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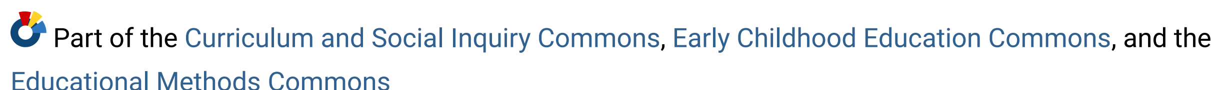
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Stories From Three Native Hawaiian Alaka'i About the Education of Young Children

Charis-Ann Sole, M. Nālani Mattox-Primacio, and Shin Ae Han

ʻAʻohe pau ka ʻike i ka hālau hoʻokahi. #203
All knowledge is not taught in the same school.
[One can learn from many sources.]
There is waiwai (value) from all resources, and not all knowledge is the same.
(Pukui, 1983, p. 24)

HOʻOLAUNA–TO INTRODUCE

Many Indigenous parents want their children to learn who they are, to know their relatives, to know about their ancestors who have passed on, to learn their Indigenous language(s), to know about the land they are from, and to develop a spiritual identity rooted in their Indigenous identity (Ball, 2012). Historically, educational systems in the United States have taken on the function of educating children separated from native knowledge. Instead, schools are still used to culturally assimilate, naturalize, and expand the Western mindset rather than to teach for success that includes ancestral language, traditions, practices, and cultural value systems (Kanaʻiaupuni et al., 2017). As this practice of erasure continues today, it confuses and contradicts what children know and learn to be true in their daily lives outside of school settings (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al., 2008).

The inherent right to their cultural identity, language, and values is one of children's fundamental human rights (Battiste, 2013; United Nations General Assembly, 2007). Some in the early childhood field are accordingly exploring ways to shape programs that reflect the unique cultural knowledge and values of Indigenous populations (Smith-Gilman, 2015). Indigenous education aims to build on and enhance the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive strengths held within the native host culture, often by including efforts to revitalize languages, knowledge, practices, and beliefs lost through colonization or occupation (Demmert & Towner, 2003), and seeks to make learning more meaningful and relevant to students. Essential to this (re)education model is the integration of elders, families, and communities into everyday educational settings, which may lead to a more "holistic, community-oriented system" (Bang et al., 2019, p.15).

Recognizing the fundamental importance of preserving cultural identity and values, early childhood education (ECE) is gradually embracing Indigenous practices and ways of living (Lees & Bang, 2023). The approach of centering indigenous culture and language is accentuated as an integral part of ECE practices in Hawaiʻi (Kaomea, 2005). In this endeavor, early childhood educators in Hawaiʻi strive to honor indigenous traditions and heritage and seek to create an environment where young children develop while forging a strong connection to their indigenous roots. This commitment to Indigenous education in ECE settings aligns with broader efforts to revitalize languages, knowledge, and practices that have been lost, to foster a return that involves elders, families, and community voices in the educational journey of the younger generation.

In this research, we aim to describe how Native Hawaiian education practices are integrated, embedded, and brought forth into early childhood settings, thus contributing to the broader discourse on the intersection of Indigenous values and ECE. Through an examination of the implementation of Native Hawaiian educational approaches in an early childhood context in Hawaiʻi, we aim to illuminate

Indigenous educational struggles, strategies, and perspectives and provide insights that can inform educational practices not only in Hawaiʻi, but also in other diverse settings that aspire to honor and integrate Indigenous knowledge (Hoʻomanawanui, 2019).

METHOD

Moʻolelo (Story, Narrative) Approach

A moʻolelo approach is employed in this research. In Native Hawaiian culture, moʻolelo is a "way of knowing" based on experience; in this piece, it is used as a way to honor traditionally silenced voices to allow them to be heard (Denzin, et al., 2006, p. 774). Moʻolelo can also be thought of as a sharing of words: sharing and listening to each other's stories, experiences, and knowledge. (Lipe, 2014). Osorio (2001) underscores that moʻolelo represents a fragment of a story, acknowledging that the storyteller does not convey every facet of the subject (p. 369). Osorio's insight into the meaning of moʻolelo adds depth to this narrative approach and frames our conscious decision not to interpret the participants' moʻolelo using our ideas or to add additional context to them. This deliberate choice is deeply rooted in Hawaiian culture (Kaomea, 2005; Smith, 1999) and reflects a profound acknowledgment of the significance placed on each individual's voice and narrative (Kahakalau, 2019).

Instead, to honor the words, story, and voices of the three alakaʻi wahine (Native Hawaiian women leaders), we gave them the transcripts of their interviews and asked them to decide which parts they wanted to share with the public. This approach, which is grounded in Hawaiian cultural values, reflects an acknowledgment of the significance placed on each individual's voice and narrative (Kahakalau, 2019). The regard for the participants' autonomy honors their voices and cultural practices and empowers them to control their own moʻolelo. By presenting the findings in collaboration with the participants, we aim to amplify their voices authentically without imposing external interpretations. While we recognize the inherent limitations of this approach, it is founded on the belief that delivering the participants' stories and words exactly as the alakaʻi wahine expressed them is important, enabling the wahine (women) to contribute their unique perspectives directly to the broader discourse.

The participants tell their stories in a circular nature. Themes build upon each other and are interwoven, but are rarely presented linearly. As Lovern (2022) points out, this way of storytelling, which is often called a "spider web" approach of transmitting information, can be found in other Indigenous cultures. Stories and information are thought of as having a relationship with each other and can and should be understood from multiple perspectives, which are deconstructed, examined, and then reconstructed (Nuʻuhiwa, 2019). Due to this relationship, the information has the potential to expand infinitely as more stories are unearthed (Lovern, 2022). This can be disconcerting to those accustomed to a Western construct of how information is conveyed, with its emphasis on efficiency and directness, but is reflective of an Indigenous point of view in which knowledge, and indeed reality itself, is thought of as metaphoric, multilayered, and multidimensional (Meyer, 2016).

Participants and Interviews

This research was part of a bigger project focusing on the significance of incorporating ʻohana (family) voices in early learning (EL) environments in Hawaiʻi. The project involved interviews with administrators and kupuna (grandparents, elders). For this research, three alakaʻi wahine were asked to share manaʻo (thoughts, ideas, beliefs) they learned as administrators of programs that are aimed at serving Native Hawaiian families and have strong family engagement components. All of the administrators are Native Hawaiians who have worked within culture-based education settings in Hawaiʻi. Two of the alakaʻi work in family-child interaction learning (FACIL) programs, one of four types of EL programs (center-based, home visiting, family child care, and FACIL) that currently operate in Hawaiʻi (Executive Office on Early Learning, 2019). The other alakaʻi works in a Hawaiian language

immersion setting. The immersion program was created to combat the loss of the Hawaiian language and culture, and all its classes are conducted exclusively in the Hawaiian language.

The aim of this inquiry was to unravel and reveal the efforts of the wahine participants, and the thought processes involved in those efforts, in which they uplift and instill Native Hawaiian-embedded knowledge, practices, and beliefs in their unique programs. The alakaʻi therefore addressed key questions focused on understanding the transfer of 3 knowledge in a Hawaiian context, such as: How does the transfer of Native Hawaiian transfer happen? What is the role of EL in this transfer of knowledge? What practices in educational environments help to develop relationships, build partnerships, and make contributions within Hawaiian communities?

Throughout this paper Hawaiian language is used. Translations are provided in text at the first instance. Additionally, an ʻōlelo noʻeau, a Hawaiian proverb, is used in the opening and closing which situates the content and context of the piece within the lens of a Native Hawaiian worldview.

MOʻOLELO–INTERWEAVING WORDS AND MEANING

The alakaʻi responses were verbal and were purposely presented in a semi-transcriptional format for the reader to "hear" and "listen to" the actual words of the three wahine. The moʻolelo are presented one at a time, after which a summary paragraph follows each response. Additionally, their stories are divided with subheadings. Lani chose the subheadings for hers; the researchers created them for Lena's and Kaleilehua's stories. After this section, four common themes from the moʻolelo are presented.

Lena

Lena lives on the island of Maui and works in a Hawaiian immersion program. Since joining the program as a parent with her own child, she has been involved in the Native Hawaiian ECE program she is currently employed by. She is and continues to be an alakaʻi wahine within her organization, as well as in Hawaiʻi as a whole, helping to support the broader educational infrastructure throughout the state. She discusses her thoughts on the prioritization of relationships, community support, the handing down of culture through intergenerational cultural transmission, and the kuleana (responsibility and privilege) of the ʻohana in her program.

> ***Relationships Are Prioritized***
> What attracted me about this program was that it was very ʻohana, and relationships are very important here. Relationships are extremely important to me; they mean everything. They're gold. The relationships that we've created here are not only amongst our teachers and families, and the children who have graduated from here, but they are also within the community as a whole. We have excellent relationships with the community—they've always been very supportive. Whenever I reflect on the support systems that have sprung from these experiences, I think it's wonderful, very wonderful.
>
> ***Community Support as an Outgrowth of Relationship Building***
> It's pono (goodness, uprightness, morality) to support the people that are supporting you. We're an ʻohana, we're lokahi—together, united; we can do so much more. Aloha kekahi i kekahi (to love one another). Hōʻihi (to respect one another). It's alulike (to work together) to move forward for the cause. It's just what you're supposed to do; to mālama, to care for one another. The nature of Hawaiian culture teaches fundamental aspects that are embedded within the community, which then is reciprocated throughout the community.
>
> When you're able to support people, they can be emotionally stronger. When they're strong and feel supported, they can be that way with the keiki (child/children). If I support my teachers,

they're going to be happy. When they're happy, they're going to be able to share that with the keiki. The keiki will know, they can feel it, they understand—and they will learn. It's super important to the people we serve and the community we live in and want to sustain. We have grown this school in our community to the point where it has a huge reputation and integrity on our island. Whatever we do, whatever we commit to, everyone knows that it will happen; and most importantly, it'll be excellent, culturally rich. This has become the nature of our program, because it is a family-based program. Our program is not just a drop-off-your-child-and-walk-away scenario. We get the entire family involved, not just the parents. This includes the extended family—the kupuna, as well as siblings and entire families.

Handing Down of Culture
How is culture passed down? Well, for us here, we live it and we do it. "Ma ka hana ka ʻike"—"In the doing, the knowledge is there." Observing, then doing. Those are things that we pass down to these keiki. "Nānā ka maka, hoʻolohe ka pepeiao, paʻa ka waha," so "Don't say things, but watch, and listen, and observe." The work we do is in the "doing," "actions," and "modeling." The example that we set for the children and the values that we share with them are significant. Those are the things that they learn, that we pass down to the children. For the keiki, it's very easy because it is a part of their heritage. Obviously, language is a part of that. Within four months, they're understanding the Hawaiian language. Some keiki have only been here for two-and-a-half weeks and they're already picking up the language—understanding things, following us around, simply figuring it out.

The Kuleana of the ʻOhana
Families have to be very committed; they have to participate on many levels. One kuleana they have is they have to go to language classes if they don't speak ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian language) at home. We provide the classes, but they need to make that kind of commitment and try as best they can to facilitate Hawaiian speaking at home. Because of our commitment to the language, it's become a lifestyle for us. We're looking for families that are committed for the long run and the long haul to pretty much change their lifestyle; for them to make a lot of culture and language changes. We support those changes that need to be made at home.

Intergenerational Cultural Transmission
We invite the kupuna to come and join us in the learning environment. For example, last year, we had a Tūtū (grandparent) come and talk about fishing and the techniques that he uses for fishing. He's a lawaiʻa (fisherman) that uses traditional ways of fishing. For example, he throws the ʻupena style net. He brought in different kinds of fish and talked about the fish with the kids. He made poke (cubed food, mostly fish), and the keiki ate the poke.

We had another kupuna come in and did lei (garland) making, who talked about the different kinds of plants involved in lei. We have kupuna that have some of these skills; we utilize them to come in and share with the keiki. We had another one that talked about medicinal kinds of plants. We obviously have kupuna that know how to grow kalo (taro), tend to the loʻi (taro patch), kuʻi kalo (to strike or pound the kalo) and how to pound the poi (food made out of taro). They come in and they demonstrate the kinds of things that have been passed down to them. They're part of our class and they're part of the activities we do here. We found with our kupuna, they hold different types of knowledge and are cultural practitioners.

The Embeddedness of Generations in ECE
We emphasize the connection between generations in many different ways—in song, in hula (traditional dance)—and we talk about it all the time. We're constantly embedding the connection between generations in everything we do. When we share things with the children, we're always

> talking about makua (parents), and kupuna, and akua (God/gods). And of course, aumakua (familial or personal gods). All of the ʻohana deities and ancestors. We're going beyond the kupuna that the children would know. Their kupuna are also visually in our classroom through photographs. We make books with the keiki and their families about their families because we're ʻohana-based. The interactions between the kupuna and the keiki are emphasized all the time because it is important to us.

Lena underlines the importance of relationships in multiple contexts: with the teachers, families, and children she works with daily, but also in the school's interactions with the local community. Because they are valued, relationships with the local community have been forged and maintained, and, as a result, the community is very supportive of the school as whole. In addition, a major aspect of this EL setting is the handing down of cultural knowledge and practices. Lena sees this as not only the kuleana of the program, but also of the ʻohana. If the ʻohana is not familiar with cultural knowledge or the language, they are expected to learn those alongside their keiki. Cultural transmission occurs through modeling and inviting others into the program's space who can share important experiences. It also occurs through acknowledging connections of those past generations who have come before. Lena views the symbiotic and reciprocal nature of these relationships as directly connected to Hawaiian culture and values.

Kaleilehua

Kaleilehua was born and raised on the island of Oʻahu, but currently resides on the island of Hawaiʻi with her husband and family. She has been involved in the Native Hawaiian ECE community since joining as a parent with her own firstborn over 30 years ago. She is and continues to be an alakaʻi wahine within her organization by raising up staff, keiki, and ʻohana in culturally grounded ways. In the discussion below, she speaks about her view of culture and its relationship to identity, the role in ECE that the community and kupuna play in passing down on knowledge, the role of staff in facilitating this, and the role of giving back.

> ***What Is Culture?***
> I feel that culture is so complex and there are so many forms of culture. I cannot say culture is this or that—culture is all of it. Hawaiian culture is founded upon relationships. In my view, there are three main types of relationships: connection to the land, connection to the people, and connection to a higher being.
>
> ***Culture as Related to Identity***
> **Connection to Land.** As a Hawaiian, knowing where you come from is foundational to knowing your identity. One of the first things we ask when we meet others is, "Where are you from?" We want to know where you come from as we connect to our ʻaina, our land. When I think of these connections, it is about being connected to our land, our ocean, and all that dwell there. It is knowing your water, your rain, your mountains. It is deeper than just knowing the name of a place on a map. As Hawaiians, we are deeply connected to our land, and without that connection, a small part of us dies. As educators, we need to create spaces where children, kupuna, and parents can have opportunities to connect to the land.
>
> **Connection to Genealogical Roots.** Culture is also rooted in our moʻokūʻauhau, our genealogy. At the core of our genealogy is knowing our roots. When we know our roots, we have this foundation from which to grow. We have to understand traditional knowledge and the traditional ways of our kupuna. We cannot practice this if we do not know who they are. For me, I am a mother of four, a wife of one, and a grandmother of three, but there are generations that came before me that shaped who I am. My family are farmers, fishermen, lauhala (leaf) weavers, educators, and historians. Learning about them helps me to understand more about who I am.

Connection to Values and a Higher Power. Culture, for me, is also my connection to Akua, our God. It is about learning to respect a higher being. Culture is embedded in your daily practices and in the values that you teach to your children. When I think about culture, I think about the Hawaiian values that were taught to me by my ancestors. For me and my family, they are Christlike values. These values were taught within our home, and I have tried to pass this on to my children. The hope is that my children will teach them to their children and one day to their grandchildren.

Connection to Native Language. One thing that ties all of these connections is language. Three of my grandparents were Native Hawaiian, and they were punished for speaking their own language. When trauma like this happens, part of that language dies. Language then diminishes between the generations. In the last 30 to 40 years, people have worked hard to bring our language back. I've seen the joy that it brings when parents are able to communicate with their own children in their native tongue. I think language connects us to our culture. If we don't tell our own stories, someone will tell them for us. We need to share them with others and with our keiki—whatever part we can play, whether we're a native speaker or not.

The Community and Kupuna Belong in ECE

There's a proverb, "Aʻohe pau ka ʻike i ka hālau hoʻokahi," which means "all knowledge is not taught in the same school—one can learn from many sources." When I learned this, it was powerful. I started to think about how our kupuna are incredible resources, full of knowledge, talents, and experiences. That knowledge doesn't come from an outside source, it comes from our own community. I thought about integrating the talent and resources they bring into my class. I decided I would invite them to share their knowledge in my classroom.

The first kupuna was a grandfather who was a retired firefighter, pig farmer, and beekeeper. He was excited to share all of his experiences with the children in our classroom. He taught us the importance of pigs, how to care for them, what they eat, and how they survive. He taught us about taking care of the land and what happens when we do not. He also taught us the importance of bees and the role they play in our ecosystem. He taught us to be safe and protect ourselves. He brought bees to the classroom, showed us how to extract the honey from the comb, and families were able to taste honey from the native lehua, coconut, and kiawe trees.

The second kupuna was a grandfather who was a fisherman. He brought a throw net (fishing net) into the classroom. He talked about the various parts of the net and their purposes. Children were able to hold the lead and feel the weight of the net. He took them outside and set items on the ground to represent fish. Then he threw the net and caught the fish. It was the most amazing curriculum that we've ever had.

We started to invite more kupuna to participate in our classroom. Not only did the kupuna enlighten the classroom, but they, in turn, were enlightened. They were so grateful to be asked to participate. I learned the importance of including kupuna in our work; different people have different things to teach to you. Again, if we don't share the stories, if they don't share their stories, the stories die with them.

Giving Back (Reciprocity) and Passing Knowledge Forward

Whatever we can do to give back we should; it's about reciprocity. We have to be able to learn from the kupuna and integrate them into our classrooms. We also have to ask, how can we give back to the kupuna who share with us?

Kupuna are a valuable educational resource. Our kupuna are valuable, irreplaceable resources in the community; they play a significant role. They have so much knowledge to share. We must value

it, respect it, and we must promote it in the classroom; then, our resources become limitless. We're not going to see it otherwise; it is sacred knowledge passed from generation to generation.

Role of ECE Staff
I have learned that we, as teaching staff, have to be quiet. That is the hardest thing—because we're bound by time, we're bound by a lesson plan, but we have to understand that Hawaiian culture was an oral culture. We have to be the facilitators. We have to know when to listen and when to ask questions. We need to understand that just as important as any college class, the richness and the values that kupuna bring with them to the classroom are priceless. I think the best part of belonging to a Native Hawaiian organization is understanding these beautiful relationships and being a part of something precious.

Kaleilehua outlines her view of Native Hawaiian culture as it relates to an individual's identity—connection to ʻaina and moʻokūʻauhau, a higher power and native language. She tells of the importance of connecting EL settings to community members and kupuna who hold stories, knowledge, and experiences, and she underscores the necessity of a reciprocal relationship between both of them. She sees that the role of staff in relation to the experience is to step back, relinquish control, and guide, rather than be directive. In this way, cultural knowledge that is held by the kupuna is passed directly down to the ʻohana and keiki in the program.

Lani
Lani is a Native Hawaiian educator who has been an executive director for a rural FACIL program on the eastern shoreline of Oʻahu for 11 years. During that time, through community dialogue, she was exposed to ideas about the privilege of responsibility, multigenerational knowledge, and the community's understanding of the places surrounding them.

Relationships Help Learning
I think culture is passed down through relationships. That's why I talk about relationships all the time, because you can go someplace and learn from somebody at the head of a class or take a weaving workshop and learn. But unless someone is by your side, talking to you while you're working the materials, or talking to you while you're learning the language, or displaying characteristics of behavior expected of a Native Hawaiian, you're never really going to get the full experience. It really is not going to be a complete cycle until you have relationships with people who are there with you.

Guided by Kupuna
Most people say, "Oh, yeah, my grandmother gave this to me." I didn't have that option; instead, I had multiple people who shared with me. Some of them were older, some younger—but each one of them gave me something. Not all of us have the opportunity to be mentored by our family kupuna. So, we look for people to help us understand. The people who mentor you, they notice things in you and they try and help you move forward. The people I have learned from have always said, "Come sit down, bring a glass of water for me, and then we talk story." The older kupuna, they knew that it was about a relationship; you never scared someone or chastised them.

Intention
I'm not saying every kupuna is the same. Every line of Native Hawaiians is not the same. It's the transfer of knowledge they had from their life—it's the idea of how they treat other people with aloha (love, affection, compassion, kindness), how you treat the environment and the land. And especially how you treat the world around you, and that includes people.

> ***Family and Elders in ECE***
> In family engagement, people add to the program in different ways. In early childhood in an American system, they don't see elders as being part of the family. They're like, "They've had their time." But if you go to Africa, Mexico, the Caribbean, South Pacific, or Indonesia, you'll see the elders are all included. I'm talking about the rights of children to have access to the elders in their family. For parents or early childhood systems to separate them from their grandparents is a real concern. It's a societal thing.
>
> ECE underestimates the power of elders in a program. Just like they underestimate the power of men with young children. I'm not talking about staff. I am talking about family engagement and the different ways different people add to the program. I think that's what early childhood should look like—not like a mini third-grade classroom.
>
> ***Families Teach, Too***
> How did we include families in our program? We would *ask for their ideas*. At the end of the day, we would ask the parents, "Can you go home and see if your child asks anything new?" We would also send activity ideas home with them on weekends or holidays for families to become involved in the teaching of their keiki. "Just try this one thing: go to the beach and look at the kinds of sand on the beach. See if your child can use words to identify it." We tried to arrange the instructions so that anybody in the family could do the activity and have the child experience it. We really encouraged it. In class, we would try it, sure, but then we would always send them home—either with something to do or something to achieve. This included having the elders take the kids to *their* favorite place and talk about it, no matter where it was. That encouraged some interaction. And of course, when they came back, we would hear all kinds of really neat stories, "Oh, there's Tutu-man's favorite beach!"
>
> We also encouraged parents to bring other members of their family with the child. If they had grandparents available, then bring the grandparents with them to the program. A grandparent, a father, an aunt, or an uncle who just happened to be hanging out for the day.
>
> ***Observing in a Natural Environment***
> At the same time, we were teaching about the land we lived on. We'd say, "Let's go outside and let's look at the mountain. What do you see that stands out?" We were doing kilo (to watch closely, examine, look around, observe). I wanted them to look at the mountains and be able to say, "I know that mountain's name." We would walk across to the beach park and go down to the water and let the kids get their feet wet. We would ask one of the parents or the kupuna to talk about this place. That was in preparation for them going home and asking their kupuna to take them to their favorite place.

Lani speaks of the importance of investing long term in relationships—of having people walk by your side and notice something within you. She explains that the process will not look the same for everyone, but that the intentionality of passing down cultural values is what is important. To her, a missing component in the modern ECE landscape is the inclusion of families and elders in formal teaching experiences and the richness that families and elders can bring to the classroom. Lani also highlights the importance of learning about the land the ʻohana live on and experience daily.

Revealing Learning Through Child and Family Interactions

Throughout the three interviews, the alakaʻi repeatedly speak about the importance of embedding children and families in both the physical place of their inhabitation and in the social context of the host culture of Hawaiʻi, and in all the nuances, complexities, and splendor associated with each.

The deliberate intent of the programs in embedding and nesting children and families is to foster connections to the broader context within which children and families exist.

The wahine speak about ways their programs make connections that are rooted in lived experiences. From this, four themes emerged:

1. Pedagogy should be culturally grounded, which includes introducing and using Native Hawaiian language.
2. The building of strong, caring, reciprocal relationships between family, staff, and community is significant in ECE.
3. Embedding multigenerational relationships within EL programs is necessary for connecting children to their ʻohana and moʻokūʻauhau.
4. Power and influence in the EL setting need to be shared. This shared power dynamic includes asking for community and ʻohana input in the education and teaching of the young keiki.

The four major themes that commonly appear throughout the three interviews are interwoven and build upon each other to form a foundation of family and community engagement.

Reflections, Recommendations, and Questionings

In listening to and reflecting on the shared moʻolelo, we found a strong emphasis on family and community engagement in ECE settings, both within the local context of Hawaiʻi and beyond. The wahine highlighted the importance of empowering families to express their voices and actively participate as partners in educational programs. This collaborative approach respects the cultural values embedded in Native Hawaiian past practices and serves as a cornerstone for fostering meaningful connections between educational institutions and the Native communities in the present. Embracing this approach, we propose the following as navigational tools for partnering with Native communities in meaningful and caring ways.

First, actively adhere to the principle of "Aʻo aku, aʻo mai" (literally, "learn from you first, and then you can learn from me"), which means listen fully first, then share—that is, listen for understanding first and then share the knowledge you bring. In this connection, we can recognize the reciprocal nature of learning and emphasize the significance of relationship building to create a foundation that aligns with incorporating native language and culturally rooted pedagogy into an early-age educational framework.

Second, adhere to the guiding principles, highlighted in the responses of the three alakaʻi wahine, that are rooted in a Native Hawaiian worldview and that connect to both the basics of Indigenous knowledge systems (Brayboy, 2023) and to ECE best practices, standards, and competencies (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020, 2022; National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement [NAFSCE], 2022). This aligns with the practices of other nations, most notably with Aotearoa, in New Zealand, which has engaged in, and even codified, EL programs that value child and family voices and connect children to the host Indigenous culture as a national model, e.g., Te Whāriki (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). In the United States, shifts in standards and expected teacher practices are being made as there has been an updating of developmentally appropriate practice (NAEYC, 2022) and family engagement competencies (NAFSCE, 2022). However, there is still a lack of equity-driven EL programs that ask for, share power and influence with, and actively engage with and pursue family and community voices.

Third, to serve Indigenous communities in culturally congruent ways, ideas about passing down traditional knowledge and existential identity to children should be embedded within ECE programs by inviting Indigenous culture and Indigenous language into the classroom. This is especially pertinent for programs that function in Indigenous communities and wish to operate through an equity lens. These

two aims can only be accomplished by creating EL programs that operate with power-sharing dynamics in mind; i.e., that ask for and encourage family and community participation, then work in partnership with families and communities to make programmatic and pedagogical decisions on the institutional, as well as classroom, level.

A consideration of the second and third points above caused the authors to question whether all schools reflect the communities they serve. It seems the placement of publicly funded EL programs is based on state and national results. The emphasis in these programs seems to be on outcomes and service delivery with a failure to see how such outcomes are meaningful in children's lives versus sustaining learning environments that support student recognition and cultural norms. This trend is in direct opposition to the first principle, which asserts EL pedagogy (and/or schooling itself) should be grounded in the local culture and reflective of the keiki and ʻohana being served.

Other questions arose from these reflections: Is the universal EL program model threatened by other program models, especially by EL programs that emphasize the importance of an Indigenous knowledge base? Why are states pursuing center-based universal ECE programs instead of considering alternatives, such as a mixed-delivery EL system, that would assist in creating or maintaining diversity in the EL sphere? Discussing those questions helped us in thinking about currently favored curricula and the forced metaphor of "scaling up" in a pre-K system (Tobin, 2005).

Finally, the three stories provide lessons, which could inform teacher state licensure pathways, about the relevance of teacher candidates' learning about regional Indigenous cultures and implementing culturally relevant components in the "everyday" learning of the students they will teach, the importance of serving children and their families with humility in all the complexities a learning environment encompasses, and, most notably, the strength of family and community engagement in the classroom. It seems teacher licensure pathways in some areas are slowly adopting a changing of standards; however, for institutions that do not embrace these lessons, as their student-teachers move into the teaching profession, they will perpetuate old practices of what has always been done instead of re-imagining education as it could be—as what the alakaʻi and authors posit needs to be done for our Indigenous children in EL settings.

HOʻOKUʻU–TO RELEASE

Elders, families, and communities are an integral part of educating young people in Indigenous communities (Grace & Serna, 2013; Kaomea, 2005). Incorporating elders, families, and communities back into educational systems for all children leads to more holistic, community-oriented programs. The education system has been, and in many nations continues to be, a weapon of settler colonialism. Engaging families and communities in the education system in meaningful ways is a movement toward rematriating, a returning, of education. This requires collaborative design and decision-making regarding educational systems. (Bang, et al., 2019).

ʻIke i ke au nui me ke au iki. #1209
To know the big currents and the little currents.
[Be very well versed.]
(Pukui, 1983, p. 131)

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