From Moʻolelo to Manaʻo: Transforming Postsecondary Support Systems for Native Hawaiian Teacher Education Students

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Dedicated to Dr. Ernest "Niki" Libarios Jr. An inspirational educator, mentor, and friend

As a recent graduate of EdD program, this paper serves as a reflection of my growth as a practitioner scholar. I named my dissertation in practice an *action research narrative inquiry* to honor the story of my students at Leeward Community College. My dissertation is just a beginning step towards transforming teacher education support systems to meet the needs of Native Hawaiian students.

When considering the educational status of minority and Indigenous students in postsecondary settings, institutional actors such as counselors, instructors, and administrators tend to view the issue through a superficial, one-dimensional lens of diversity, treating it as a general characteristic of the institution rather than acknowledging the "particular circumstances of the racial and ethnic groups that constitute diversity" (Bensimon 2005, 100). Even those that may be aware of the educational status of specific ethnic groups are "more likely to make stereotypical attributions, such as associating deficit with blacks and Hispanics and achievement with whites and Asians" (Bensimon 2005, 100). Although an apathetic or cursory attempt to understand the intricacies of our students' cultures, and in this case the Native Hawaiian culture, are not overtly discriminatory, neither do they promote an atmosphere of *real* equity and social justice. In regards to faculty of color, Johnsrud and Sadao (1998) identified the lack of Indigenous knowledge at the institutional level as the primary factor in creating a separatist environment, resulting in Native Hawaiian and minority faculty experiencing a sense of "otherness" in the workplace (325). Bensimon (2005) feels that the reduction of inequities in higher education does not depend on the latest innovative training program or touted best practice, but rather "lies within individuals, specifically, in their capacity to develop equity as their cognitive frame" (100).

The process of developing a conscious mindset for equity begins with educating ourselves about the cultures of the students that we serve. This study attempts, on a small scale, to do this by presenting the voices of 50 Native Hawaiian Teacher Education haumāna with the intent to understand the cultural and educational experiences that have shaped their views of education and use that knowledge to inform student support services at Leeward Community College's Associate in Arts in Teaching (AAT) program. The design of my study focused on collecting the perspectives of my Native Hawaiian students through qualitative surveys (i.e., Hui o nā Manaʻo Haumāna), interviews and moʻolelo (i.e., Hui o nā Moʻolelo Haumāna), and a focus group (i.e., Hui Hoʻoholomua). As an action research narrative inquiry, the study's findings directly impact the way in which I, as the counselor for the AAT program, view my work and my relationships with my haumāna. Realizing that the implications of this study would impact the way I have been engaging in student support and advising activities, especially with my Native Hawaiian students, for the past twenty years, I had to ask myself if I was genuinely ready to hear what the data was telling me and make the necessary changes in my attitudes, actions, and interactions with my students. After some reflection, a quick prayer, and a big breath, I answered myself with a definitive "Yes."

Weaving Moena o nā Pua

With the gathering of all the elements from Hui o nā Manaʻo Haumāna, Hui o nā Moʻolelo Haumāna, and Hui Hoʻoholomua, the weaving of the Moena o nā Pua[1] commences. I am greatly influenced by the words of Benham and Heck (1998) who state:

> The work of the storymaker is to recollect and re-collect events, then reflect on the events' multiple meanings, both personal and public and within their time and across time. This reflection extends the mind not only to what is known, but to what is surprising. Kaona is the goal here, that is to tolerate

ambiguity and shifting meanings in order to come to truth. As all things in Hawaiiana are practical, the process of storymaking presses the storyteller to make sense of these multiple thoughts within a current context; that is, to consider the political, the social, and the cultural. Once these thoughts are framed and articulated in a text, the storymaker must encourage —even propose—action. (xvi)

As I reflect on what has been revealed by nā pua through this process, I realize that although this is their story, I am the storyteller. If their voices and ideas are the key elements in the creation of Moena o nā Pua, then I am the weaver. When I contemplate this role, I feel the weight of this awesome responsibility. Benham and Heck (1998) speak of the purposeful nature of moʻolelo, the lesson to be learned, and the kaona[2] to ponder in search of truth. McDougall (2016) provides a comprehensive discussion on the various explanations of kaona as articulated by revered Native Hawaiian historians, poets, and cultural authorities, but I gravitate towards her reference of the ʻŌlelo Noʻeau, "Pali ke kua, mahina ke alo" (The back is a cliff, the face a moon) to provide the context of kaona for this study. McDougall (2016) states that:

We can read ke kua (the back) and ke alo (the face or front) as a duality that mirrors how meaning is constructed in kaona. The front, which must shine like the moon, is the surface or literal meaning that most audiences can enjoy and read. The back, however, which must hold up the entire structure of kaona with the straightness and strength of a cliff, comprises the layers of figurative meaning lying under the literal. (39–40)

It is important to understand and acknowledge the cultural values, practices, and language patterns of our students as well as their experiences and influences in developing their relationship with education and a teaching career. Beyond that, I asked myself, "What is the spirit of the findings? What is ke kua, the strong back, the foundation on which these findings are built? As I reflected on the mana of the words shared by nā pua, I approached my review as if reading a long, detailed, multifarious narrative. In this process, two questions drove my rumination, "What do nā pua want me to know? What do they want me to do?" As a result, the kaona, or the spirit of the findings, emerged and at last, I knew what message or pāwehe would appear on Moena o nā Pua.

Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model

Wheatley and Rogers (1998) explain the importance of identity development and maintenance for all living organisms:

Life organizes around identity. Every living thing acts to develop and preserve itself. Identity is the filter that every organism or system uses to make sense of the world. New information, new relationships, changing environments—all are interpreted through a sense of self. This tendency toward self-creation is so strong that it creates a seeming paradox. An organism will change to maintain its identity. (14)

As I went back to the raw data, reviewed transcripts and survey results, and read my formative and summative findings, I realized that each morsel of data was inimitable and significant in its individualism. I was careful not to trivialize the uniqueness of each moʻolelo, comment, or suggestion by making broad-sweeping statements or forcing overarching categories just for the sake of presenting a Euro-American modeled and sanctioned research template. However, when I looked and listened closely, I was inspired by the message I was hearing. To me, my Native Hawaiian AAT students were giving me a roadmap to the successful development of their own identities grounded in four principles of building pilina or relationships with their Native Hawaiian culture, education, ʻohana, and our AAT program.

As I looked deeper into the findings, my ever-present guiding principle of Nā Piko ʻEkolu[3] materialized, this time with each component serving as a cornerstone to the development of an identity and achievement model for Native Hawaiian Teacher Education student success. I found that my Hui o nā Moʻolelo Haumāna participants, who had all persisted in the AAT program and were continuing successfully in further education or employment as a teacher, had a well-developed sense of self in terms of their pilina with their culture, education, and ʻohana. Wilson et al. (2011) support this stating that "students who maintained a strong identity were able to strategically counter and critique the alienating effects of the university culture and its curriculum" (703). In presenting a portion of their findings from the Hawaiian Cultural Influences in Education Study, Kanaʻiaupuni and Ledward (2013) conclude that "great teachers have ample knowledge about content and instruction, and they also understand the fundamental importance

Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model for the Native Hawaiian AAT Student

- Meaningful Teaching Strategies
- Teachers as Role Models

Piko Waena

- Financial & Other Resources
- Seamless Transfer Partnerships

Culturally-Inclusive Collaboration

Piko Po'o

Piko Ma'i

- Tangible Measures of Achievement
- Genuine Affirmations
- Encouragement of Cultural Infusion

Piko Waena (Present Wisdom & Connection to Self)
- *Pilina with Education*
- Value of Laulima
- Embracing Haumāna Identity

Piko Ma'i (Connection to Future Generations)
- *Pilina with 'Ohana*
- Value of Kuleana
- Preparing Kumu Identity

Piko Po'o (Ancestral & Spiritual Connection)
- *Pilina with Culture*
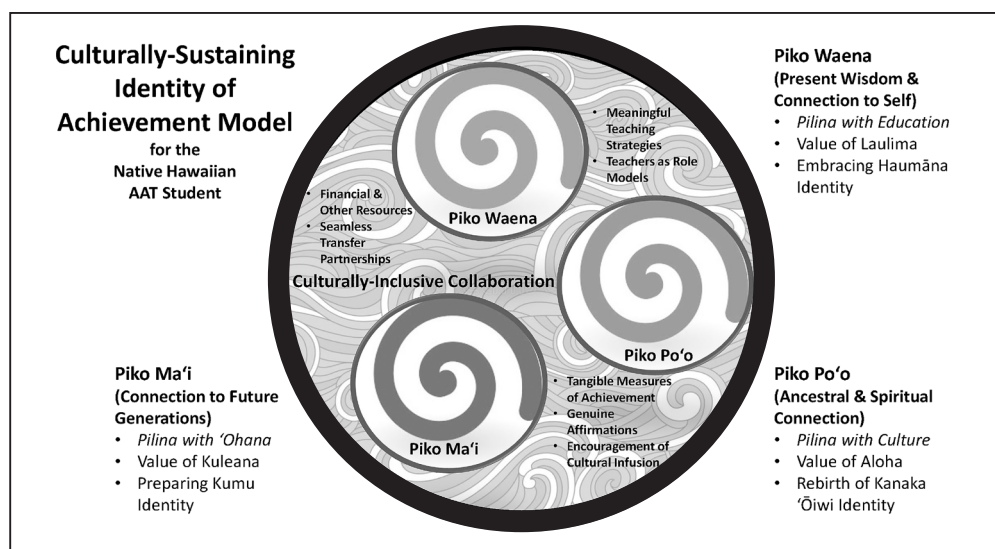- Value of Aloha
- Rebirth of Kanaka 'Ōiwi Identity

Figure 1. Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model

of cultural relevance and relationships in their work with children and their families" (153).

As counselors, we often focus on helping our students identify career goals, academic pathways, and resources needed to reach set goals. These are necessary steps when helping students navigate effectively through the chaotic maze of higher education policies and procedures. However, the message from nā pua is not just about identifying goals and reaching them, it permeates much deeper to their essence, their mauli. It is about developing a sense of who they are. It is about rebirthing their spirit as kānaka 'ōiwi, discovering and embracing their validity as haumāna, and preparing their path as future kumu. Incorporating the spirit of the message gleaned from nā pua and inspired by the artistic design of the 'Ekolu Piko bone carving created by local artisan and carver Benjamin Muti, I developed an image to illustrate an achievement model whose cornerstones are rooted in culturally-sustaining pedagogy, self-awareness and mindfulness on both the parts of nā pua and the advisor, and the infusion of reciprocity.

There are four components to the Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model: Piko Po'o (Ancestral/Spiritual Connection), Piko Waena (Present Wisdom/Connection to Self) and Piko Ma'i (Connection to Future Generations), and the interaction between counseling and advising professionals and haumāna, which I describe as culturally-inclusive collaboration. The metaphor of the

piko is critical to the model because it represents the centering and mindful connectivity to three areas of the Native Hawaiian AAT student's development of an identity of achievement. The purpose of this model is to provide a guide that counseling and advising professionals (i.e., myself) can refer to and share with students in order to work together and build a sense of self that embodies the institutions of culture, education, and family. In a study of 16 Aboriginal community college student experiences and perspectives on persistence, Muzzin (2015) states that the "major finding was that First Nations students experience a disconnect between the epistemology of Aboriginal peoples and ways of being in community colleges" (53). By addressing the students' contexts in the areas of education, culture, and family, the goal is to minimize feelings of alienation or non-belonging and show that pilina exists between all three in the support of the student's individual achievement. This is important because as counselors, we help our students to recognize, and change if they so desire, their own realities. Wilson (2008) posits that realities are multifarious and defined by relationships that we foster with all that exist in our cosmos. These pilina help to define our place and purpose in the world. The Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement model can be used as a tool to help students determine and acknowledge their own connections to the cosmos. It is through this self-discovery that they can then gain clarity in understanding who they truly are.

Piko Poʻo (Ancestral/Spiritual Connection)

This Piko Poʻo component of the model focuses on the student's ancestral and spiritual connection to their ethnic culture, which in this case is Native Hawaiian. Represented by the color green, this symbolizes growth and planting roots firmly in one's cultural identity. There was an undeniable feeling of pride from all of the haumāna about their bloodline and being a part of the Hawaiian genealogy. Nā pua shared a common understanding of the importance of being connected with both the physical and non-physical aspects of their surroundings and living by Hawaiian values. The deficiency appeared when asked about their level of knowledge of their native language and the frequency and quality in which they participated in native practices. Developing opportunities by which pilina with their culture can be nurtured and doing so by incorporating the value of aloha and fostering genuine affection for Indigenous tradition has the potential to awaken and strengthen their kānaka ʻōiwi identities.

Piko Waena (Present Wisdom/Connection to Self)

In this model, the Piko Waena represents the student's mindful connection to self. The goal in this area is to be able to understand and add to the wisdom and creativity that already exists in their naʻau and then use that knowledge to embrace who they are as they develop confidence and pride as haumāna. The red hue of the piko represents the passion that develops as nā pua learn about the craft of teaching and begin to see their place within the context of higher education. Through exposure to various teaching principles, strategies, styles and methods of delivery, nā pua begin to envision who they want to be as kumu one day, using those ideals that align best with their personal and cultural orientations. Reflecting on their own educational experiences and influences will bring awareness to why they are the kind of student they are and can be used to further inform their goals and action plans.

Laulima is the guiding value as this piko requires a willingness to cooperate and work with others who have the expertise and resources to guide them on their path. In this piko, it is not the end-goal that is most important, rather, it is being present to where they are in their educational journey and taking the time to reflect on learning gained in the moment and its implications to their overall development. It is also identifying why they are in education and re-visiting that motivation often to ensure timely adjustments in goals, actions, and the attainment of supports and resources.

Piko Maʻi (Connection to Future Generations)

The third piko is heavily influenced by the Hawaiian value of kuleana that repeatedly appeared throughout all three methods of data collection. This sense of responsibility to perpetuate culture, knowledge, and hope to the next generation is the greatest motivating factor of the haumāna who participated in this study. Shaded in blue to represent the fluidity and life-giving aspects of water, this piko embodies the spirit of reciprocity and allows a free-flow of acquired knowledge and innate wisdom to pass from one generation to the next, ensuring that the life, language, values, practices, and essence of the culture and its people will be protected and preserved.

Piko Maʻi represents a stage in which nā pua prepare for the next step in their journey, usually entering the workforce or transferring to a university teacher education program, that leads them closer to their goal of becoming kumu. It is also in this stage that they clarify who they are and who they want to be as kumu. The relationship or pilina represented in Piko Maʻi is one with ʻohana. For this model, ʻohana is not only limited to one's genealogical kinship, but rather extended to those who influence and enhance their journey as a teaching professional. It emphasizes and requires reflection on how they intend to build pilina with their own haumāna. All of these steps work together to prepare the journey for nā pua to transition to their role of kumu.

Culturally-Inclusive Collaboration

The last component is not represented by piko because it ebbs and flows throughout all three areas of the model. I base the concept of culturally-inclusive collaboration on the foundation of collaborative counseling and psychotherapy as presented by Pare (2012), where "counseling is unveiled as a cultural practice, and clients are viewed as cultural beings" (xxi) and where "counseling comes to be seen less as an exercise in correcting dysfunction or promoting personal growth and more as a cross-cultural collaboration capitalizing on people's unique knowledge and competencies" (xxii). In Pare's (2012) presentation of collaborative counseling, the goal is still intervention and therapeutic benefit for the client. However, in this

educational setting, the outcome is less therapeutic and more exploratory and celebratory in nature. Culturally-inclusive collaboration is a method of interaction between student and academic counselor where the advising function is viewed as a collaborative partnership between both parties with the intent to ground exploration and decision-making activities in the cultural, educational, and familial orientations and priorities of the student.

By definition, counselors and advisors are those who give advice to others and the rapport established usually supports a one-directional flow of information where the student shares the issue or asks the question and the advisor provides the answer. This automatically places advisors in a position of authority and assumed power, sometimes even before the two parties have met. Pare (2012) views interactions between counselors and clients (e.g., students) not only as "vehicles for delivering some form of helpful intervention distinct from the conversation itself" but rather, "the conversation *is* the intervention" where "counselors talk with clients, and the talk itself is what is helpful" (5). Similarly, in culturally-inclusive collaboration the conversation is key. This interchange between advisor and student works best when advisors are open to diverse perspectives (especially those that are contradictory to their own), are willing to show their "humanity" in front of the student which may include humility and vulnerability, and are committed to promoting pride in culture and being open to its infusion throughout the advising process.

Regardless of job title and the supposed roles attached to it, those who enter into a culturally-inclusive collaboration define the relationship as it best suits their dispositions, backgrounds, and objectives of the session. It allows the flexibility for roles to be reversed, where the student is the expert in a particular area such as a specific life history experience or cultural practice or both parties could decide to work as equals and learn together in order to meet agreed-upon objectives. In this model, advisor and student do not just work together to determine the "what" (e.g., goals), "when" (e.g., timelines), and "how" (e.g., action steps) of their intentions. The most important aspects are determining the "why" behind their actions and "who" are they doing this for beyond themselves. In this study, these were the motivational factors that kept our Native Hawaiian AAT students on track for their own achievements. If the three piko in the model are the templates for self-discovery

and authentic reflection, culturally-inclusive collaboration is the method that promotes an environment where non-threatening, honest, and intimate discourse can take place. With a healthy exchange of ideas, values, cultural experiences, and belief systems as prompted by reflecting on the three piko, both advisor and student can gain greater awareness of their own evolving identities as culturally-sustaining educators.

Model Application to my Doctoral Journey

As a reflective practitioner scholar, creating a theoretical model that stimulates provocative discourse is secondary to developing a model of practice that can be rendered useful in my daily interactions with Native Hawaiian AAT students. In an effort to illustrate the utility of the Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model, I reflected on its components in application to my own life, specifically my educational journey as a Native Hawaiian doctoral student.

In Summer 2014, I was admitted to the EdD of Professional Educational Practice cohort at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa with 25 other educational leaders and practitioners from P–20 levels of education in Hawaiʻi. I applied to the competitive program with the intent to hone my postsecondary leadership skills and academic prowess. Identity development was not my goal when I first entered the program, however, it has been one of my greatest takeaways. Reflecting on this rigorous three year educational epoch, I can now appreciate how the EdD program's diverse faculty and students, multifarious course readings, community projects, and reflective exercises have shaped my own culturally-sustaining identity of achievement.

The Piko Poʻo of this model speaks to the connection we build with our ethnic and cultural roots. An unexpected benefit of my EdD doctoral journey was experiencing a rebirth of who I am as kanaka ʻōiwi. Various program influences, such as assigned course readings highlighting minority and Indigenous worldviews, my ʻōlelo Hawaiʻi speaking cohort peers and professors, the opportunity to conduct a consultancy group research project for a Hawaiian immersion school, and being sponsored by the EdD program to present at and experience the cultural pride and advocacy of the He Manawa Whenua International Indigenous Research conference, all contributed to the development of pilina with my Native Hawaiian culture.

One particularly poignant class activity, in my Social and Cultural Contexts of Education course, served as the catalyst to my cultural awakening. Led by instructors Dr. Walter Kahumoku III and Dr. Lori Ideta, our class was divided into small groups of five to six students. Each small group had their own ʻāina and was asked to develop the values of that island and its people. This first part of the activity fostered a sense of laulima and belongingness. We created ʻāina that we believed in and were proud of. All but one person on the ʻāina was then instructed to move on as a group to visit a neighboring "island." As the one left behind, I experienced a sense of loss seeing my group move on as well as a kuleana to preserve what we created and adequately explain and share it with the new group coming to visit. When I found out that the "visitors" were allowed to take a portion of what my group had instilled in our island home, I started to downplay what I felt was most important because I did not want them to take it away. I strategically engaged the visitors in discussion so that they did not make their selection in time and my island remained untouched. When the next group of visitors arrived, I became very protective and was in disbelief when they took a piece of my island without asking. I felt violated. After the initial shock, I went into a practical, problem-solving mode trying to determine how I could make my ʻāina whole again, which I eventually did. However, it was not the same island I started with, and never would be again. In my course journal, I reflected on the activity and the feelings it provoked. I wrote:

> In my heart, I knew that we could re-build [our ʻāina], but I also knew that it wouldn't be the same EVER again. Even if we had our island pieces returned to us, they would be altered and the scar of having these components literally ripped away from us would still be there. I was AMAZED at how much emotion went into every single stage of the activity and for the first time, I was beginning to understand what it felt like to be a Hawaiian (or a part of any Indigenous group) and have something taken away. (Thompson, EDEF 762 personal journal, 3)

In reflecting on the **Piko Waena** construct of the model, my EdD educational journey played a critical role in the development of my doctoral student identity. Although the majority of my professional career had been within the realm of higher education, it had been over a decade since I had assumed the role of a student. In this context, strengthening my relationship with education not only as a

provider (i.e., counselor or instructor), but from a consumer (i.e., student) perspective was the priority. This entailed reacquainting myself with the nuances of college such as locating library and research resources, applying for financial aid opportunities, and writing as a scholar as well as finding balance between work, school, and family responsibilities. In essence, I was reminded what my own students are faced with every day and as a result, rejuvenated my empathy for them. The Hawaiian value of laulima was also evident as I embraced my positionality as a doctoral student. Initially unsure of my place, role, and ability to contribute to the EdD cohort of professional educators, I soon understood that many peers felt as I did and together we grew as individual leaders and as a cohesive unit. We cooperated and helped one another so that no one would fall behind in their academic obligations, and in doing so, developed a greater sense of our own places within the program and the larger context of academia.

The **Piko Maʻi** component of the model speaks about developing a kumu identity grounded in the value of kuleana to the next generations and building pilina with ʻohana, however broadly it is defined. Although the term kumu is commonly referred to as teacher, it is also defined as the source, beginning, origin, reason, or goal ("Nā Puke Wehewehe ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi," n.d.). To me, the Piko Maʻi of the model represents the place and time when haumāna prepare for their next steps and contributions upon completion of the educational program. It is the beginning of the formation of their identity beyond the educational experience they are in. As an EdD student, I was given ample opportunity to reflect on my leadership abilities and growth opportunities through self-directed and guided exercises, program projects, and responsive journaling to class readings and activities. I became self-aware of how I develop and sustain relationships with administrators, professors, cohort peers, haumāna, community members, friends, family members, and new associates. I discovered that *how* I relate to and treat others is just as important, if not more important, than *who* I develop pilina with. Reciprocity and a deep sense of kuleana to my ʻohana, which I define as whatever group I am serving at the time was the impetus for obtaining my doctorate and continues to be the foundation for my academic and career aspirations.

Lastly, the faculty and students associated with the EdD program worked together to develop an academically

rigorous and stimulating environment that allowed **culturally-inclusive collaboration** to develop organically. A shared governance approach in terms of allowing student input into curriculum considerations and program processes created an atmosphere charged with open-mindedness and creativity. In addition, faculty took the time to learn about cohort students' lives outside of the program. Social events, such as a family potluck and barbeque at a classmate's taro farm, allowed faculty and students to engage with one another outside of the classroom and embrace one another's family members, thereby extending the EdD ʻohana beyond the original cohort members.

During my doctoral journey, I experienced growth in each area within the Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model. When I first applied to the program, I expected an evolution in my kumu identity, however, I did not anticipate the additional benefits of embracing my haumāna identity or connecting with my Native Hawaiian culture. I had hoped for encouraging professors and supportive cohort members, but what I experienced was an authentic culture of caring and gained an extended ʻohana of educators, forever linked together by a passion to improve Hawaiʻi's educational systems. The Culturally-Sustaining Identity of Achievement Model will serve as my guide in providing my students with opportunities and experiences that clarify who they are in terms of where they come from, who they are in our program, and who they dream to be beyond Leeward Community College.

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ENDNOTES

[1] With elements from each data collection method clearly defined, we can begin to weave a metaphorical moena or mat that captures the voices of nā pua (my students, nāhaumana).

[2] Hidden meaning ("Nā Puke Wehewehe ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi," n.d.). According to McDougall (2016), there are many explanations of kaona ranging from buried, multi-layered meanings to private jokes to sophisticated episodes of rhetoric intended for exclusivity in meaning-making.

[3] Nā Piko ʻĒkolu is a Hawaiian construct that describes three metaphysical points on the human body (ie. Piko Poʻo: Piko Waena; and Piko Maʻi) that connect kānaka ʻōiwi to those who come before us, those who are with us now, and those who will suceed us.