapter one, p.2)

This study focused on my mo‘olelo with the intention that others would find, as Wilson (2008) suggested, the connection and inspiration relevant to their own contexts. Mo‘olelo as data presented an opportunity for deep and often repeated reflection and the ability to surface subtle

meanings within the text. In reflecting on my research question—how has the interweaving of my work and career, family and lived experiences, and expanding knowledge of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian Culture-based education philosophies transformed my practice as an educator of young children and my identity as a kanaka Hawai‘i?—I embrace the three major themes that emerged from my stories: trusting the child, kuleana, and huliau. This chapter focuses on the implications and recommendations that appeared across the three themes.

Implications for Future Research

Throughout my self-study, a multitude of perspectives blossomed as I explored the interweaving of Reggio Emilia and Hawaiian culture-based philosophies. I wondered how to honor the young child and the kuleana for successfully integrating Hawaiian language and culture into my classroom. I sought to understand what transforming education would look like in the future as I looked back over pivotal events in the present. Out of these wonderings, I present the following implications for further research emerging from my study:

Implication 1: Conduct a study of the development of Hawaiian spirituality in young children as an essential part of developing a deep relationship with place.

As I have come to understand how spirituality is integral to a Hawaiian sense of place, I, like McGregor (2007), accept the importance of embracing our spiritual development as well as that of our children. In the ‘Uhane section of chapter five, I recognized spirituality as an emerging way to embrace our relationship to this ‘āina we call home. As we learn to nurture the spiritual connection to our island home—the hō‘ailona found in the winds and rains, the intangible yet profound links between how the moon and sun impact what we do in our lives—a research study to develop these spiritual understandings in our children will expand their ability

to wonder, to see beauty, and to hope to not only become strong stewards of this land but to also commit to its preservation and, in some urban spaces, its restoration.

Such a study must help us to embed reflection in spirituality to transform our thinking, education, and living. When we develop a commitment to reflection and spirituality, we acknowledge our shared humanity, and this can impact marginalization (Zurmehly, 2014). This study may allow us to increase the potential to smooth the rifts and fissures within our communities. As we teach children to work in and with the ‘āina, I believe they will revel in our world’s wonder. As we share mo‘olelo and oli to honor the places in which we learn about and work in, we are planting the seeds of spirituality in our keiki (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013). Such a study might help us uncover how to bring reflection and spirituality to our children to empower them to be the next kia‘i of our homelands.

Implication 2: Conduct a study on how Hawaiian and Non-Hawaiian educators effectively integrate ‘ike Hawai‘i and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i into the lives of Hawai‘i’s children.

In chapter three, I recognized the child’s innate curiosity as a researcher, and the importance of encouraging him to explore his home and all that surrounds him. I suggest a study that examines the various and unfolding methods that educators take to bring ‘ike Hawai‘i and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i into their classrooms. Such a study should investigate access points to ‘ike Hawai‘i, especially for those who are new to this type of curricular and instructional methodology. In seeking to understand the systematic implementation of Hawaiian culture-based education into early childhood classrooms, this study might collect and analyze data to make recommendations about developing deeper understandings and appreciations for the importance of how this type of teaching and learning has an impact on the identity of children, their families, and the larger society.

This study could also evaluate how family attitudes towards language, culture, sense of place, and stories are impacted and enhanced by culture-based learning experiences with their children. Just as I held onto Jordan as we began work in the lo‘i (chapter five), I believe that we must study how Hawaiian Culture-Based Education can help parents hold a strong set of values that celebrate both their familial histories and cultures, enabling families and communities to live together here in Hawai‘i. As a parent recognized at the end of a trip to Paepae o He‘eia in chapter five, the significance of such cultural visits, especially for those who have lived here yet do not often experience these cultural and ‘aina-based learning opportunities, is valuable and worthy of gratitude.

To build a strong relationship with the ‘āina and the culture, there must be sites for experiential learning (Kawakami & Dudoit, 2000). This study could also offer different ways to open new experiential learning sites to our students and families. In chapter four, I noted our kuleana embracing culture-based, on-site immersive experiences as a significant step in bringing the Hawaiian culture, language, and traditions into the lives of our haumāna and their families. The knowledge and modeling that ‘āina-based kumu provide and this study could explore how our encouragement and support of these educational sites will be crucial to nurturing the cultural connections we envision for our haumāna and their families.

Implication 3: Conduct a study on language learning within culturally-integrated settings.

When language proficiency and fluency are the goals, we know language learning must go hand-in-hand with culture to be meaningful and applicable (‘Aha Pūnana Leo & Haka ‘Ula Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, 2009). This study would examine how to create deep cultural connections through language learning opportunities, increasing understanding and encouraging growth in action. In chapter five, I noted that cultural learning takes on a richer tone

when there is an understanding of the language. I recognize that within cultural traditions and mo‘olelo are the supports necessary to understand the nuances of the language. Initially, we must step into the culture and history of this place to access the mo‘olelo and the traditions that are there waiting for us (Lake, 1987). This study could investigate methods and settings that evoke a connection to our ‘āina, our kūpuna, and the kuleana that sits below the surface in each of us. In turn, we will develop programs that will significantly engage learners through languages, especially that of Hawaiian.

Recommendations

The findings of this study encourage the development of deep trust in the capability of the child and the early childhood educator, as well as a commitment to childhood and the lessons found within it. The processes of inquiry and reflection can have a transformative impact on an educator’s identity and practice, as well as those of their haumāna. The following recommendations emerged from the data, and are presented as opportunities to take initial steps towards a future that honors each child’s culture and, more specifically, all of us in Hawai‘i. These recommendations are offered in the spirit of provocation and possibility.

Recommendation 1: Develop and operationalize a strong image of the child

Given the results of my study, I recommend that educators, administrators, and policy makers both here in Hawai‘i and beyond develop and maintain a strong image of the child in order to check ourselves and our practice. In chapter three, I discussed the importance of constructing a view of the child that acknowledges competence, strength, inquisitiveness, and capability. I advocate that we embrace a view of the child that is “positive and expectant” (Collins, et al., 2015, p. xviii). Rather than believing a child to be incapable, not worthy, or less than, we must believe that all are capable, worthy, and intelligent. We must hold ourselves

accountable to these tenets as we interact with children (Glover & Keene, 2015). In chapter four, I highlighted that learning occurs when a child is in a reciprocal relationship with his or her teacher. Open dialogue and interaction between them builds the child's sense of worthiness, and encourages independence and initiative to flourish. I suggest in chapter five that an educational process that offers spaces for curiosity, exploration, and initiative nurtures children's minds. Observing and listening closely to behaviors and questions of children helps us recognize their capability and keen curiosity. Taking the time to develop this image of the child through journal writing, photography, note-taking, and the composition of mo'olelo, these strategies may offer prospects for both their and our reflection and growth. Viewing children from their strengths, their gifts, and the authenticity of their drive for learning can transform our practice immeasurably (Meyer et al., 2018).

Recommendation 2: Implement Hawaiian Culture-Based Education for Early-Childhood

Throughout this study, I have found the implementation of culture-based education to be essential to the well-being and grounding of our children in their home and their childhood. Guided by the findings of my study, I recommend integrating culture-based education in early childhood classrooms. This recommendation will come in three parts: 1) first steps into classroom integration of Hawaiian culture-based learning, 2) family engagement, and 3) integration into literacy instruction.

a. In the sub-theme of "A Child's Right to a Gentle Welcome" in chapter four, I noted that a nurturing, supportive, inquiry-based learning environment plays an integral role in a child's growth. It is our kuleana that this environment reflects our values and our beliefs. By first looking at our classroom environment, routines, and literature, we can begin to take the first steps towards the integration of language and culture. When we step into culture-based learning,

we take on the role of learner and model a commitment to learning we hope to see in our haumāna. In chapter three, I noted that integrating ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and ‘ike Hawai‘i into our classrooms begins to normalize these practices and offers a connection to our home. Some possible first steps include:

- labeling the room in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i,
- adding songs in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i to your daily routine,
- creating greeting and end of day protocols of mele, oli, or gratitude,
- adding words or phrases in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i to your classroom schedule, and
- learning traditional mo‘olelo that connect to the place of your school.

b. In chapter four, I suggested that we have a kuleana to plant the seeds of ku‘u home o Hawai‘i by developing a sense of aloha ‘āina in our children. We must find opportunities to immerse children in the ‘āina and the traditions of our culture. Including families in this work offers growth and learning beyond the children, and can model new behaviors for all. I encourage us to think about ho‘opili as a coming together in close community. Inviting families to work in the lo‘i, learn the mo‘olelo of Hāloa and Kahalaopuna, and engage in oli and mele protocols will help more families become knowledgeable and impassioned land stewards. In the ho‘omohala section of chapter five, I suggested how we can extend the family’s learning through two projects:

- Ku‘u Home Project—Send the families out to learn about the place of their family home. Learn the Hawaiian names of their ahupua‘a, the nearby stream, their valley, or ridgeline.
- Mo‘okū‘auhau—Children can begin to introduce themselves in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, including their name, where they are from, the name of their parents, and their grandparents.

Families can be encouraged to learn this protocol as they engage in learning trips with us (E. McGuire, personal communication, June 3, 2020).

c. Weaving Hawaiian literature/traditional mo‘olelo into current literacy programs—Reading Workshop (Calkins, 2015)—can form a core reading curriculum that embraces the tenets of Hawaiian Culture-Based Education. Working with knowledgeable Hawaiian authors and researchers, we should incorporate a compilation of specific mentor texts into reading lessons for our children; this will not only improve their connections to Hawai‘i but also, as Kana‘iaupuni and her colleagues (2017) illuminated in their research, enhance children’s reading abilities.

Recommendation 3: Increase Avenues for Teachers to be Researchers and Co-constructors of Knowledge

Given the results of my study, I recommend early childhood educators embrace the role of researcher and co-constructor of knowledge alongside their haumāna. I believe each of us has gifts, and when we can let those gifts shine, we all rise. Our ability as educators to inspire new learning and deep introspection is a powerful kuleana we carry, not only in our influence of children but also in our interactions with our colleagues (chapter four).

In chapter four, I underscored that the continual nature of our work as educators requires us to remain in a constant state of learning for the benefit of ourselves and those we teach. We must be careful and focused observers, then step back and reflect on what we can learn from those observations (Clemens, et al., 2012). The role of teachers as researchers and co-constructors of knowledge set forth by Reggio Emilia educators reminds us to pause and take stock in ourselves and our practice. They encourage us to “continue moving forward and to evolve by keeping in step with a changing society. We owe this to children, ourselves, our

community, and society” (Gambetti, 2012, p. 180). This research journey has demonstrated that conversation, reflection, travel, and a willingness to take risks have led to transformational shifts both in educator practice and personal identity.

Recommendation 4: Kūpa‘a for Our Keiki

“Assume that each person you meet or talk to is sacred and worthy, and that will help you interact and treat people with respect and dignity” (Burgess, 2013, p. 20). Given the results of my study, I recommend that early childhood educators, administrators, and policy makers develop an advocacy stance that allows our keiki to learn in environments and—through educational processes that encourage the development of interests, identity and voice—the natural proclivities of being a child. It is our kuleana to ho‘okūpa‘a for our children. We must model the strength of character and integrity as we create spaces for our haumāna to develop their own voice. In chapter five, I described how supporting children as they build a relationship with their home says they are valued, and their experiences are significant and meaningful. In chapter three, I noted that viewing the child as a researcher opens opportunities for the child to exercise the right to pursue their own ideas and create their own understandings. As per the mo‘olelo of *The Piazza and the Bubble* (chapter four), there are times where our kuleana requires courage, and we must take the time to develop our voice.

As we argue for children’s rights, we also must advocate for their right to a childhood. Our society is moving early childhood education further and further towards standards and academic instruction and away from the importance of play, inquiry, exploration, and self-generated learning. It is our kuleana to step forward and defend children’s rights to a childhood that builds a solid foundation in relationships, place, and curiosity. We are their advocates.

Creating a solid foundation for the children of Hawai‘i to develop their own identities and self-efficacy must be at the center of what we do as early childhood educators.

Mana‘o

I left my kindergarten classroom for Spring Break intent on writing the last pieces of this dissertation. Instead, I found myself immersed in distance learning preparations as we began to feel the devastation of COVID-19. While my mentors guided me from the other side of a computer screen as I wrote this study, I was also searching for new ways to maintain and nurture relationships with my haumāna and their families. My teaching had entered my students’ and mentors’ homes, and our lives had merged further than we could have anticipated.

As I look back on this research process, it has been one of deep reflection and striking personal growth. This journey has placed me in a state of immense gratitude for the learning, the relationships, and the emerging understandings that I have been privileged to experience. I stepped onto this path as a reflective practitioner-researcher, hoping to delve into a compelling blending of different perspectives on culture-based education. As a practitioner, I hoped to find a stronger way to bring my haumāna into the traditions, language, and culture of our islands. As a researcher, I wanted to explore the use of indigenous methodologies that were unfamiliar and provocative. I intended to step away from traditional forms of qualitative research and reporting to explore methods rooted in mo‘olelo, mo‘okū‘auhau, and personal reflection. As an individual, I hoped to discover a place where I could embrace my own indigeneity.

I have begun to know my ‘ohana, not only those who are with me in this lifetime but those who came before and those who will come after. I can see myself within the context of our mo‘okū‘auhau, one individual in a long line of survivors, voyagers, educators, warriors, mothers, fathers, grandsons, and granddaughters. I see my Tūtū writing to understand her journey. It was a

journey of faith, change, and challenges, a set of writings that came about because of a strong desire to share her thoughts. It seems so simple now to realize this, too—that I have researched and written this study to offer my words to future generations in the same way my Tūtū Sarah’s journal offered me her words so that I might know and understand her and me through conversation and reflection.

As I have spent time reflecting on the many mo‘olelo of my mo‘okū‘auhau, it has become increasingly important to honor those who are responsible for my being here. Entering into conversation with my kūpuna, I began to feel a sense of knowing them as people, as individuals with ideas, frailties, and opinions. I could see both similarities and differences in how we each chose to live our lives. My missionary kūpuna were strong, principled, and fervent in their faith. They came to Hawai‘i with a sense of duty and purpose. My purpose is different, but my sense of kuleana, my ability to stand up for what I believe, and my openness to take on challenges comes clearly from the Hawaiian voyagers on one side and those pious missionaries on the other. Each of us carry the mo‘olelo of our kūpuna within us. They are mine; they are part of my history and part of what sits in my na‘au and that of my sons. If we can embrace our mo‘olelo, we can continue to grow into the kuleana that has been set before us.

As this lei comes to a close, the last blossoms being woven into place, I step back to look at what I have created and marvel at the journey that it inspired. The path has been rocky, the work arduous, and the kuleana has left me exhilarated, grateful, and humbled. The challenge has felt purposeful and productive. The conversations around our family table have been deeply supportive, as I have felt buoyed by my ‘ohana's pride in my efforts. I am used to being the one who is proud, the one who celebrates their accomplishments. This is new territory for me.

What began as a journey into academia in pursuit of learning about practice has undoubtedly transformed over time. This journey of huliau has created opportunities for ho‘opili, to bring together those I love and offer a gift of time, remembrance, and mo‘olelo. I offer these mo‘olelo and the reflections they inspired as a way my ‘ohana, and those close to me, might explore facets of my identity and history that have not always been open to them.

In the same instance, this writing is my gift to those yet to come. I am offering my heart and my words so that they may know me and our ‘ohana more fully. Developing a relationship with my kūpuna was the most unexpected joy of this work. Taking the time to sit with Tūtū Sarah’s journals, to get to know that stern young woman and the struggles of her life, helped me to realize to a friend that, “I feel like I know her. She is mine.” What a gift that has been. Not only to know her through her writings but to know that I can seek out a relationship with my kūpuna through reflection, wonderings, and walks through the trees or along the shore. This has encouraged a deep sense of connection and continuity that I have carried quietly within me to come forward. I hope those who read this take the call to embrace their kuleana, always stand proud for who they are, and believe in their unique strength and beauty. I hope they will seek reflection and opportunities for learning that can transform them in ways unimaginable.

In a state of gratitude for those who have come before and those who will come after, there is one last mo‘olelo to share for now. It is a mo‘olelo of my imaginings as I walk in conversation with my kūpuna. Up until recently, Kahiliaulaninui has been a name in my genealogy that I did not feel I had the right to claim. He was a man I will never meet face to face. However, he is my ‘ohana; he is a part of my mo‘okūauhau. We are the survivors, the descendants of all that he was, and all that he will be, as we walk together in his footsteps towards our future.

Mo'olelo: Walking With Puna

The slightest light edges its way over the horizon just as the day begins. I find myself walking a trail into the forest with my Puna. I only know his name, Kahiliaulaninui. I do not know his face. He walks silently by my side. Maybe he senses I have questions to ask. Making our way over the rocks of a dry streambed I ask,

“Did you ever think about me? About your mo‘opuna?”

“Of course,” he said, almost surprised by my question. We continued to walk in the silence of close companionship. Every so often, he would point to something along the trail. The kukui growing along the mountainside, shimmering silver-green amongst the deep green of the ulu and a sprinkling of crimson of the ohī‘a.

“I would think of my mo‘opuna from time to time and hope that their lives would be good,” he mused.

We reach a hilltop, looking out towards the water. I hear the hollow sound of paddles in the distance as they brush the mo‘o (gunwales). The wa‘a glides swiftly along the coastline. Fishponds dot the shoreline.

“Our kūpuna's journey was an act of faith. They left home knowing in their na‘au that they would pull these islands from the sea,” he says. “I am grateful for their strength and spirit, and for giving us this place as our home.”

“I never really thought about you being born here. I think of you as that first voyager, but that was generations before you, wasn't it?” I pause to let that sink in. Puna and I both born here. Both descendants of voyagers. “The haole side of my family were voyagers too,” I add.

“I think you are a voyager as well,” he offered. “Tell me about your journey. You are studying. Telling mo‘olelo.”

“Yes. I teach young children. I am trying to understand how to serve them the best I can.”

“Do you teach them about the ‘āina? About our traditions? Do you tell them mo‘olelo of this place?” he asked, trying to understand my work.

“I’m trying. I’m learning and sharing everything I can.”

“Do you ‘ōlelo?” he asks, knowing what my answer will be.

“No. I’m sad to say I don’t.” His brow furrows. “I learned some words as a child, and I have added more over the last few years, but I have a long way to go. That’s my next project.”

“Good,” he replies firmly. “You need to learn. I’m proud of you. Passing our mo‘olelo on will keep our ‘ohana strong.”

“Our ‘ohana!” I’m beginning to think of this as our ‘ohana rather than just names on a genealogical chart. “I think as I understand my story, I am better prepared to help the children as they learn about themselves. With little ones, they are just beginning to find their own voice, you know? Talking to you, I feel as if I can hold you closer. I wish you could know your mo‘opuna, my sons. They’re beautiful, strong, and intelligent.”

“I know them. We are all here with you every step of the way,” he reassures me. “As you walk through the forest, we are all walking with you. Listen carefully. You will hear our footsteps. Kilo. You’ll see us.” I turn to ask another question, but he is gone.

I have reached an ohi‘a, standing tall with new liko adding a pinkish silver cast to the tips of its branches. I place a lei la‘i at its base and murmur a prayer of gratitude as my fingers gently brush its blooms.

*

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