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## Building Relationships With Our Island Home: Three Stories From Kindergarten in Hawai‘i

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# Building Relationships With Our Island Home: Three Stories from Kindergarten in Hawai‘i

*Donna Reid-Hayes*

Elder Dr. Walter Soboleff tells us that the seeds of our ancestors are planted within our consciousness. It is this awareness that remains within us and compels us to want to learn more and do more on behalf of our culture and language. It is a longing inherent in us, a legacy of valuing our heritage (The World Forum Foundation Indigenous People’s Action Group, 2020, p. 12).



*Figure 1.* This child is joyfully immersed in this ‘āina-based learning experience. There is a spiritual connection that emerges with this work.

As early childhood educators, we seek to create authentic and meaningful experiences for the children we learn alongside. We must remember that at its core, “education, in its highest form, liberates human potential through transformational teaching and learning experiences” (Meyer, Maeshiro, & Sumida, 2018, p. 17). As a Native Hawaiian early childhood educator in Hawai‘i, I feel compelled to nurture the children’s emerging sense of place and self to empower them with a strong sense of connection and identity. Although not all the children in my care are Native Hawaiian by blood, they are being raised within a place and a culture that requires each of us to be cognizant of that place and culture. As Meyer (2016) stated, “what will be vital in this century is Culture—a way of being unique to place and people” (p. x). Meyer further clarified that “as a point of history, let it be known that we [Hawaiians] never did privilege” [ideas of race, ethnicity, and blood] as “points of separation” (p. x). There have been efforts to colonize and erase our Hawaiian language and culture for generations (Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, 2013; Kana‘iaupuni, 2006). My hope as an educator is that each of us—children, educators, and families—will grow to embrace our kuleana, our responsibility and privilege, as people living in this unique and storied place.

## MO'OLELO (STORIES) AS AN INDIGENOUS PEDAGOGICAL CHOICE

Kovach (2012) stated, “Stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledge while simultaneously signifying relationships” (p. 94). Archibald [Q’um Q’um Xiiem] (2008) used the term “storywork” (p. 3) to describe a powerful pedagogy for use in Indigenous research and in school curricula. In my doctoral work (Reid-Hayes, 2020), I used mo’olelo as research, claiming my own stories as valid data. Weaving together the mo’olelo of my childhood here in Hawai’i with those of my journey as an early childhood educator offered me opportunities to consider how my emerging sense of my Native Hawaiian identity has shifted my pedagogical and curricular decisions.

Stories are a way in which Indigenous cultures across the world pass knowledge from one generation to the next (Archibald [Q’um Q’um Xiiem], 2008; Kovach, 2012). Acknowledging Goldblatt (2008) and Withrell and Nodding (1991), Gay (2018) stated, “Stories also are powerful means for people to establish bridges across other factors that separate them (such as race, culture, gender, and social class), penetrate barriers to understanding, and create feelings of kindredness” (pp. 2–3). Each listener receives a story from their own perspective and derives their own meaning from its telling. It is with this intentionality that I offer three mo’olelo as glimpses into how pedagogies can shift to embrace the culture, ‘āina (land), protocols, language, and traditions of the place we call home. These mo’olelo come from a Hawaiian perspective, but the same principles can ring true in diverse settings. ‘Ōlelo Hawai’i (Hawaiian language) is used throughout this paper as a way to honor the place and culture I am working within and to kūpa‘a (stand firm) in its reclamation. It is important to the Hawaiian people that our ‘āina hear her once-banned language spoken aloud.



*Figure 2.* Child’s vantage point from the hale looking out across the loko i’a at Paepae o He’eia as he listens to the mo’olelo of this place.

## CONNECTION TO NATURE AND A SENSE OF PLACE

It is critical in developing a kuleana to Hawai‘i that our keiki bond with the places of their childhood. Kana‘iaupuni (2006) stated, “Hawaiian identity is rooted firmly in ties to the land and sea” (p. 289) and further described the natural world as kūpuna (ancestors) of the Hawaiian people.



*Figure 3.* Children and kūpuna learning together in this beautiful setting. The experiences of our kūpuna enrich our learning each time we step into these spaces.

As schools develop programs that encourage caring for the land and the ocean, our haumāna deepen their connection to place and embrace their growing understanding of their kuleana (Kana‘iaupuni, 2006). Burgess (2013) highlighted a long-term view as she credited an unknown kūpuna saying, “If you plan for a year—plant kalo. If you plan for ten years—plant koa. But if you plan for 100 years—teach the children Aloha ‘Āina (to love the land)” (p. 30). If we want our children to develop a respect and love for their place and a commitment to its future, we must weave Indigenous ways of knowing and learning into their daily lives. As a central tenet of our kindergarten program, we encourage the children to build a relationship with nature because “[c]hildren must first build relationships with land and territory to become its stewards” (The World Forum Foundation Indigenous People’s Action Group, 2020, p. 5). We hope to build this sense of connection and stewardship as living on an island requires us to deeply understand our interconnectedness with the world around us.



*Figure 4.* Children slow their bodies, breathe deeply, and observe. We settle in to paint en plein air in order to see more fully; to notice the shapes, lines, colors, and textures of all that surrounds us. We develop a relationship with the ‘āina through all of our senses.

I intentionally focus learning trips on culturally connected natural settings rich with opportunity for wonder and evocative sensory and aesthetic (Greene, 2001) experiences. We hope to engage our haumāna in learning through Hawaiian cultural experiences rather than learning about the culture. I choose literature with a more critical eye, seeking inclusivity and avoiding stereotypes and colonizing attitudes. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i has become part of our morning message, our daily schedule, and our routines. Families and our local community play an integral role in our learning environment.



*Figure 5.* Children, parents, and grandparents experience learning side-by-side, enriching their relationships as they work through challenges.

This paper contains three mo'olelo that come from my lived experiences. My intention is that these mo'olelo will create space for your reflection around your own stories and your pedagogical choices. In these mo'olelo, children are asked to step into work in the lo'i (kalo patch), to mele (sing) to greet the 'āina, and to kilo (observe) and immerse themselves in their surroundings by painting and writing about what they see. These are small moments where Indigenous pedagogies and cultural learning are utilized in our program. They are a beginning, the first pebbles in the pond, creating ripples that move outwards and amplify with each circle they make. When we ask children to immerse themselves in a place, they have the opportunity to develop empathy and respect for their environment (Kana'iaupuni, 2006).

The first mo'olelo, *Jordan: Building Trust*, looks closely at a child as he literally steps, somewhat unwillingly, into an 'āina-based experience and discovers an inner strength and peace in working with his hands deep in the earth. We work to push beyond some initial discomfort and the Western tendency of privileging the individual's choice, and to embrace the work of the group as we build a caring relationship with our 'āina.

### MO'OLELO: JORDAN: BUILDING TRUST

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

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

"This is kalo... taro," she said.

"The leaf looks like a heart!" exclaimed Jason.

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

Jordan had begun to inch away from the edge of the lo'i, hoping to escape from this work. My hand wrapped around his, I whispered, "we're staying here... this is our work." But his hand continued to defy me, pushing past my grip, his feet inching away just slightly... but no! I held firm, breathing deeply to keep my resolve from turning into the sourness of anger. We stepped together into the lo'i, as I firmly



Figure 6. Working together offers our keiki shared experiences and moments of deep connection.

grasped his hand, encouraging but unrelenting. He turned to flee, and my arms went around him, strong but embracing. “This is our work today,” I reminded him. He struggled, and then... his body relaxed against mine, his grip loosened, and we began the work of pulling kalo—reaching deep into the mud, dislodging the kalo, pulling off the roots, rinsing the mud, and throwing our harvest onto the grassy bank.



Figure 7. Reaching a hand into the mud, feeling the kalo as he pulls gently.

### JORDAN: BUILDING TRUST: REFLECTION

As we make pedagogical and curricular choices, we can look to cultural resources in our areas to help us integrate Indigenous knowledge into our daily work. All learners can benefit from the deep knowledge and expertise of cultural practitioners as they design and guide the interactions at culture-based, ‘āina-based learning sites. From these initial steps, we can gather experiences and stories to help strengthen our growing understanding of the pedagogical shift we are making.

It is vital to place experiences in the children’s paths that will challenge them, encouraging them to develop a healthy respect and aloha for their homeland. This kuleana to our island home, to care for this land, has grown into a strong component of the work I do with

my haumāna today. I am as firm and unrelenting in my commitment to nurturing my students’ sense of Aloha ‘Āina as I am with individual children in the lo‘i. Through a Western lens, we may see Jordan’s resistance as a sensory difference or individual preference, and yet from an Indigenous view, we know that experiencing the textures, smells, and sounds of our ‘āina is key in throwing off colonized attitudes as we reclaim our connection to our ‘āina and our histories. We embrace opportunities to challenge our senses and immerse ourselves in the beauty that surrounds us each day. Experiences in the lo‘i and the loko i‘a, as well as hikes into Mānoa valley and along its ridges, help us all to gather the meaningful experiences we need as we build connections to our place.

*Waimānalo–Kaiona*, the second mo‘olelo, begins with my own memories that capture moments of spirituality and connection to the ‘āina and to our kūpuna that are so important to our Hawaiian way of knowing and learning.

### MO‘OLELO: WAIMĀNALO–KAIONA

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

Our family knows this place as Waimānalo or Shriners. We came here often to swim, to play, and to picnic. We came for lu‘au and parties in the evenings. We celebrated birthdays here, swam through the concrete block just offshore, and played with trucks and shovels in the sand. We brought cousins, aunts, and



Figure 8. Looking out across the water, there is time to breathe in the salt air, observe the colors of the ocean, and search the surface for the honu who surfaces for a breath.

grandma and grandpa to explore our favorite spots, introducing them to our life. This place was like family, part of the ritual of our lives.

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

“Here we are!”

“Hello!”

“Aloha!”

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

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

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

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

We gather there on the grass and collect ourselves. We mele to greet the space. We express gratitude for the learning we hope for. Then we get ourselves ready to start putting together our project for the day. I look out at the water, a bit teary, breathing in the beauty of this place. My mother’s ashes were scattered here, in the waters just offshore, where children were splashing and laughing.

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

We begin to fill palettes with turquoise, yellow, and magenta to offer the children bright colors to match the day. Children and families begin to settle, some on the grass, some under trees, and others out on the sand.

The horizon is clear; the many shades of blue, deepening the further out the eye travels. Gentle waves lap the shore. Children stop from time to time to run through the shallow water. Someone calls out “honu!” And we are reminded of the mo’olelo of the ali’i and the honu of this place generations ago, as the children work to tell the story of this place with their paints.



Figure 9. Painting en plein air offers time to ponder and be enveloped by a place.



As the canvases are lined up along the fence, we collect dirty brushes and supplies. There is a feeling of satisfaction as the paintings catch our eyes—an array of colors, mixed carefully by artists, both children and adults. Each image tells the story of this place from the particular perspective of the painter. We walk down the beach and dance hula. The children had learned a song about Kaiona. We honor that place with our hula and our voices.

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

### WAIMĀNALO-KAIONA: REFLECTION

We often use the picture book *Step Gently Out* (Frost & Lieder, 2012) to set the tone for our adventures into nature. If we can step gently, enter peacefully, what will we notice? What will we hear? We have used art and observation as a means of building a relationship with a place. We offer our haumāna experiences to slow down and embrace a place, to share its rhythms and feel its presence. We invite children to draw, paint, write poetry, listen to mo'olelo, or dance as a way of getting to know their surroundings in a more enduring way. We ask families to take on the role of learner rather than observer or even critic. Adults tend to hesitate at first, shying away from the vulnerability required for new learning, but with encouragement they eventually put down their phones and settle into the work as well. This shift in the structure of our learning trips has brought deeper connections for all learners, developing lasting memories and building strong desires to return to this relationship over time. The children and families have become more comfortable with challenges and more present in their interactions with a place and with each other. Our relationships shift closer as our shared experiences grow.



Figure 10. Parent and child sharing a common palette while telling the story of this place from their unique kuana'ike (perspectives).

The third mo'olelo, *Paepae o He'eia*, evokes a time when my growing understanding of this pedagogical transformation was reflected back to me by a parent. In this mo'olelo, I begin to recognize the impact our work can have on our relationship with families and their learning when we include them in our experiences.

### MO'OLELO: PAEPAE O HE'EIA

Never have I considered that I am teaching Hawaiian language, and yet today, my haumāna use 'ōlelo throughout their day. They have begun to hear the sounds, taste the words, feel the vowels forming in their mouths. They introduce themselves, starting to understand the importance of carrying their family name to honor their 'ohana. They hear songs, find familiar words, pick out what they know. They notice words around them, asking, "How do you say...?" My answer is often, "I don't know. I'll go find out."

They listen and try to pronounce. Their ears are familiar with the sounds. They notice the ‘okina in the name of a friend. They are aware that this language, the language of their home, exists for them. They use many words as first words for things, knowing their meaning rather than their translation. Words and phrases like mākāhā (sluice gate), i‘a (fish), mahalo (thank you), heluhelu (read), e ke akua (Dear God), noho ilalo (sit down), kū iluna (stand up), e pā‘ani kākou (let’s all play), mele (song), piko (center), and oli (chant). Some of these words are now familiar, old friends, comfortable on the tongue. When a word is not part of the everyday mo‘oki‘ina (routine), the children may not always remember it, but they have already stepped over the threshold of ʻōlelo Hawai‘i, never to feel left outside. They know they can enter, that they are welcomed into this space and this learning. They know they have a place in this work. There are children like me, blond, blue-eyed Hawaiians. No one would guess that they too are Hawaiian, proud of their heritage, eager to embrace any learning about it that comes their way. Parents express appreciation for their child’s new perspectives, ideas, and understandings.

We tumble off the bus; the air is charged with the energy of eager 5- and 6-year-olds. We are heading to Paepae o He‘eia. The children recognize the loko i‘a from books in our classroom as we head down the long driveway. We gather together as a group.

“Aloha!”

“Aloha!”

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

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

Eia no mākou  
Nā keiki o ka Punahou  
Ho‘omālamalama e mōhala ai  
‘Umeke ka‘eo  
Loko maika‘i  
Mahalo i nā kumu alaka‘i  
Mahalo i nā kumu alaka‘i<sup>1</sup>

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

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1 E. McGuire, lyrics provided in personal communication, 2010. “Here we are. The children of Punahou. Seeking enlightenment. So that we may blossom. Have well-filled minds. And be people of good character. Giving thanks to the teachers who lead up. Giving thanks to the teachers who lead us.”



*Figure 11.* As we walk the wall of the fishpond, we walk in the footsteps of our kūpuna.

We walk along the walls of the pond. The children marvel at the stories of how it was built long ago and rebuilt over the last decade. They think back to the stories read at school and how the people hali hali the stones, from hand to hand, from the mountains all the way down to the shore to form the walls. This is how they learn the idea of “ho’omau ka hana a pau” ((Armitage & Hale, 2001, pp. 20–23), the concept of ahupua’a becoming real for them in this collaborative act. The makahā fascinates them, and they try to imagine the fish entering the loko i’a in pursuit of food rather than being caught and trapped. The intelligence of our kūpuna illuminates the faces of the parents as they learn alongside their keiki.

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

Another trip, taken years ago, lingers in my memory:

“We are going to have you all do some work here at the fishpond. This big pile of coral needs to get loaded into these buckets,” directed the kumu during that trip. “Can you guys help us with that?” “Yes!” shouted the children. They scrambled towards baskets of gloves and began to stretch their fingers into the tangled fabric. Each child has their own way of putting the gloves on. Some were careful, placing each finger in cautiously. Others pushed hard against the stiff, salt-soaked fabric and needed help to slow down and insert their fingers into the right spaces.

The children returned eagerly to the pile of coral to gather handfuls or armloads, as much as they could manage. Thud... clunk... the pieces of coral crunched together as they landed on rocks previously dropped in the bucket.

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

We began by reading from *Nā ʻōlelo noʻeau no nā keiki: Words of wisdom for children* (Armitage & Hale, 2001). The children learned the ʻōlelo noʻeau (wise words from our ancestors), “E hoʻomau ka hana a pau (when you start something see it through until completed until the very end)” (Armitage & Hale, 2001, pp. 20–23). There was an illustration of people passing stones, hand to hand, in order to build the walls of the fishpond. We read, we talked, and then we gathered stones from our ʻauwai to build our own fishpond walls and, with them, our own understanding.

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

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

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

“I want to thank you for this trip.”

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

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

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

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

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

### **PAEPAE O HEʻEIA: REFLECTION**

At first, the idea of integrating language and culture into my classroom seemed out of reach, maybe even inappropriate for someone who was clearly not an expert in cultural knowledge, and yet I felt I had no choice. As a Native Hawaiian educator, it was my kuleana to enrich my understanding and offer culture-rich opportunities to the children and their families. As my culture-based research and learning progressed, I found that I would need to include language, traditional song and dance, moʻolelo, and cultural protocols to create a culture-rich environment for the children (Reid-Hayes, 2016). The mother in the moʻolelo reminded me that as a people, we are learning how to reclaim and restore our right to

our culture. It is within the grasp of each of us to make these shifts. It takes intentional action to move in new directions that can feel daunting, and yet it is a transformation that is not only achievable but empowering.

I discovered the power of family engagement within this context. Including family members in this work encourages a broadening of their understanding of kuleana and of their relationship with their child as a learner. If I can open spaces for families to engage, inspiring inquiry and interest, then I will have made an impact beyond the single school year I have with their children. Each step we take toward embracing the cultures around us enriches our programs and our own lives in the process. I have found that it is in these pedagogical shifts that I have been able to turn my practice towards new insights and goals.

## AS OUR STORIES COME TOGETHER

As early childhood educators, we can intentionally push our work into new areas, integrating culture-based experiences, developing protocols, incorporating native languages, and aligning our practice with culturally responsive practices (Hammond, 2015). We can transform our practice by utilizing Indigenous pedagogies and curricular designs to more intentionally meet the needs of our diverse community of learners.



*Figure 12.* After harvesting kalo, the children experience the lo'i through the eyes of an artist capturing this moment in time on their canvases.



*Figure 13.* Immersive 'āina-based experiences deepen our connection to the natural world and offer us a new perspective for learning.

'Āina-based learning trips offer opportunities to engage with cultural practitioners and build relationships with the land, the sea, and the natural world of our home. Building protocols around how to enter a space, greet a teacher, or express gratitude encourages deeper cultural learning, incorporating traditions, behaviors, attitudes, and language into our daily lives. Inviting families into this learning broadens the scope of our impact as “the intelligence of our kūpuna illuminates the faces of the parents as they learn alongside their keiki” (see Mo'olelo: Paepae o He'ēia). Integrating 'ōlelo no'eau grounds our work in the wisdom of those who came before us. Each step forward offers new growth and new opportunities for learning.

My work as an early childhood educator exists at the beginning of a long and winding journey. I can plant seeds with my haumāna, their families, and my colleagues in the hope that we will create a better foundational experience. As Palmer (2017) stated, “Intellect works in concert with feeling, so if

I hope to open my students' minds, I must open their emotions as well” (p. 66). Beauty creates a desire within us to replicate and recreate (Scarry, 1999). If we invite children and their families into beautiful, meaningful experiences with the ‘āina and the culture, we may inspire interest in future learning. Perhaps we will increase the expectations of the children and families and a thirst for more culture-rich experiences as they grow and learn together. It is in this new learning that each of us grows.



Figure 14. Opportunities to work alongside our kūpuna connect us to generational knowledge well beyond the tangible experience.

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**Donna Reid-Hayes**, a Native Hawaiian, is an early childhood educator in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. She holds her MEd and EdD from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Her research centers on how the interweaving of Hawaiian culture-based education and Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogies has transformed her practice within her kindergarten classroom, as well as her growing sense of indigeneity. Donna utilizes the concepts of mo‘okū‘auhau (genealogy) and mo‘olelo (story) to build understanding of her experiences and pedagogical choices. She believes passionately in the competence and drive of the young child and sees culture and place as having an integral role in their development.