

# Thoughts on Designing Research to be Pono

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As a Native Hawaiian, I am steadfast in my efforts to revitalize the Hawaiian language and culture as I embrace the “Hawaiian immersion lifestyle” as an educator, a mother, and Tūtūmā to my 14 grandchildren. At this late point in my career—I’ve been a teacher and administrator for over four decades—I especially valued the learning opportunities and experiences of being a member of the pioneer cohort of the EdD program. The 28 cohort members were from diverse backgrounds and contributed incredible amounts of community and educational expertise. Combined with the dedicated visionaries who served as doctoral faculty and mentors, we truly represented Hawai‘i’s multicultural community and educational landscapes. The diversity amongst us added many layers of depth to our inquiries and reflections and ultimately elevated our development as servant leaders.

I consider my journey within the EdD program as transformative; I arrived as an educator and progressed to become a practitioner researcher. Honing the praxis of educational leadership through the rigors of program coursework provided the sustenance needed to complete the two required capstone projects. The group consultancy projects provided a pragmatic means to collaboratively address real issues by contributing research to benefit educational initiatives throughout Hawai‘i. The dissertation in practice (DiP) required research focused on problems of practice relevant to our respective fields.

Immersed as a practitioner researcher in both the group consultancy project (Akiu-Wilcox, Alencastre, Hattori, Lucas, and Seto 2012) and DiP (Alencastre 2015), I found invaluable opportunities to engage in authentic applied research focused on P–12 Hawaiian language medium-immersion education and the preparation of its teachers. Coming to terms with the scope of work to address problems of practice was a lengthy but essential process negotiated with multiple members of the respective communities. Considering the specific contexts of these projects as Hawaiian language educational programs, it was apparent that traditional research paradigms would

not suffice. Principles of indigeneity promoted within Indigenous research resonated well with contemporary Hawaiian education initiatives and provided the foundation for developing appropriate research frameworks for both projects. I was inspired by several Indigenous research concepts that expressly elevated cultural knowledge and values as the basis of its methodology, namely

- ❖ characterizing the epistemological framework of Indigenous research by “bringing to the centre and privileging indigenous values, attitudes and practices” (Smith 2012);
- ❖ considering qualitative research approaches as an “inclusive place” that provides room for Indigenous research (Kovach 2009); and
- ❖ honoring oral traditions by
  - validating oral interviewing strategies as a means to empower both the individual and collective voices and experiences of participants (Brayboy 2005); and
  - building personal relationships through an understanding of the culture to promote “respectful, reciprocating interaction” (Vaioleti 2006).

The focus of my DiP was to contribute to the knowledge base of maui ola Hawai‘i (Hawaiian cultural identity) education by exploring the efficacy of teacher preparation for Hawaiian language medium-immersion education. One of the major breakthroughs experienced within the DiP process was designing my research to be pono<sup>1</sup> by developing it on a foundation of cultural norms, values, and practices. This was achieved by relying on ‘ike kupuna, on traditional wisdom and values as the essential core of the study, which directly informed and enriched its intent, process, and outcomes. Aspiring to permeate pono throughout the design and implementation of the study enabled the methodology to authentically reflect the distinct characteristics of maui ola Hawai‘i education. Another essential facet of designing pono research was to be mindful of the practitioner researcher’s kuleana—the responsibility to

ensure that the research would be purposeful and beneficial beyond its academic value.

As such, I set about designing my study to critically explore issues and challenges, document and analyze distinctive practices, and affirm achievements within the context of preparing Hawaiian language medium-immersion teachers. The study was designed as a values-driven and culturally-appropriate framework with Hawaiian concepts, protocols, tools, and behaviors intentionally incorporated and adhered to throughout the study. For example, the use of traditional Hawaiian metaphors and similes evoked imagery framing the study and making essential connections among the various research phases. The use of metaphorical language is considered to be an authentic and desirable way of conveying understandings and expressions in Hawaiian that go beyond conventional conversation. “Since the sayings carry the immediacy of the spoken word, considered to be the highest form of cultural expression in old Hawai‘i, they bring us closer to the everyday thoughts and lives of the Hawaiian who created them” (Pukui 1983, vii).

Portraying each of the chapters through descriptive prose associated with the sun’s ascent integrated Hawaiian thoughts and inspiration into the study, calling upon the sun’s life-giving energies to provide growth, health, and well-being. *Ka lā i ka Mauiola* (Pukui 1983, 154), a traditional Hawaiian metaphor that initiated the imagery of four of the sun’s phases, framed the study and reflected its progress from inception to completion. Within the various chapters, the essence of each of the sun’s phases, from *wana‘ao* as its dawning until *kau ka lā i ka lolo* as its moments directly overhead, infused the well-being of this study with essential intentions, processes, and outcomes. Additionally, *‘ōlelo no‘eau* (traditional wise sayings) were elicited from program graduates as reflections of their preservice experiences. Incorporating these types of image-making techniques provided an important cultural lens and grounding to the study.

The research design centered *Ke Kumu Honua Maui Ola* (KHMO) Hawaiian educational philosophy (2009) at its core. This philosophy articulates the richness and depth of *maui ola Hawai‘i* as epistemological frameworks and ontological values inherent within a traditional Hawaiian worldview. Cultivating *maui ola Hawai‘i* became a definitive goal of the study by integrating *pili ‘uhane* (spirituality), *‘ike ku‘una* (traditional knowledge), *‘ōlelo* (language), and *lawena* (behaviors) as essential cultural elements throughout

the study. A prominent feature of this study was the predominant use of the Hawaiian language throughout all research activities, including developing the tools, engaging with participants, and presenting and analyzing the data sets. Maintaining Hawaiian as the primary language of interaction with participants was critical in supporting previously established language relationships between myself as researcher and the participants. Equally important was the opportunity to promote the status of the Hawaiian language as a viable medium within academic pursuits.

As a means to visualize and internalize the overall research process, an essential step taken was to connect myself into the study by making its design familiar and meaningful. Insights into an appropriate research approach eventually came to me while in the native forest gathering ferns and flowers for lei that would adorn my four-year-old *mo‘opuna* (granddaughter) and her *Pūnana Leo* classmates at a Hawaiian language festival. Although I have made hundreds of lei throughout my life—in my youth as a hula dancer and to bedeck loved ones during life’s many celebrations—being in the forest that day clarified a design that refined my study. Figure 1 illustrates the lei-making metaphor.

Lei-making is an art that is rewarding on spiritual, physical, and emotional levels and is a cultural practice that I thoroughly enjoy. I applied my knowledge of the intricacies

### Kumu Honua Maui Ola

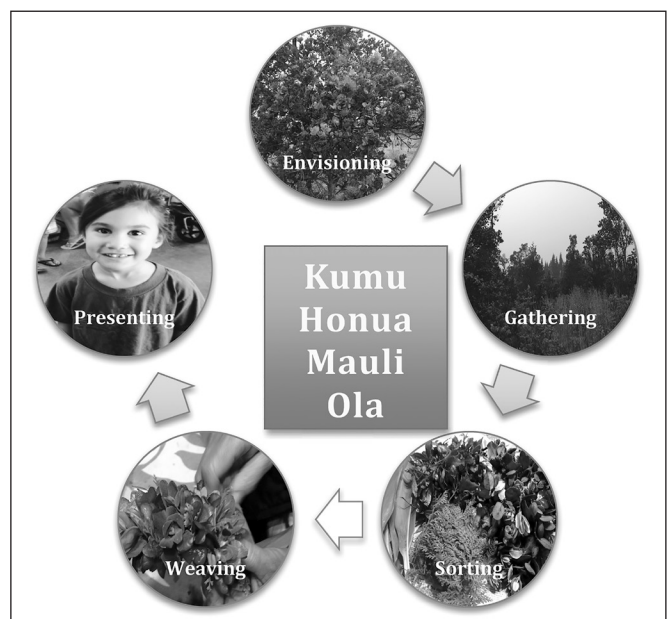


Figure 1. Lei-Making Metaphor

of lei-making to conceptualize and operationalize a values-driven, culturally-appropriate research framework—one that intuitively made sense to me. Envisioning the recipient and occasion determines the appropriate type of lei. In considering lei styles that would appropriately illustrate the intended metaphor, the lei haku as a traditional style of weaving together a variety of flowers and foliage was selected. Intimate familiarity with places and processes allows respectful access to connect with the natural environment. As many of the plants used for lei haku flourish in the native upland forests, requesting permission is an essential protocol conducted prior to entering the forest and opens the way for safe and productive gathering. The choicest flowers and foliage are sought out and gathered from different areas—until lawa—there’s just enough. While departing, words of appreciation are offered. Taking stock of all that was gathered, each piece is carefully considered for obvious and subtle distinctions. Individual pieces of foliage are meticulously tended to, sorted, and pruned to prepare for their selection and placement in the lei-weaving process. Relying on both intuition and creativity, the weaving firmly yet gently secures each item together. As the weaving progresses and individual elements are connected, an intricate pattern of colors and textures is created. To assure that each piece has been appropriately placed and securely fastened, it is picked up and gently shaken. A final reflection of the lei includes a discerning visual inspection to affirm its qualities and to enjoy its unique beauty. As a labor of love, once the lei is complete, it is presented to encircle its wearer with aloha.

The analogy of Hawaiian lei-making was instrumental in connecting to the intentionality and complexities that emerged within each phase of the study. Incorporating the lei metaphor into the research design ultimately informed the cohesive development and flow of my study as its processes guided the data collection, analysis, and reporting. As practitioner researcher, having a clear sense of purpose elucidates the intent to clarify the type of study that would be meaningful and beneficial. My capacity to access and gather Hawaiian educators’ experiences throughout various educational communities was made possible by relationships that were created through decades of personal and professional involvement in Hawaiian language education. Respectful of those relationships, I humbly requested individuals to participate in this study. The wisdom, experiences, and perspectives of elders,

mentors, teachers, and students was sought out; their stories were data giving voice to this community. Experiences and expertise were shared through a survey, as well as through focus groups and interviews that honored oral traditions via culturally-grounded interactions. Each activity was opened and closed with pule (prayer) to guide and enrich the process. I was cognizant of listening deeply to both individual and collective voices. Reflecting on the essence of the experiences and perspectives shared, ideas were woven together as unique and resonating themes emerged. As with the lei, it was with sincere aloha that this study was conducted and presented to further enhance Hawaiian language educational efforts. Overall, reflecting on and extending the intricacies of lei-making as a valued custom contributed to the maui ola of this study, to its well-being and success.

In conjunction with the creation of Hawaiian language educational programs aimed at renormalizing the use of the Hawaiian language and culture, it behooves us to articulate the means to appropriately conduct research that will contribute new understandings and insights to this emerging field of education. Designing research to be pono has been described as emanating from a foundation of cultural values and knowledge that authentically reflects specific contexts. As such, engaging in scholarship that asserts an Indigenous presence and worldview will continue to expand and deepen existing research paradigms.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Pono is a concept which has numerous meanings and is used here to indicate a process done in an appropriate manner. Additional meanings include good, upright, moral, correct or proper procedure, excellent, well-being, prosperity, welfare, benefit, behalf, equity, sake, true condition.