

MĀ‘AWE PONO

A HAWAIIAN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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PART 3:

The Eight Phases of *Mā‘awe Pono*

Mā‘awe Pono is made up of eight phases designed to follow one another in consecutive order. These phases, which can differ significantly in length, are designed to guide the primary researcher and the various groups of co-researchers through the research process. As with all aspects of *Mā‘awe Pono*, each of the eight phases is grounded in the wisdom of our Hawaiian ancestors as expressed in our proverbs. While the primary researcher is involved in and responsible for all eight phases, the co-researchers and the community are primarily engaged during the second, third, seventh, and eighth phases of the research.

The eight phases of *Mā‘awe Pono* include:

1. ***‘Imi Na‘auao***—Search for Wisdom
2. ***Ho‘oliuliu***—Preparation of Project
3. ***Hailona***—Pilot Testing through Action Research Project
4. ***Ho‘olu‘u***—Immersion
5. ***Ho‘omōhala***—Incubation
6. ***Ha‘iloa‘a***—Articulation of Solution(s)
7. ***Hō‘ike***—Demonstration of Knowledge
8. ***Kūkulu Kumuhana***—Pooling of Strengths

Phase 1: *‘Imi Na‘auao*

The first phase of *Mā‘awe Pono* takes its name from the traditional Hawaiian way of discovery and problem solving, called *‘imi na‘auao*, which literally means “to seek wisdom,” or “seeking an enlightened gut.” The directive to *‘imi na‘auao* and find enlightenment and initiate positive changes has been passed down to us in various proverbs including, “*Lawe i ka ma‘alea a kū‘ono‘ono*. Take wisdom and make it deep” (Pukui 1983, 211).

During the *‘Imi Na‘auao* phase the primary researcher conducts a preliminary assessment, which begins with identifying an obvious issue in the community that is aligned with personal interests and passions. This issue must be relevant and real. The identified need is then carefully analyzed and narrowed down or focused according to severity, urgency, community buy-in, and timing. Acting when the opportunity presents itself is a very Hawaiian way, since we always want to assure the community that the task is performed under optimal conditions. This preference is captured in, “*E kanu i ka huli ‘oi hā‘ule ka ua*. Plant the taro stalk while there is rain. Do your work when opportunity affords” (Pukui 1983, 39). In other words, if the researcher perceives that it is not a good time to pursue a specific research topic, *Mā‘awe Pono* suggests that she select another. Once the phenomenon has been narrowed down, a specific research goal and research question are formulated that will directly impact the researcher’s community. This is followed by an informal inquiry assessing the rationale, practicality, and feasibility of the study. The *‘Imi Na‘auao* phase concludes when the researcher determines that the problem is relevant and that there are sufficient resources to conduct the research and solve the problem.

Phase 2: *Ho'oliuli*

The *Ho'oliuli* phase is known as the preparation phase, where the researcher explores what is already known about the phenomenon, brainstorms possible solutions with various stakeholders, and begins to develop a clear plan of action to tackle the problem. This phase also includes mapping out the research design, strategies, and components, and identifying the specific resources needed to execute the research plan. Our ancestors placed a high value on being prepared, as the following proverb verifies: “‘*A ohe ‘ulu e loa’a i ka pōkole o ka lou*. No breadfruit can be reached when the picking stick is too short” (Pukui 1983, 25). This proverb reminds us that there is no success without preparation. During the *Ho'oliuli* phase, the researcher prepares for the process ahead by visualizing the big picture that will be affected by the research, determining both the large scale and long-lasting impacts, as well as the direct and immediate benefits. However, instead of merely developing a hypothesis, the researcher develops an actual solution with a concrete plan of action. This solution is tested via a short-term action research project, which is planned and designed during the *Ho'oliuli* phase.

The *Ho'oliuli* phase is also the time for the primary researcher to select the various co-researchers and identify the roles of both. Another vital aspect of this phase is establishing and/or solidifying personal relations between the primary researcher, the various co-researchers, and the impacted community. Making time and effort to establish amicable, familial relations among all research participants is crucial, because a lack of trust can tremendously limit the outcome of the research. Indeed cultivating strong, trusting relationships between the primary researcher, co-researchers, and the community is vital in achieving success.

Phase 3: *Hailona*

The third phase of *Mā'awe Pono*, called *Hailona*, which means “to test,” refers to an actual testing of the hypothesis through short-term action research. During this phase, the primary researcher is responsible for setting up and implementing an authentic, community-based action research project involving multiple co-researchers. This action research project should be designed to test a potential answer to the identified problem using a trial-and error method strategy. Specifically, the action research project should test the general validity of the hypothesis on a small scale by gathering and analyzing quantitative and/or qualitative data using culturally congruent methods. The data can range from quantitative data like statistics or survey data, to qualitative data like salient threads from discussion groups, information gathered through talk-story sessions with experts, or standardized, open-ended e-interviews involving various co-researchers. In addition to providing data to answer the research question, the action research project should also have some immediate positive impact and initiate some measurable positive outcomes for a specific community. At the same time, the lessons learned should be expandable and be able to address the needs of Hawai'i's native people and/or our land as a whole.

Phase 4: *Ho'olu'u*

The *Ho'olu'u* phase is a time for the primary researcher to immerse and submerge herself in the phenomenon practically day and night, to the point where pretty much everything in life becomes crystallized around the question. During this phase, the researcher looks at and analyzes all of the data gathered in the *Hailona* phase, searching for common themes and salient threads. If necessary, this is also the time to seek additional, external input from elders and/or experts, or via a review of additional literature, in an effort to gain more understanding of the phenomenon.

It is during this phase that the researcher begins to live the question in waking, sleeping, and dream states. Learning in and from dreams is a way of gathering data highly valued by our ancestors. In fact, a common

question, posed by Hawaiian language speakers was, “*He aha ka puana o ka moe?* What is the answer to the dream? What will the result of this be?” (Pukui 1983, 61). The value of dream learning has always been understood by Hawaiians as a resource to tap into insights hidden deep within us, as the following proverb indicates: “*Ka pō nui ho‘olokolako, ke ao nui ho‘ohemahema.* The great night that provides, the great day that neglects. The gods supply, but man does not always accept with appreciation. Guidance is given in dreams that man often misunderstands and neglects” (Pukui 1983, 166).

During the *Ho‘olu‘u* phase the researcher spends countless hours in self-reflection and self-dialogue in quiet periods. Clark Moustakas believes that by engaging in ongoing self-searching and self-discovery, the researcher creates an environment that allows the research question and the methodology to flow from inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration (1990, 11). As the researcher contemplates the phenomenon, she allows specific notions to awaken into consciousness from deep within the *na‘au*. *Na‘au* in Hawaiian literally means gut. It is that which connects us with the tacit *‘ike* (knowledge base) of our ancestors. This *na‘au*, when calibrated correctly according to the standards of our ancestors, becomes a powerful gauge to measure what is *pono*, or righteous, and what is not. In fact, using our *na‘au* to find solutions has always been a very Hawaiian technique. The *Ho‘olu‘u* phase comes to an end when the researcher, after intense and extensive contemplation and deliberation, formulates a conclusion.

Phase 5: *Ho‘omōhala*

The *Ho‘omōhala* phase is a period of incubation, where the researcher temporarily steps away from the issue. During this period, the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question and allows the inner workings of the tacit knowledge and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside immediate awareness (Moustakas 1990, 29). This concept has also been used by great thinkers like Paulo Freire. After finishing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a project he had immersed himself in day and night, Freire was advised by a friend to lock away his work and “let it ‘marinate’ for three months, four months, in a drawer” (Freire 1994, 48). When re-reading it a few months later, Freire discovered that his book needed one more chapter in order to be complete. During this phase, the primary researcher avoids all conscious thinking or conversation about the research question or any of the solutions. As the researcher distances herself from the phenomenon, allowing the knowledge and insights accumulated through various aspects of the research to marinate for a while, organic, unconscious growth and development occur, intuitions surface, discoveries and illuminations happen, awakened out of obscurity and the supernatural darkness, called *pō* (night), which is the realm of the gods.

Indeed, the researcher has reached the final stage of the *Ho‘omōhala* phase when insights awaken into consciousness that may have always existed and are certainly logical. Yet it took extensive reflection and inner growth for these revelations to become apparent enough to be articulated in words. Depending on multiple variables, arriving at this point may happen relatively quickly, or it may take many years for illumination to occur.

Phase 6: *Ha‘iloa‘a*

The sixth phase of *Mā‘awe Pono* is called *Ha‘iloa‘a*, which literally means, “say what has been gotten.” This phase encourages the researcher to undertake a thorough analysis of the various data, insights, and revelations accumulated during the previous phases and articulate her findings. Specifically, this phase triangulates the data procured as part of the research, and officially synthesizes the various aspects of the project. If necessary, this phase also allows the researcher to re-examine areas that are not yet clearly understood. In the end, the *Ha‘iloa‘a* phase should produce a clearly articulated solution to the problem, based on insights gained by the researcher as a result of the research. In addition, the *Ha‘iloa‘a* phase should finalize a viable action plan with short-term and long-term impacts, designed to bring about the desired results.

Phase 7: *Hō'ike*

The seventh phase of the *Mā'awe Pono* process is called the *Hō'ike*, which means “to exhibit,” where the primary researcher and her team present the cumulative findings of the research to one or more authentic audiences. *Hō'ike* is a traditional Hawaiian form of assessment that has been used by our ancestors since the beginning of time. This performance-based assessment can take numerous forms and involve multiple audiences. For example, it can consist of a simple, oral and/or audiovisual presentation of the outcome of the research and the solution to the problem. Or, it can be a creative synthesis of the research presented to the community with whom the research was conducted in diverse forms, ranging from a story map to a *hula* (dance) drama. In addition, the researcher may also prepare other theoretical or creative contributions to scholarship to external audiences, including academia, funders, and planners. While such sharing is important, *Mā'awe Pono* purports that the affected community must always be the first and foremost audience to be informed about the research outcomes in a form that is understandable to that community.

Phase 8: *Kūkulu Kumuhana*

The final phase of *Mā'awe Pono* is called *Kūkulu Kumuhana*, which means the pooling of strengths for a common purpose. The *Kūkulu Kumuhana* phase focuses specifically on growing the bigger picture and creating a comprehensive depiction of the core or dominant themes that drive our quest for systemic change. During this phase, which is usually absent in Western research paradigms, the primary researcher actively seeks approval and buy-in from the community in question, to implement the solution(s) presented in the research *Hō'ike*. Once this implementation takes place, the current research cycle has officially ended and a new research cycle is about to start, which is a typical phenomenon of participatory action research. Moreover, as each cycle is a scale-up from the previous action research project, there is ongoing growth as solutions are implemented, their impact measured, and new answers pursued.

As an Indigenous research methodology *Mā'awe Pono* is designed to provide answers to pertinent questions and solve specific problems, making a real difference in Hawaiian communities, preferably both short term and long term. Such impact can only be achieved when the research is organized and well arranged, following a specific plan, with specific rules and assumptions based on long-standing premises. *Mā'awe Pono*'s eight-phase process constitutes such a plan.