The Ethnographic Edge

Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines



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Kuahuokalā: Reflections on space and transformative education conversations

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Mo'olelo i ho'opōkole 'ia (abstract)

How can a place transform a conversation? In this paper the authors discuss how meeting to develop a professional learning community in a hale, a traditional native Hawaiian building, changed the course and direction of the learning community. Too often, departments and divisions of higher education are driven by external standards imposed by state and national accrediting and licensing agencies. The conceptions of education and the way it is implemented then is more focused on meeting the standard rather than coming to a deeper understanding of what can be accomplished for our communities in the name of education and how it can be achieved. Our PLC is intended to address this shortcoming by creating space of sharing, conversation and communal action. What emerged from our work within our relationship to the hale was an expression of the values, commitments and ideals that emerged through the context of our developing relationship. With a political desire for voice, we built a community that found meaning in the process of building something greater than ourselves, yet fundamentally immersed in our everyday lives.

Ka huliau, the turning point

I think he brought me into the garden from building E. We left the dark concrete hallway of a laboratory building that looked more like a factory than a school, and right at the edge of so much concrete, there was a path of grass and square stone tiles. There was an archway of liliko'i vines, heavy and chaotic that hid the rest of the garden until we ducked down to walk through. The contrast of the closed spaces and recycled air of the factory/classrooms did not prepare me for what was beyond the liliko'i arch. We stepped out into red dirt rows of sugar cane and heather, cabbage, olena (turmeric), gourds for hula implements and a traditional Hawaiian hale, an outdoor, open air 'building' with a palm thatched roof, wooden posts and a shallow border wall to hold up the posts. I immediately got goose pimples, what we call chicken skin, up and down my arms. It was not because of the sheer beauty of this organic garden. I can honestly say this garden was very 'organic'. The different rows were in no apparent aesthetic order and the plants were in different degrees of growth, overgrowth and decay. The path of stones stopped at the liliko'i arch and I found myself walking through, over and around different plantings to get to the hale. But the spiritual magic of this place, as I found out that first day, was not in the sight of the garden area. It was in the electric humming of the air, the breath, the hat holds mana and promise. The rows had just been watered, so as we walked around puddles and low spots, the overwhelming scent of red dirt mixed with water brought me back in time to another garden, another spiritual magic place, a memory of people long gone. For a quick moment with the full force of the Ewa sun on my face and the



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kaiaulu winds coming in from Wai'anae, I was back in Maui, in my grandfather's garden surrounded by Lahaina red dirt, mango trees and Grandma humming in the pump shed where my sister/cousin Kaliko and I played store. Those three people are gone now. I helped to scatter their ashes in the ocean between Lahaina and Lana'i, but for that one second, they came to greet me at Kuahuokalā, the name of the hale that sits in the garden. I found the spiritual piko of this place and suddenly this job interview became real and this campus tour was really an invitation to come home again.

In the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, students find a room of requirement that morphs into anything that a person needs at the time. The process is simple but intentional. In order for the room to 'open', someone must walk past the area of the door three times while thinking of what he or she needs. This paper talks about the needing, or yearning, for a specific space to do specific work, as well as the effects of those ripples and large and small currents that continue to emanate from Kuahuokalā as both physical room of requirement and metaphoric space. We are organising this paper through an indigenous frame of telling a story, and we are using both the subheadings as well as 'ōlelo no'eau, ancient proverbs, as metaphoric ahu, or place markers, to guide the reader through both our process and our reflections on this process.

In addition, as a way to introduce ourselves as scholars who use our personal reflections to tell 'our' story, we do not identify the specific 'I', but instead use the pronoun 'I' to represent our collective 'we'. Our short biographical sketches below set the stage for who 'we' are in this 'place'.

Cathy Kanoelani Ikeda is an Assistant Professor, a kanaka maoli, native Hawaiian, and a child of this land. I am a descendent of generations of Hawaiians and Japanese from Puna Hawai'i, Pūkoʻo Molokaʻi, Lahaina, Maui, Mānoa, Oʻahu, Waiākea, Hawaiʻi. The bones of my ancestors' ashes swim in the Lahaina Roads within the 'Au'Au Channel between Maui and Lana'i. My ancestors continue to guide me in my work as I try to nurture Hawaiian culture based educators who will teach my grandchildren that follow me.

Stephanie Kamai is an Associate Specialist in the Division of Education. My current position is the culmination of 22 years with the Hawai'i State Department of Education. My emphasis is on nurturing partnerships and being mindful of the common goals that bring people together. I teach the student teaching seminar, supervise teacher candidates as they work towards completing the requirements in their field experience and serve as liaison in the larger context of the education community. Education is dynamic, thereby fostering my interest, curiosity and hard work, which keeps me humble.

Michael Hayes is a Professor in the Division of Education. My journey through the space of higher education has taken me through a range of geophysical terrain; the rugged mountains on the western edge of the rocky mountains, the islands of Hawai'i, the seemingly endless rolling wheat fields of the Eastern Washington Palouse and back to the comfort of the Pacific Ocean. These are more than physical places and represent phases of consciousness. In the fields of soft-white wheat destined for a market in China, my work was focused on globalisation, education and global citizenship; in Hawai'i it has shifted to be more concerned with the work of community in specific places. The places in which I have dwelled have had a profound effect on how I view and move through the world.

Ho'okahua, to lay a foundation

In our following discussion we illuminate the work of our learning community. Most important to this work has been a reflective practice where we have developed a set of ideas, concepts and philosophies that define who we are and how we work together. It is not about what we have done or what we have achieved but who we have become.

Often in higher education, especially in departments and divisions that address teacher preparation, the discourse and the expectations are driven by external standards imposed by accrediting agencies, whether they be at the state or national level. The conceptions of education, then, are more focused on meeting the standard, completing the task and determining accountability. As a spatial convention these are external to and other than the educational endeavour and must be imposed from the outside (Prakash and Esteva 2005).

Our theoretical frame and our practice is Kuahuokalā. Kuahuokalā is both symbol and practice, metaphor and physical space; it frames the nature of our practice and foments our intellectual endeavours. The transformation of our original learning community was a function of this space and place. In an indigenous and Native Hawaiian framework, we do not separate theory from practice, or a method of inquiry from our overarching perspective. Rather than submitting to the intellectual demands of western and modernist methods for viewing the world, we ground and build our perspectives and our practices from within Kuahuokalā.

Kuahuokalā is a traditionally built Hawaiian open-walled hale created with rocks from the area, wooden posts from the forest above the campus and a fan palm roof gathered from the garden and nearby groves. Approaching the space from the ground, Kuahuokalā is virtually hidden from sight, which adds to its mythical quality. It seems to transcend space and time as it is close to the intersection of modern concrete and glass buildings, but it feels very far away. Because of that isolation, there is no noise but the makani, the wind.

Kuahu means altar and o ka lā means of the sun, which makes the alignment of the building to the sun path during the summer solstice both purposeful and sacred. This name brings forward ancient Hawaiian ways of knowing, the alignment of altars and temples placed strategically to track the sun as we metaphorically track our own sun, our own enlightenment. The name gives this space purpose—the sanctuary for enlightenment.

As a traditional, Native Hawaiian space situated within the plant of a modern university, the hale clearly carves out a space that is quite different, even troubling, for the modernist spaces of the contemporary university. Yet, because it occupies a space at the heart of our university, it is not separate from or other than the university but liminal to it (Land, Ray, and Vivian, 2014). As a liminal space Kuahuokalā functions to uneasily transform both Native Hawaiian and western intellectual traditions and practices. It is also a third space (Anzaldua, 1987; Bhabha, 2012; Irving and Young, 2002). The hale as a third or borderland space marks a place where we can articulate and live cultural experiences involving self and other; a space that is comprised of both inner and outer realities; the both/and of an inter-subjective experience (Ikeda, 2018). Through Kuahuokalā we work within, through and across multiple practices and epistemological traditions. It is, at times, an uneasy and illusive tension that generates new perspectives and identities. We embrace these tensions as we lash together Native Hawaiian and western intellectual traditions throughout our analysis and discussion.

Kuahuokalā reframes and nurtures our work, our relationships and our purpose. As a space the hale infiltrates our minds, hearts and spirits through a reciprocal reimagining (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991). The hale constructs us as much as we construct it. We need not be in its physical presence to be in the space of Kuahuokalā. We find evidence of the hale throughout our thinking, ideas and imaginings.

Nā pou kihi, the corner posts

Our professional learning community (PLC) has been nothing if not a pathway of surprises. As colleagues we did not come together initially in an effort to form a learning community but to participate in an institute led by ETS (Educational Testing Services) on the PPAT (Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers). Our attendance was for the purpose of bringing a better understanding of the assessment back to our division. What happened is that a conversation unexpectedly burst out of the mono-cropped wheat field of the institute's agenda. What emerged was a relationship predicated on the sharing of knowledge and understanding and particular way of conducting business and a desire to keep that relationship intact upon our return.

Our PLC was formed as an open invitation to continue the conversations we had begun at ETS. All faculty members in our division were invited to the hale to have a conversation around preparing for the PPAT, but on the first meeting, what we started to talk about first was what we valued as teachers and what kinds of teachers we wanted to nurture at UHWO. At the end of the first PLC, we realised that we had just started the conversation. We sustained our interest and motivation in these monthly activities despite competing demands on our time and challenges in scheduling because we were hungry for this type of open conversation. There was no compensation for the time we spent in the PLC, but we were invested and willing to see where the conversations would lead us. We hoped that the PLC could replace the division meetings since the division meetings provided no opportunity to discuss in any meaningful way how to really and truly prepare our students to be teachers. What came out of this year long work instead was a written paper that defined values that we wanted our student teachers to possess as well as how these values could also become our professional dispositions. For us and for our students, there is now consistency and transparency in the values that guide our teaching, and how these expectations are communicated. Being a part of the PLC also helped us live into what we have wanted our students to think about and bring into their own teaching practices, thereby learning becomes a normal part of working through practice. It is not banking education where information is deposited into the empty, waiting minds of our students (Friere, 2000). Instead, education becomes an emergent social activity, always intentional but never predefined. As Boud states, "Practices are also emergent in the sense that the ways that they change are not fully specifiable in advance" (Boud and Hager 2012, 17).

Ka pouhana, the centre post

What have we learned and what has held firm in this year of PLC conversations? In Kuahuokalā our work together emerged from the interior of the space refusing the status quo, and engaging with a deeper communal understanding of what education can be and how it can be accomplished. The expressions generated through our work in Kuahuokalā speak to a much deeper and more profound conception of education and how faculty work together to make a difference in their institution. These expressions of our work together also illustrates how profoundly the spaces of educational practice act as limit boundaries or as possibility. The eight expressions that emerged from our reflective conversations are described below and are preceded by an 'ōlelo no'eau that acts as both metaphor and marker for our thoughts. 'Ōlelo No'eau are proverbs that have guided Native Hawaiians for generations, as they offer guidance for living a life of balance with each other and with the land. In the following discussion they serve as the opening point and thematic organisation of each of our expressions. The reader is asked to consider the poetic meaning of each 'ōlelo no'eau as it deepens and guides each expression. The 'ōlelo no'eau are followed by the proverb number rather than the page number as each proverb is alphabetised by the proverb in Hawaiian then translated into English. Any additional annotations are contributed by Mary Kawena Puku'i who collected, translated and annotated all of the proverbs.

Commitment

He 'ike 'ana ia i ka pono. It is a recognising of the right thing. (620)

Kuahuokalā is a sign of commitment. Kuahuokalā is a steadfast structure on the landscape and always available, always present and accepting. Commitment is a state of being where opinions are sacred, mutually beneficial, where needs and motives are different and the diversity of voices are valued. Commitment starts with an investment to self and to others and the possibility of what could be if trust in individual and collective strength were a core value (Kamai, 2015). This idea rises above the notion that working in solitude alone produces results and recognises that when we connect a kind of bond happens. I recently returned from presenting at a conference at a university in Oregon. The student-organised Pacific Islander Indigeneity & Education Conference grows from the college students' commitment to their own personal historical and contemporary issues within Oceania and at the same time opens the way for others to be allies. The students have established a space where the conversations and perhaps healing, along with a better understanding of who they are and where they are from, can take place. Commitment, then, is to each other, even those who are in a state of uncomfortability. Therefore, resources are committed to values such as respect, reciprocity and hope in the end result.

Food feeding and spirituality

Le'ale'a ka 'ōlelo i ka pohu aku o loko. Conversation is pleasant when the inside is calm. Talk is pleasant when hunger is satisfied. (1967)

In Kuahuokalā the body, the mind and spirit is nourished. In Hawaiian, to feed, to nourish is hō'ai. Hōis the causation for the base, in simplest terms it means 'to' do something (the base). 'ai has multiple meanings, but in this case, it is food, so 'to food', becomes the act of feeding. Part of growing up in Hawai'i is to understand the importance of food and the kuleana, obligation, to feed. My grandmother, a kanaka maoli woman, welcomed visitors and family into her house through the kitchen. No matter what time it was, everyone was invited to eat. Her common phrase was "Hui, hele mai 'ai", or "yoohoo, come and eat". By planning our PLCs with the intention that we also share food together, we intentionally choose to offer a different kind of sustenance as a way to feed each other spiritually, physically and emotionally. Sometimes within the PLC, we have not been able to meet in Kuahuokalā because of rain coming in or the heat being oppressive. In those times, although we went into the building and met in the lounge, we still brought our food along so we could share with each other. Feeding, as a Native Hawaiian cultural value, is inherently a political act of refusal taking place within a Western institution. Noted Hawaiian culture historian Mary Kawena Puku'i, in Nānā i Ke Kumu: Look to the Source, Volume II, talks about the idea of "first the snacks, then the schooling". (Puku'i, Haertig, and Lee 1972, 68) She relays the importance for our tutors, teachers and educational aids working in the Western institution we call public schooling to understand the importance of snacks and treats in teaching local children. In our PLC, the food became our lineal connection to the physical space as well as to each other.

Building of community

Ho'okāhi ka 'ilau like ana. Wield the paddles together. Work together. (1068)

Physically building Kuahuokalā required a community of volunteers who devoted their time and energy over a period of three months to erect the structure. In teaching my grandchildren to help with household duties, we model the value of laulima and kuleana. Laulima means to work together to accomplish something and kuleana is one's responsibility. Yet there are deeper meanings. Besides the obvious electrical impulses that are needed, what keeps our heart pumping? In the case of teaching my grandchildren, my heart beats through the joy that I find in the relational practices we engage in. The laughter and the tears bring joy. The other day I laughed so hard I cried, which caused my granddaughter to become concerned about my tears. It was pure joy and I hope she will come to understand how that was so. My heart beats. As a function of laulima and kuleana, building or working in community is only possible through the acceptance of our privilege to serve others and a commitment to each other. This is not a static place at which we arrive; community is not a thing but a continuous, flexible and emergent process of becoming.

Indeterminacy and flexibility

Aia no i ke kō a ke au. Whichever way the current goes. Time will tell. (69)

The building techniques of lashing, dry stack wall building and using whole-plant materials gives Kuahuokalā the flexibility to be resilient in the face of natural forces. The structure has an indeterminacy as damaged, worn-out or missing materials are easily replaced over time. The hale's structure is more like a natural organism, than a man-made architectural form, as it is built to respond to its surrounding environment. Like all structures the hale is built to generate a particular kind of relationship between the human participants, as well as between the participants and the materials and structure of the hale and its surroundings. Unlike a factory, hospital, university or office building, which are intended to have a specific effect on human relationships (e.g., hierarchical student/teacher relationship of the university), the effect of the hale on human relationships is emergent, flexible and indeterminate. The hale does not impose effects but is the material and conceptual condition of relationships, memory and consciousness.

Our learning community has been formed around principles of suppleness, indeterminacy and malleability. Like the lashing cord, the pohaku (stones) or la'au (plant materials) that are organised into the form of a hale, our conversations have lashed together a set of ideas, concepts, practices and people into a relationship. We have an intention to make our teacher preparation programme better for our students and for ourselves. But we do not push for a set of results to which we can be held accountable. Instead, the ideas, concepts, practices and relationships we have addressed have emerged from and been sculpted by a series of intentional conversations that are purposeful but without assurances. We have been making the path by walking.

Kuahuokalā folds an intentionality to our work. It does not define, direct or even specifically impact our work. The hale is just another participant in our learning community adding its own mana, its own 'ike and its own presence to the work.

Conversation

Hili hewa ka mana'o ke 'ole ke kūkākūkā. Ideas *run wild without discussion*. Discussion brings ideas together into a plan. (993)

Kuahuokalā does not stand in opposition to the natural landscape, it exists in a deep and abiding conversation with it. The campus is constructed of new grey compressed concrete blocks. They are modern buildings that intentionally harken back to the days of the sugarcane plantation on Oʻahu. The university is, in fact, modelled on the architectural styling of the sugarcane factory. The legacy of an industrial domination over and exploitation of the landscape is visible in the physical structure of the university. This is a kind of cultural, epistemological and conceptual domination that is at the heart of western universitys. Our university is simply a very visible continuation of that legacy. When the hale and mala open to view from between two buildings it is almost like meeting an old friend: it is comforting, inviting and engaging. Rather than dominating the surroundings, it is in conversation with them.

Conversation is a form of communication in which the relationship is the key element. Conversation in this sense is different than discussion which has a focused outcome and a purpose. Conversation treats its content as a meeting place rather than as the locus of control, that which places conversation at the centre of human existence. It is not simply a matter of humans interacting and communicating, it is, in fact, their efforts to construct a form of community with shared interests, and desires (Burbules, 1993). Conversation is less about the direct communication of ideas and information between people and is more a form of poetry that "... is a sort of truancy, a dream within the dream of life, a wild flower planted among our wheat" (Oakeshott, 1960, 110). Conversation moves participants outside the predictable and controllable world of concrete experience and enters them into an imaginative and playful terrain that is generative without being directed. The unpredictable twists and turns of conversation create a pathway of surprises. One never truly knows the direction of a conversation as it constantly diverges and explores unknown paths. If there is any direct intention or outcomes of conversation it is the formulation of a relationship.

Kuahuokalā is the memory keeper, the consciousness of our conversation. We always return to the space of the hale for the unfolding of our conversation, whether it takes place in the material space of the hale or as a kind of metaphorical foundation that animates and gives energy to the conversation. Just as any other structure (natural or manmade), Kuahuokalā is a repository of evocative memories, images and emotions.

Letting go of ego

E noho iho i ke ōpū weuweu, mai hoʻokiʻekiʻe. *Remain among the clumps of grasses and do not elevate yourself.* Do not put on airs, show off, or assume an attitude of superiority. (361)

Kuahuokalā is a humble structure, palm leaves, natural 'ōhi'a wood posts, local pōhaku, rocks, erect an unassuming and welcoming space. The structure makes no demands yet does not submit. The hale

blends into the natural environment rather than dominating it. Like the humble structure, conversations in the hale mirror the humble surroundings. For our group, humility was about listening and being open to hearing and learning. In the magic space of the hale, cultural humility could occur only when we let go of ego. Hook et al. (2013) define cultural humility as the "ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person]" (354). Three factors of cultural humility and letting go of ego guided our discussions: commitment to self evaluation and self critique, desire to fix power imbalances, and an open invitation to partner with people and groups who advocate for others (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998). A delicate and delicious affair happens when the balance between teaching and learning unite. A partnership based on mutual respect and understanding develops when teacher, as learner, and learner, as teacher, undergo a transformation of our assumed roles through cultural humility and letting go of ego.

No hierarchical structure-shared governance

'Ike aku, 'ike mai, kōkua aku, kōkua mai; pela iho la ka nohona 'ohana. Recognise and be recognised, help and be helped; such is family life. (1200)

Kuahuokalā exists only as a partnership of its various materials. Each item in the structure has its own purpose and responsibility. Each post is named to delineate its kuleana, not to accentuate its importance over any of the other materials. Recent research and theory on organisational structures and action focus on the self-organised dimensions of an organisation (Imada, 2008). We think of our PLC in a similar fashion. There are three of us that organised the original group, but it has since been open to anyone in the division. Decisions of what to talk about or what to focus on are the function of a conversation moving in a particular direction rather than someone wanting to complete a particular task. The people, the conversations, ideas and activities, the hale emerges together with each imparting its own energy to the process and the outcome; one is not more important or exerts more of an influence than another.

We do not ignore the fact that the dynamics of certain kinds of power potentially infect the space. There are power dynamics of race, gender and those related to an indigenous and western epistemology. We keep these dynamics of power as a part of our conversation and our work. However, the intention is to generate an equitable space; it is our intentionality and the intentionality of Kuahuokalā that our group emerges from our own self-organised system where each component shares a particular energy to the dynamics of the group.

Trust the process

He 'ike 'ana ia i ka pono. It is a recognising of the right thing. One has seen the right thing to do and has done it. (620)

In pre-missionary Hawai'i, within 24 hours of the first born child's birth, the family held a 'aha'aina māwaewae or clearing the path feast for this child (Puku'i, 1983). The feast was a way to spiritually clear the path for this child so that no obstructions might hinder the oldest child and the children to follow. This feast ritually started the child on the ma'awe pono, right track of honor and responsibility (19). Trusting the process in this situation as we nurture this PLC for the first time also has to do with clearing a path free of outside obstructions and barriers that may impede forward movement. Kuahuokalā is the rational and spiritual organisation of the materials. It is a cleared path that the participants are compelled to trust. Once the obstructions are cleared (acknowledging need, carving out space, inviting inclusivity, letting go of ego, etc.), the process for conversation and dialogue on this path itself must be righteous.

These expressions, na mea waiwai, that came out of the professional learning community thrust us forward to a place that sets a stronger foundation where meaning and common understanding among colleagues, students and stakeholders is possible.

Puka, to rise

Past experiences and understandings about professional learning communities tell us that a professional learning community is a systematic, collaborative way for educators to affect the practices of schooling. Similarly, faculty learning communities may offer faculty who feel marginalised to have a voice and where faculty may feel that they do not have a sophisticated vocabulary and understanding but can still contribute (Daly, 2011). Our professional learning community helped to destabilise hierarchical frameworks in a place in our teacher preparation programme, where we gained a more vibrant sense of our professional identity and legitimacy (Teagarden, 2017) that eschewed scholarly work beyond the status quo. This journey was a sort of 'slow agency' (Micciche, 2011) response to the usual chore of ticking off a to-do list with rapid speed, and it quickly became a respite for shared experiences. Rather than a feeling of marginalisation, we remained still and confident that the group was moving in the direction it was meant to go.

In this paper we discussed the way in which we used the professional learning community as a strategy to address a need we had for equity in conversations, discussions and decision-making processes. With a political desire for voice we built a community that found meaning in the process of building something greater than ourselves.

Throughout our discussion we have presented a set of of experiences that occurred in the past; it is something we 'did'. However, through a Native Hawaiian epistemology the past is firmly in front of us while the future follows behind us. In the Hawaiian language, the word for future is ka wā mahope. The word ka wā means the time of. Mahope is a directional that means behind. Therefore, in Hawaiian thinking, and in opposition to western thought, the future is behind us. Our past is ka wā mamua or the time that is ahead, in front. We have worked to create a story of who we are and who we have become because of a set of relationships that were developed in a particular place. In a Native Hawaiian tradition the stories or mo'olelo, while created at a particular time in history, are for the purpose of guiding future generations into a pono or balanced relationship to the land and to others. Just as traditional mo'olelo gives guidance to the past, present and future, our story is intended to do similar work.

In the western philosophical tradition this might be considered a teleiopoiesis. For Gaytry Spivak, teleiopoiesis is "a constant and risk-taking venture to affect the distant in a poiesis of imaginative remaking, without guarantees" (2010, 14). By imaginative remaking Spivak is not suggesting we create images in our head of what a distant future might look like, instead, she is arguing that the work we are conducting now is the practice of effecting a time that is not yet. We are already 'friends' or 'allies' who provide support and guidance with those conducting like-minded work in the future. We hope that by sharing our collective imagination of Kuahuokalā, we strengthen our present work, honour the work that has gone before us and prepare for the work that must continue.

Ours is one story in a lineage of stories, and our present work is one moment in a historical flow of ideas and practices in which Kuahuokalā is our consciousness, guide, our ka pouhana, our centre post that stabilises the structure of our work. It is a constant moving backward and forward in time, inside and outside of space. Our work continues, without assurances, but always with an intentionality to keep our stories and practices alive and meaningful for the field of education.

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