

11-25-2019

## Seeking an Intentional Crossroads: Working Towards an Understanding of Community Building in Hawai'i Public Libraries

Vanessa Irvin

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, irvinv@hawaii.edu

Nicholas Cho

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, nscho@hawaii.edu

Sarah Nakashima

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, sarahan@hawaii.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching Commons](#), [Indigenous Education Commons](#), and the [Information Literacy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Irvin, Vanessa; Cho, Nicholas; and Nakashima, Sarah (2019) "Seeking an Intentional Crossroads: Working Towards an Understanding of Community Building in Hawai'i Public Libraries," *Collaborative Librarianship*. Vol. 11 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/collaborativelibrarianship/vol11/iss3/8>

This Peer Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Collaborative Librarianship by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

---

## Seeking an Intentional Crossroads: Working Towards an Understanding of Community Building in Hawai'i Public Libraries

### Cover Page Footnote

The research in this article represents outcomes from Hui 'Ekolu, a recipient of the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian grant, funded by the Institute for Museum & Library Services (IMLS).

*Peer Reviewed Article*

Seeking an Intentional Crossroads: Working  
Towards an Understanding of  
Community Building in Hawai'i Public Libraries

Vanessa Irvin ([irvinv@hawaii.edu](mailto:irvinv@hawaii.edu))

Assistant Professor & Hui 'Ekolu Principal Investigator,  
Library & Information Science Program, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

Nicholas Cho ([nscho@hawaii.edu](mailto:nscho@hawaii.edu))

Children's Librarian/Librarian II, Mānoa Public Library, Hawai'i

Sarah Nakashima ([sarahan@hawaii.edu](mailto:sarahan@hawaii.edu))

Hui 'Ekolu Graduate Research Assistant,  
Library & Information Science Program, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

**Abstract**

Public libraries in Hawai'i serve one of the most diverse populations in the United States. With 51 branch locations across six islands, Hawaii's public libraries are central hubs for citizens, where community building can take place. This paper seeks to explore ways in which community building takes place at public libraries in Hawai'i. Through on-site visits at public libraries, observations of training sessions of participants of a Hawai'i-based public library professional development program (Hui 'Ekolu), and informal interviews with local public library patrons, key themes, reflections and analysis convey a common question across all groups: "What is a Native Hawaiian Library?" "What is Hawaiian librarianship?" This research is at an emerging stage where such meaningful questions are pointing towards a need to center Indigenous Hawaiian ways of knowing and perceiving public services in libraries as a primary tenet of cultural competence for public library workers in Hawai'i. As a federally funded grant program, Hui 'Ekolu is an innovative opportunity to explore questions that emerge as an inquiry-based approach to determining what professional learning and development can look like within place-based contexts.

Keywords: collaboration, community building, Hawai'i, professional practice, public libraries

**Clearing and Claiming the Space**

It is vital that we claim space within this writing to clarify and confirm protocols and concepts that we are accountable for and that we speak fluently with, as Hawai'i residents living, with

permission from the *'aina* (land) to do and share this work. Our approach to re-searching, re-understanding, and re-discovering public librarianship as identity-, practice-, and service-based



is founded on ancient tradition within the profession of library science itself, and, as human beings accountable to our own ancestral heritages and legacies contextualized within the land on which we live and perform our vocation as librarians, researchers, students, and scholars.

Thus, we also acknowledge our mentors and elders within Hawaiian and Hawai'i-based library and information science (LIS) tradition: Mahealani Merryman, founding librarian of the Native Hawaiian Library – ALU LIKE, INC., retired library and information science (LIS) faculty of the University of Hawai'i's LIS Program (namely Violet Harada, Diane Nahl, and Miles Jackson) and, all *kupuna* (elder) public librarians who have served in Hawai'i for careers spanning more than four decades.

With such dedication and commitment to public library services in Hawai'i, we newer generation librarians, a widely diverse crew, acknowledge and honor our personal and professional accountability to ask ourselves deep questions to explore and discover what it means to offer culturally relevant, respectful, and competent library services to Hawaiian, Polynesian, local, and residential members of the human community residing within the state of Hawai'i, in the United States. Throughout this paper, we readily identify and discuss the Indigenous Hawaiian community, following the expressed knowledge paradigms of renowned Indigenous scholars: Martin Nakata (Australia), Shawn Wilson (Canada), and Manulani Aluli-Meyer (Hawai'i).<sup>1</sup> This research was funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Pseudonyms are used for all participants and locations cited.

### *Defining Community Building*

Public libraries are ideally located in communities where information needs, public services and events are diverse. Such diverse information needs when navigated through public library

services promote or heighten citizens' sense of building connections with one another and oftentimes, local groups and organizations. When community building takes place in public libraries, such engagement offers individuals an opportunity to enhance their experience of being a reciprocal, productive part of contributing to a collaborative ontology that further defines a community's knowledge-based system.<sup>2</sup> Taking inspiration from Gruber's idea of knowledge-based systems being "based on heterogeneous hardware platforms, programming languages, and network protocols,"<sup>3</sup> we can translate the ontology of citizen participation in public libraries as a contribution to building community culture because culture, too, is based on plurality coming from multiple people, groups and locations (i.e. platforms). Such socio-cultural interactions communicate a common "way" of language, and "doing" that enacts protocols unique and specific to the group or community. Thus, community building in public libraries is a vital engagement towards the knowledge base of a community.

The opportunity to explore what "community building" means for public libraries in Hawai'i involved understanding culture and citizen involvement that is very place-based towards the Indigenous context of Hawai'i.<sup>4</sup> A place-based framework for community building was enhanced due to a unique chance to observe and participate in a professional development program called *Hui 'Ekolu* (which means "three groups" in Hawaiian). *Hui 'Ekolu's* mission was to bring together three library and information science groups for the purpose of exploring creation of a culturally competent professional development model for public librarianship. The three groups gathered cover three stages of the LIS career: pre-service librarians as graduate students of the University of Hawai'i LIS Program (UHM LIS), public library paraprofessionals from Hawai'i's Indigenous public library

system, *Ka Waihona Puke 'Ōiwi* – Native Hawaiian Library of ALU LIKE, Inc. (a non-profit organization that provides social services to Native Hawaiians), and professionals - branch managers from Hawai'i's municipal public library system, the Hawai'i State Public Library System (HSPLS). As a member of the pre-service group it was imperative to examine the two institutions, ALU LIKE and HSPLS, from a participant-observer lens in order to examine what community building looks like in public libraries across Hawai'i.

An important comparison to make is to examine their mission statements to find common ground between ALU LIKE (which means “go together” in Hawaiian) and HSPLS. The mission statements provided by both these institutions are similar in intention, yet different in scope. For example, ALU LIKE's mission is to “extend help” to Hawaiian Natives, “To kōkua Hawaiian Natives who are committed to achieving their potential for themselves, their families and communities”<sup>5</sup>, while the HSPLS aims to “nurture” - “The Hawaii State Public Library System nurtures a lifelong love of reading and learning through its staff, collections, programs, services, and physical and virtual spaces.”<sup>6</sup> ALU LIKE is specific in *who* it is they are providing services for, the HSPLS is specific in *how* it wants to provide library services. By unpacking these statements, especially ALU LIKE's, one develops a better idea of what community building at public libraries in Hawai'i could look like. ALU LIKE's framework points to the ideal that by focusing on individuals, their families, and communities as a whole, public library staff can begin to survey and collaborate with patrons and institutional neighbors to facilitate discussion on what community building will look like at the neighborhood library.

Hawai'i's foundational cultural context is Indigenous. *Kanaka Maoli* (Native Hawaiians) have lived throughout the Hawaiian Islands since at

least 1200 A.D.<sup>7</sup> Hawaiian indigeneity was disrupted with “the great distress”<sup>8</sup> of their first European contact via British Captain Cook in 1778. Through the centuries to present day, this disruption has resulted in a marginalization of Hawaiian knowledge, cultural protocols, and social processes.

In library world, particularly for public libraries, the idea of Hawaiian information needs has been little researched. Case in point, a search in the University of Hawai'i's online catalog for the subject heading “Public libraries -- Hawaii” yields just 53 results dating from 1974 - 2014, with just one entry being published in 1991 - an issue of the peer-reviewed American history publication, *Journal of the West*. A database search via *Academic Search Complete* for the Boolean expression (“hawaii” AND “public libraries”) reveals that for the past two decades, articles about public libraries in Hawai'i do not lean towards research into library professional practices, information services, or Hawaiian or local community information needs, but rather, articles are typically news items to note developments and achievements in technological services within the HSPLS.

Thus, our research, we feel, is necessary to share a narrative of what is happening (or not happening) with addressing and meeting the Hawaiian community's information needs and services in Hawai'i's public libraries. This work is important because considerations for the information needs of Indigenous people in Hawai'i have been long muted. Our work with the *Hui 'Ekolu* professional development program conveys that such consideration for Indigenous community needs in public libraries must begin with the librarians and library workers themselves. In this paper, we are interested in conveying questions asked and explored concerning attention paid to centering the unique and specific community information needs of the *Kanaka Maoli*, starting with thinking about what makes a library, Hawaiian. With respect to working



within an Indigenous context in Hawai'i, our conceptual framework for guiding our collaborative work comes from a synthesis of understanding LIS *community engagement* in Indigenous contexts, application of *Indigenous research paradigms* to public library services, reflective *practitioner inquiry* for library workers, professional and paraprofessional.

## Literature Review

### *LIS Community Engagement in Indigenous Contexts*

In library science conversations about information needs and community engagement of Indigenous communities, much of the literature on Indigenous knowledge and how to incorporate that knowledge into a Western modeled thought process, centers on understanding the differences between Indigenous methodology and western methodology and then applying the nuances of the knowledge gained to actual professional practices.<sup>9</sup>

However, Mestre shows that although librarians may intellectually understand the concept of being open to diverse cultures and looking through the lens of different perspectives, such understanding has not moved past a passive subjective acknowledgment.<sup>10</sup> Similar conclusions can be found, albeit through a different topic, on Western Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) for Hawaiian knowledge created by Indigenous people. Matsuda found that although KOS exist, they are not meant for Hawaiians but mainly designed for the practicality of librarian practices.<sup>11</sup> Whereas Matsuda confirms the importance in having uniformity, for Hawaiian communities, KOS without Hawaiian knowledge and terms becomes unusable because within Hawaiian cultural mores, obtaining input and direction from the community during project development is vital.

Although American public libraries have made strides to be inclusive of diverse cultural representations in their collections, programs, and

services, Becvar and Srinivasan show that such culturally responsive methods are still based on Western notions of access and engagement, which are antithetical to traditional, Indigenous perceptions of community-based information services.<sup>12</sup> Becvar and Srinivasan posit that in Indigenous traditions, access is not necessarily always open, nor necessarily always free, as is typical for Western-designed public libraries.

Similarly, Blackburn found that providing community engagement with Indigenous communities at libraries failed to show positive results.<sup>13</sup> Though there are similarities in the vision of libraries and Indigenous cultures, creating a program or interactive community event between the two is not so clear cut.

Where libraries can learn to work together with Indigenous communities is to draw from their educational counterparts who are conducting research in school media centers. For example, Harada examines how a group of K-12 public school teachers in Hawai'i incorporates Native teaching methods in order to build a sense of community and belonging for students, through place-based learning.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, this concept of place-based learning can be utilized in community building within Hawai'i-based public libraries: both ideas center on building a "group identity in which learners become part of a community larger than their own."<sup>15</sup>

Another approach that public libraries in Hawai'i can draw from is the library work done within the Native Hawaiian private school system, Kamehameha Schools (KS). Nalani Nāluai describes how KS librarians infused Hawaiian values and traditions into the school curriculum through the use of proverbs and words translated into actions instead of definitions, to help students connect to cultural concepts and values.<sup>16</sup> Although school media centers and public libraries each have their own specific community to serve, by virtue of them both being educational spaces (school is formalized education,





public libraries are informal educational spaces) by incorporating and applying Indigenous knowledge and practices, a sense of community and belonging can be built. In turn, a sense of Indigenous library practices can be normalized and codified as a protocol for culturally competent library and information practices and services for Native Hawaiian patrons and communities.

Ladson-Billings reflects on the sustainability and misconceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy which has been misused and discusses how many practitioners (teachers) seem “stuck in very limited and superficial notions of culture.”<sup>17</sup> Having an expansive knowledge of culture as a teacher has mostly achieved nothing and instead has reduced the concept of “culture” into a mere activity or enacting of buzzwords. Taking into account Ladson-Billings’ warnings, it is imperative that as educators and librarians, we think about the concepts of “diversity” and “culturally relevant” not as a single racial or ethnic group, but as a global identity to adapt to the fluidity and complexity of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Although Ladson-Billings focuses on linguistics and teaching, the data, theory, pedagogy, and programs she discusses are relevant to all educational professionals, including community-based, public librarians. In order to help early-career and experienced librarians to become more culturally appropriate practitioners, methodologies need to be developed that allow librarians to critique the privileges and advantages of the mainstream as well as to center authentic local, native, and community-driven socio-cultural services and needs within the library.<sup>19</sup>

According to Burns, Doyle, Joseph, and Krebs, such a critical approach to public librarianship allows professionals to analyze the efficacy of equitable access as a method towards accommodating Indigenous peoples’ information needs,

and centering those needs within their own place-based contexts.<sup>20</sup> In turn, Patterson looks at Indigenous librarianship with a global perspective and identifies that a prevalent concern for Indigenous libraries is how to address the preservation of cultural and sacred artifacts. Both Burns, et al. and Patterson point towards inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the creation of public service methodologies, programs, and protocols, but fail to provide successful examples in public libraries where Indigenous people are included in decisions pertaining to designing and building library spaces, collections, and services that meets their informational needs.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Indigenous Approaches to Public Library Services*

A recurring theme within Indigenous considerations for LIS research is the lack of collaboration between Indigenous people and Western institutions. Nakata and Hart both examine Western research paradigms and how a lack of minority perspectives is prevalent in Western-centric approaches to collaborative work and inquiry.<sup>22</sup> Though the focus on these two studies are on incorporating and/or centering Indigenous knowledge systems within information contexts, the same thought process can be applied to community building as a means of “triangulation of meaning.”

This triangulation of meaning, as identified by Aluli-Meyer, supports Hart’s position that Indigenous methodologies are characterized as being a collective where it is inherent for people to reciprocate interactions and activities, be accountable for one another, utilize knowledge gained practically, and to review and reflect with other Indigenous peoples to strengthen Indigenous knowledge and practices.<sup>23</sup> Though the concept of infusing Indigenous knowledge into mainstream thought and practice seems to be a consensus among researchers, studies have found that this is much harder to accomplish in the real world. The reasoning for this is not

made clear from the various studies in this paper except for the fact that Indigenous knowledge was used without collaboration from Indigenous people, and instead was based on researchers' own understanding of Indigenous knowledge.

When looking at examples from around the world, many researchers found that it was a challenge to find a methodology that worked with both Indigenous and Western worldviews. Kurtz, in particular, found that setting long-term goals, creating relationships with elders, and sharing knowledge was key to success in creating an Indigenous methodology.<sup>24</sup> However, with that said, research by Blackburn showed that engagement with the Aboriginal community and creating exhibits and programs incorporating Indigenous cooperation failed to show concrete data that engagement with Indigenous people rose at public libraries.<sup>25</sup> The lack of engagement or qualitative field data could be due to the fact that the initiative was unsustainable as discussed by Blackburn due to varying circumstances such as the inflexibility of libraries and its staff compared to its community, and to the size of the "target community".<sup>26</sup> The lack of concrete data can also be attributed to the fact that Indigenous people do not use or engage with the public library in a Western form, which generally relies on circulation statistics. "Use" of library can be in various ways in place-based communities - ways that are not typically documented or "counted" as actual library use. Instead of relying on data that fits a Western mold, it may be time to figure out what type of socially- and culturally-based information needs to be collected in order for librarians and administrators to gather authentic and true narratives on library usage for Indigenous communities and count those non-traditional activities as actual outcomes that can serve as factors for heightened funding for community-specific resources, staff, and services.

Though there may not have been clear evidence of success in Blackburn's study, Oliveira shows the "effortlessness with which Kanaka scholars are able to marry their academic scholarship with their customary practices and traditions" proving that cultural narratives and inherited knowledge is valid and necessary discourse for theoretical spaces and also within communities of practice.<sup>27</sup> Oliveira provides numerous examples of how Indigenous knowledge is applied to scholarly discourse; from weaving metaphors into scholarly writing, to using Hawaiian story (in varied forms of legends, mythologies, histories, and proverbs) as a methodological approach to research, and investment in relationship building "community of scholars" where people come together to discuss ideas and expand their horizons, even when the collaborative efforts are challenging.<sup>28</sup> Applying these concepts and methodologies to library collections, programs, and missions can provide a base to start creating a library community that is honoring both Indigenous and Western styles of life. The start of such a community begins with library workers at all levels: pre-service, paraprofessional, professional, and administrative.

Within an Indigenous, place-based context, like Hawai'i, community building for public libraries must begin with library staff members because invariably, as island residents, staff members are, by default, members of the very communities in which they serve. Library staff identity, agency and situated-ness begs the question: "What is Hawaiian librarianship?" This question is being explored via a professional and cultural development program for public librarians in Hawai'i, called *Hui 'Ekolu* (<http://www.hui-iekolu.org>). Given the unique and specific social and cultural norms of Indigenous societies, the question infers a secondary question: "What is a Hawaiian library?" This question is important because if traditional municipal public library systems are not engaging the Indigenous public,



then we must determine what “library” means beyond the typical Western model.

Improving library services and community building go hand in hand. The joint effort between UHM LIS, ALU LIKE, and the HSPLS sways the institutions to intrinsically learn from one another. The focus for ALU LIKE is to figure out what resources and practices they can take from the HSPLS to incorporate it into their community programs and for the HSPLS to be more proactive and humbly engaged to share resources with the Indigenous library community. UHM LIS students operate as the data gatherers and synthesizers, to observe and participate through the use of an online platform (Slack) that allows for 24/7 asynchronous communication and information sharing. *Hui 'Ekolu* aims to create a multi-modal professional development model that create ongoing space for collaborative librarianship online, face-to-face, and in the field.

#### *Practitioner Inquiry in Librarian Communities of Practice*

Following the reflective approaches of practitioner inquiry pioneers Cochran-Smith and Lytle, *Hui 'Ekolu* incorporates Slack as a platform where participants from the “three groups” can share and exchange experiences, observations, artifacts, and reflections from their daily professional practices. In this vein, UHM LIS students learn ways in which library science and practice are synthesized in the field, activities ALU LIKE paraprofessionals create and offer to Native Hawaiian community members who use the Native Hawaiian Library, and public librarians of HSPLS working with the local reading public in Hawai'i.<sup>29</sup> Thus, in the fashion of practitioner inquiry for educators, *Hui 'Ekolu* is an exploration of librarian question building for the purpose of librarian community building. Participants are asked questions about LIS in Hawai'i, which brings more questions from

the participants themselves, which inspires reflective conversations about Hawaiian culture, history, and heritage, which further strengthens mutual understanding of cultural meaning with the context of Hawai'i, for all involved.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Methodology & Design**

A tenet of the *Hui 'Ekolu* project design is that there is participation from each of the “hui 'ekolu,” meaning “three groups.” Participation from ALU LIKE and HSPLS are work-assigned from the respective library directors. To recruit students from the UHM LIS Program to voluntarily enroll in participation with *Hui 'Ekolu*, a three-credit “Directed Reading” independent study course was devised. During the Program's course registration period, *Hui 'Ekolu* was promoted throughout the UHM LIS Program with posters, flyers, and an orientation event where the structure and activities of the program were presented and explained. From this work, two UHM LIS students enrolled and participated in *Hui 'Ekolu* for one academic semester, with the *Hui 'Ekolu* principal investigator as Instructor.

This research is a collaborative reportage of one UHM LIS student's ethnographic, inquiry-based research of public library practices, understanding, and approaches to community building, alongside Indigenous ways of enacting information services to the Hawaiian public. This research took a naturalistic observation approach: students as participant-observers, witnessed and documented social actions as they occurred naturally, and as covert participants who jumped in and out of activities and interactions with people, “witnessing and documenting social life as it occurred”.<sup>31</sup> The students approached their library visits, *Hui 'Ekolu* training attendance, and online observations of discourse within *Hui 'Ekolu*, from a holistic approach in honor and respect to the Indigenous context and culture of Hawai'i where “body, mind, and spirit [serve] as a template in which to organize meaningful research.”<sup>32</sup>



Students alongside the Instructor and principal investigator for *Hui 'Ekolu*, further triangulated meaning from the wholistic approach to research methodology following Aluli-Meyer's body, mind, spirit framework via: objective/empirical observations (the body) during field visits to public libraries and attendance and participation in one *Hui 'Ekolu* training session, and collaborative reflection "offered through conscious subjectivity (mind)" during group discussions on the online collaboration workspace platform, Slack, and "through recognition and engagement with deeper realities (spirit)" during intensive data analysis and collaborative (re)reading and (re)writing process (via Google Docs) that we engaged in to compose this story for publication.<sup>33</sup>

Field visits and access to public libraries were conscientiously done through "the patron stance" due to the fact that even as LIS people, we carry multiple identities towards libraries: as an LIS student and at the same time an HSPLS staff member, as an LIS researcher and UHM LIS faculty person, and as a LIS graduate assistant and a reference librarian in an academic library as opposed to a public library.<sup>34</sup>

This research started as an independent study for the student member of this writing team who was a graduate student with University of Hawai'i's LIS Program. The course was an independent study set up in conjunction with the IMLS-funded librarian professional development program, *Hui 'Ekolu*, whose work brings native, student, and public librarians together for professional and cultural development.<sup>35</sup> Introduction to *Hui 'Ekolu* began at a two-day training session where nine *hui* (groups) comprised of Native library workers from ALU LIKE with HSPLS public librarians. The *hui* collaborated to gain library training from a Hawaiian point of view as the training was facilitated by the Hawaiian LIS professional association, *Nā Hawai'i 'Imi Loa* (NHIL, pronounced, "nil").

The first training took place as a half-session on a Friday evening from 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM and the second session took place as a full-day session the next day, Saturday, from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. The *hui* reconvened on the second day of training to better address issues that arose in communication compatibility. During this time, LIS students joined a *hui* (meaning "group" in Hawaiian) to truly make the program, *hui 'ekolu* (meaning "group of three" in Hawaiian).

Within Indigenous contexts, group events and activities are typically "opened" according to cultural protocol that pays homage to spirit, the ancestors, and universal guidance to fortify the gathering space. Thus, *Hui 'Ekolu* training was opened with a group '*oli* (chant), led by NHIL facilitators, sung in Hawaiian. During the course of the training, notes and discussion took place with reflection pieces written out to summarize thoughts, feelings, and knowledge gained. Physical activities were also included, as Indigenous work incorporates physical work alongside intellectual work guided by spirit.<sup>36</sup>

Slack was the main form of online communication used for this project and the channels were spread out in an easy to understand manner. Three public channels were created for all participants to access. The channels were named, *#ohana* (meaning "family" in Hawaiian), *#talkstory-resources*, and *#coolstuff* where participants could post nearly anything. Each *hui* was also given their own private channel where group members could share ideas and tips as well as technical, cultural, and professional knowledge with one another. Lastly, there was a direct messaging system (DMs) in place to facilitate any private communications across groups.

In addition to attending the *Hui 'Ekolu* winter training session, LIS students conducted two library site visits as part of their independent study. The sites chosen for this discussion were public libraries situated within predominantly Hawaiian communities on the island of O'ahu.



The first site visit took place about a week after the *Hui 'Ekolu* winter training session, on Thursday January 24, 2019, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the North O'ahu Public Library, which is located on the leeward side of the island of O'ahu, about an hour's drive from Honolulu. The second site visit took place at the Eastern Shore Public and School (P&S) Library on February 15, 2019, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM, which is located on the windward side of O'ahu, about 45 minutes' drive from Honolulu. Both libraries are units of the HSPLS. Informal interviews, via casual conversations with library patrons, were held at both sites. Interaction with library staff was kept to a minimum to honor the ethnographic stance of observing the natural activities of community need and use at the public library.

### Data Analysis

Observations from the field visits yielded similar results from both branches, particularly in regard to library events and programming. Library programs were heightened interests for patrons interviewed at both sites. Yet, for both sites, there was no easily noticeable display on what events were being held. Upon further investigation, it was found that most library programming was displayed online but little mention was made of upcoming programs at their physical location. Perusing the HSPLS's website, it was found that there was a dynamic and engaging program that had the HSPLS working with the Music for Life Foundation. This music program allowed several of the public libraries to lend ukuleles to the public, free of charge. This program potentially could have been a prime community building event throughout the HSPLS libraries; thus, why it wasn't advertised particularly inside the actual locations in which the events were to take place?

Other noticeable observations were the use of computers at both libraries. There was heavy computer usage at both sites, and it was visible

that some patrons struggled when typing and using the computer. A study by Patricia Overall shows that common situations at libraries is patrons lacking keyboard ability, site format knowledge and basic computer literacy skills.<sup>37</sup> Although this statistic is well documented, it is interesting that there was no signage for computer help or programs and classes that dealt with basic computer knowledge being displayed. This could be a great start in networking and community building with the patrons that use the library for its computer and internet.

Surprisingly, informal interviews at both sites were initiated by patrons while conducting walkthroughs around the library. The conversations were natural and began with interest on what was being examined at the time. The main points in discussions with the two patrons was that they both genuinely enjoyed visiting the library as it was a place easy to relax in due to the air conditioner and overall friendly staff. Neither mentioned the borrowing of materials as their purpose for their visit, but viewed the library as a place *to be*, sort of like a second home. The patron interviews brought up further questions on what a library means to users and possibly to the community on a larger scale. Is the library a place where one can borrow and read materials and find information or is the library something more, like a gathering place for neighbors, family, and friends?

*Hui 'Ekolu* participants conveyed similar questions during the principal investigator's site visits, that occurred on O'ahu during the same time period. A visit to ALU LIKE headquarters revealed that the cultural practitioners who work the Native Hawaiian Library sites want to learn how libraries are organized and operated; they want to learn a sustainable approach to inventory their collections. HSPLS librarians expressed that they admire the community engagement and "people power" of the ALU LIKE library locations and want to learn ways in

which they can better engage the Hawaiian community in relevant ways beyond the collections. HSPLS has stellar Hawaiiana collections but low engagement for cultural activities. ALU LIKE has engaged community outreach, but low readership of their collection. Thus, HSPLS librarians and ALU LIKE practitioners are convened in groups to figure out ways in which they can complement and learn from each other to better serve Hawaiian readers and library users.

In this vein, *Hui 'Ekolu* participants are wondering what libraries in Hawai'i are to be, and how libraries in Hawai'i can best function to honor the place-based context where the *'aina* (the land) is literally, home, which makes the libraries themselves a kind of *hale* (pronounced "hah-lay" in Hawaiian, meaning "home"). Thus, it makes sense that patrons would perceive the library, as "a second home", and that library staffers and librarians are reflectively understanding that what they need in order to make their spaces more engaging to the community, is to formalize more on the one hand (ALU LIKE) and to informalize more on the other hand (HSPLS) all in a quest to balance the concept of the Hawaiian library as "home."

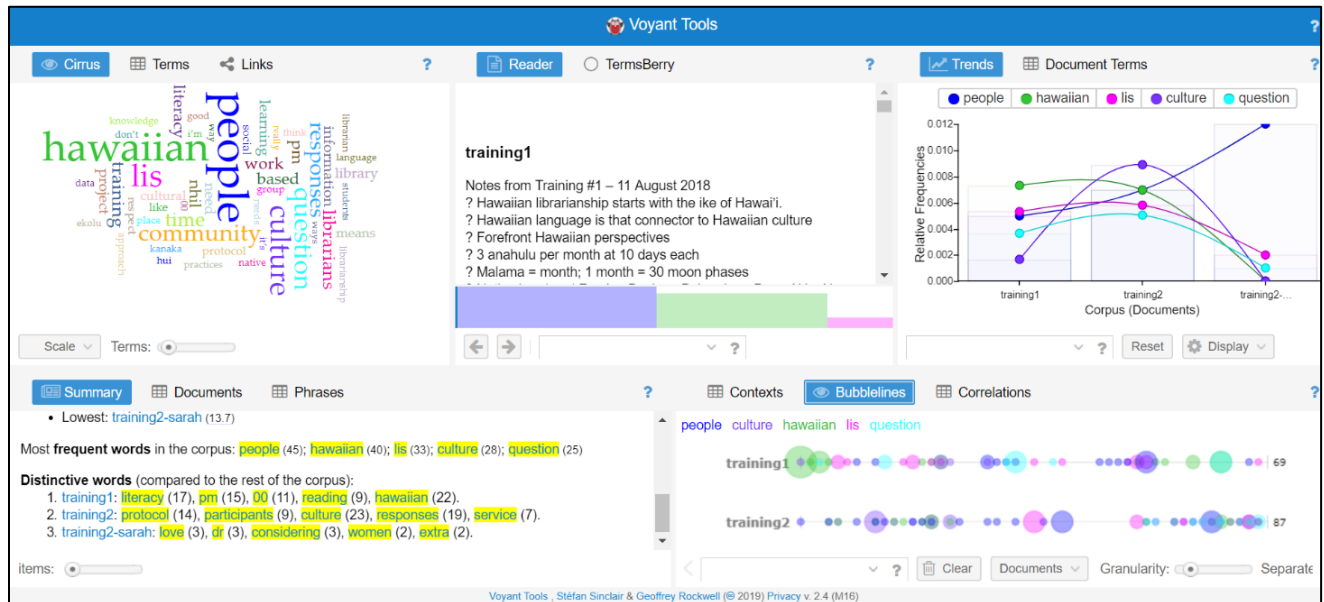
In addition to informal interviews from library site visits, data sources for this research include: field notes and reflective memos from trainings and planning meetings, qualitative interviews of the *Hui 'Ekolu* advisory council members (generously facilitated by LIS students from University

of Texas at Austin via Dr. Lorie Roy), and online discourse via the collaborative workspace platform, Slack (<http://www.slack.com>).

Online discourse on Slack tended to be sparse with the *hui*, which is in line with what Irvin and Reile showed that at the beginning of their study called *LINQ: The Librarians' Inquiry Forum*. In their research, Irvin and Reile found that librarians rarely responded or contributed to discussions on Slack and instead only read posts and through their data, indicated that it takes roughly four months to "establish a sustainable community."<sup>38</sup> The Slack channel for *Hui 'Ekolu* followed a similar pattern as it had plenty of discussion since its inception in August 2018 when channels were first created, but since then, postings have started to taper off. Posts in all channels have not had much activity as of January 2019.

To triangulate the textual data gathered from all data sources, the online data analysis tool, Voyant Tools (<https://voyant-tools.org/>) was employed. Voyant is a web-based textual analysis tool whose strength is a simple, yet flexible modular design. The tool allows researchers to upload multiple textual files for the purpose of triangulating qualitative data. Voyant helps researchers to present a synthesis of multiple texts in various visualizations for a multi-modal approach to qualitative research.

Figure 1. Image of textual multi-textual analysis of *Hui 'Ekolu* qualitative data.



Through the use of Voyant, sifting through the data results and literature revealed a few themes/keywords; a textual analysis was made on keywords that appeared frequently. The results varied from document to document, but the most common words that came up constantly were, people/kanaka/Indigenous, community, and knowledge. These three terms also popped up quite a bit at the *Hui 'Ekolu* training session, especially the Hawaiian term *'ike*, which translates to mean “knowledge”. By synthesizing the three terms, Indigenous, community, and knowledge, it is feasible to begin pondering on what constitutes community building in libraries across Hawai'i. Libraries need to have input from the people in the community, and then use those ideas or *'ike* to bring about a service or program or collection where the library reflects the community's idea of the library as a home.

The main point that we believe our data elucidates is that librarians and library workers must work together to mindfully and purposefully include the community in the conversation of “the

library.” This means that outreach and community input need to be done thoroughly to not miss the ways in which residents perceive and anticipate information services in public libraries that convey knowledge or *'ike* of the land, thus, of home. As much of the literature states in this paper, taking input from the community and actually acting upon it is the key to success in creating a community building initiative at local libraries in Hawai'i that adhere to both Western and Indigenous methodologies.

Case in point, a common theme taken away from the first-year *Hui 'Ekolu* trainings centered around the question, “What does a Hawaiian library look like?” Through on-site visits at selected public libraries on O'ahu, observations of *Hui 'Ekolu* training sessions, and informal interviews with local library patrons, key themes, reflections and analysis convey a common question across all groups (librarians, cultural workers, and library patrons): “What is a Hawaiian library?”



Admittedly, *Hui 'Ekolu's* research is in its fledgling stages where such meaningful questions are pointing towards a need to center Hawaiian ways of knowing and perceiving public services in libraries as a primary tenet of cultural competence for public library workers in Hawai'i. As of this writing, the grant has allowed for the Hawaiian cultural workers with ALU LIKE on Moloka'i and Big Island, along with the HSPLS librarians, to visit HSPLS and ALU LIKE library locations on O'ahu. Early responses from participants include:

Would it be feasible to travel to Big Island and/or Moloka'i? I think there is much value in/on these other islands as well. I think Moloka'i would be an amazing collection to see! [T]he recent visits on O'ahu have inspired me to see what others are doing as I am thinking about what I can add to what I do and feel proud to be doing what we do understanding our bigger purpose. (Paula, ALU LIKE cultural practitioner)

I really enjoyed having the opportunity to visit ALU LIKE locations ... the visits helped me to better understand the concept and reality of Native Hawaiian libraries. It would be interesting to visit other Native Hawaiian libraries on island or throughout the state. (Laina, HSPLS librarian)

As a federally funded grant program, *Hui 'Ekolu* is actualizing an innovative opportunity to explore inquiry-based questions and intentions that emerge as a means to determining what professional learning and development can look like within place-based contexts. With such an opportunity in mind, it is important to note that this research reveals further considerations for

thinking about the nuances of participant-observer approaches to ethnographically working within Indigenous contexts.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Inquiry-based learning can be incredibly meaningful when observing and participating in large group meetings, agenda-driven workshops, and engagement in one-on-one informal and formal discourse online and face-to-face. All these approaches as a multi-modal model provide consistent opportunities for librarian professional learning and relationship-building. *Hui 'Ekolu* is showing the efficacy of having a professional development model that affords community-building between librarians, library workers, and LIS students. It is clear that when adequate resources are in place to sponsor professional and cultural learning and development that librarians and library workers garner identity-grounding benefits that motivate and inspire their practice and praxis in libraries.

However, within an Indigenous place-based context, LIS participant-observers have to accept the fact that there will be conversations, activities, and events where their inclusion/membership is not automatic nor guaranteed because micro-relationships based on cultural- or heritage-based synergy are thickly interwoven into the tapestry of the larger community that is embedded within localized cultural norms. The work in *Hui 'Ekolu* is teaching us that building relationships for librarianship within an Indigenous context may be more about "building opportunities" for centering Indigenous ways of being, doing, and critically thinking about what libraries are and what libraries do. Indigenous-centered epistemology in place-based contexts within librarianship raises new questions that are complex because localized perceptions may be opposingly different from the traditional librarian identity construct. For example, whereas librarians may be used to transparent, step-by-step plans, agendas, and activities, Indigenous-



centered ontologies may require a more fluid, relationship-based membership and leadership.

In response to historically-documented colonial and imperialistic cruelties, Indigenous epistemology (within multiple cultures across the world) often confers a level of privacy in relationships that for participant-observers can become a barrier to capturing intersectional information about what is happening with networks being created or enhanced between people and groups. Cross-membership into micro-groupings may not be inclusive, thus conversations important for achieving intended learning goals within a multi-grouped community of practice like *Hui 'Ekolu*, may be missed. In Indigenous, place-based contexts, outsider LIS researchers may have to take a reflective stance to gently navigate where and how they fit into the scheme of a learning journey that may ebb and flow in circumfluous ways.

Within Indigenous contexts, it is not unusual for groups to exist within groups within more groups, inter-sectionally and spontaneously. Indeed, inter-connected micro-groupings are priceless social (re)actions that invite the promise of a broader collaboration and inclusion. Yet, collaboration can also feel exclusive to pre-subscribed relationships that are hesitant to develop into inclusive partnerships, even amongst cultural and/or professional kin. When seeking to connect and collaborate within Indigenous contexts, LIS participant-observers, regardless of any seemingly compatible cultural identities, may have to accept the insider/outsider positionality, with an agency of quiet patience, cultural humility, and unbridled flexibility in order to gently and respectfully move forward in whatever direction Indigenous-centered relationship- and community-building takes. When mindfully considering socio-cultural nuances that are often intricately textured (i.e. political), an important aspect of “following the data” is to welcome varying ways of perceiving and apply-

ing hyper-localized service-oriented practices towards a specific and unique praxis of public librarianship.

Thus, this deeply textured, nuanced, and very reflective human work of librarian practitioner inquiry as participant-observer action research can be provocative because navigating the insider/outsider stance within a heritage-based, place-based, and/or Indigenous context can be a constantly changing elaborate labyrinth to traverse and balance in the name of practicing public librarianship, which, as a specialization within LIS is embedded with its own socio-cultural subtleties. The challenge comes with our passionate search for a common ground between “the librarian identity” and “the cultural identity” of librarians themselves synthesized with the honoring and centering of the cultural norms and protocols of the communities in which we live and serve.

Seeking an intentional crossroads between who we are as librarians and who we are as descendants of various ancestral heritages and understandings is a breaking of new ground within the realm of diversity work and services in public librarianship, particularly in the United States. The research within *Hui 'Ekolu* seeks to honor the sacred chaos of jambalaya-mixing many single great human stories into a narrative that identifies the librarian identity as a culturally relevant and respectful expression in and of itself. *Hui 'Ekolu*, as an emerging professional development model, seeks to triangulate librarian and heritage-based cultural identities into a meaningful praxis-oriented approach. *Hui 'Ekolu* hopes to crystallize a valuable conceptual framework for enhancing our profession’s mindfulness towards offering culturally relevant and respectful public information services within communities everywhere.



<sup>1</sup> Martin Nakata. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA Journal* 28(5-6), 281-291; Shawn Wilson. *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood, 2008; Manulani Aluli-Meyer. Holistic epistemology: Native common sense. *China Media Research* 9, no. 2 (2013): 94-101.

<sup>2</sup> Gruber, Thomas R Gruber. "Toward principles for the design of ontologies used for knowledge sharing." *International Journal Human-Computer Studies* 43, no. 5-6 (1995): 907-928; National Institutes of Health (NIH). *Principles of community engagement, second edition*. NIH Publication No. 11-7782, 2011. <https://bit.ly/2u51tv2>

<sup>3</sup> Gruber, 907.

<sup>4</sup> Violet Harada. "The power of place-based learning: Caring for our island Earth." *Teacher Librarian* 44, no. 2 (2016): 8-12.

<sup>5</sup> ALU LIKE, Inc. "About Us." <https://www.alulike.org/about-us/>

<sup>6</sup> ALU LIKE, Inc. "Purpose." <https://www.alulike.org/about-us/purpose/>

<sup>7</sup> Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa. *Native land and foreign desires: How shall we live in harmony? = Ko Hawai'i 'āina a me nā koi pu 'umake a ka po 'e haole: Pehea lā e pono ai?* Honolulu, Hawai'i: Bishop Museum Press, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Kame'eleihiwa, 1992: 20.

<sup>9</sup> Aluli-Meyer, 2006; Wilson, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Lois Mestre. Librarians working with diverse population: What impact does cultural competency training have on their efforts? *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 36, no. 6 (2010): 479-488.

<sup>11</sup> Shavonn Matsuda. Toward a Hawaiian knowledge organization system: A survey of access to Hawaiian knowledge in libraries and archives. Masters' thesis. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i- Mānoa, 2015. <https://scholar.space.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/42370>

<sup>12</sup> Katherine Becvar and Ramesh Srinivasan. Indigenous knowledge and culturally responsive methods in information research. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 79, no. 4 (2009): 421-441.

<sup>13</sup> Fiona Blackburn. Community engagement, cultural competence and two Australian public libraries and Indigenous communities. *IFLA Journal* 43, no. 3 (2017): 288-301.

<sup>14</sup> Harada, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>16</sup> Nalani Nāluai. Approaching the inquiry process from a cultural perspective. *Knowledge Quest*, 43, no. 2 (2014): 38-41.

<sup>17</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billing. Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (2014): 77.

<sup>18</sup> Ladson-Billings, 2014: 82.

<sup>19</sup> Harada, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen Burns, Ann Doyle, Gene Joseph and Alison Krebs. "Indigenous librarianship." In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences, Third Edition*, 2330-2346. Edited by Marcia J.

---

Bates and Mary Niles Maack. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Lotsee Patterson. "Indigenous librarianship: A global perspective." 2002 Jean E. Coleman Library Outreach Lecture, Atlanta, GA, June 13-19, 2002. Chicago: American Library Association.

<sup>22</sup> Nakata, 2002; Hart, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Aluli-Meyer, 2006; Hart, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Donna L. M. Kurtz. Indigenous methodologies: Traversing Indigenous and Western worldviews in research. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9, no. 3 (2016): 217-229.

<sup>25</sup> Blackburn, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>27</sup> Oliveira, 2016: 75.

<sup>28</sup> Oliveira, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle. *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next*

*Generation*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Johnny M. Saldana and Matt Omasta. *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Aluli-Meyer, 265.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Vanessa Irvin and Wiebke Reile. LINQing librarians for better practice: Using *Slack* to facilitate professional learning and development. *Public Library Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2017): 166-179.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Aluli-Meyer, 2006; Aluli-Meyer, 2013; Hart, 2010; Maina, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Overall, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Irvin and Reile, 2017: 174.