

Politics and knowledge: Kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori

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Abstract

In the past two decades, the terms 'kaupapa Māori' and 'mātauranga Māori' have come to prominence in Māori education and research circles. They appear in a wide variety of contexts to articulate and advance certain aspects of Māori education and development. The two terms are generally utilised to support activities designed to generate benefits for Māori and to give expression to Māori ways of doing things, aspects of Māori knowledge and the Māori world view. Interestingly, there are a number of perspectives on the two terms and whilst meanings for both overlap, they are not synonymous. In this article, I present my view of the meaning of kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori. My background is as a researcher of mātauranga Māori, hence my views are presented from this perspective.

Keywords: mātauranga Māori; kaupapa Māori; tikanga Māori.

Kaupapa Māori

'Kaupapa Māori' is used popularly by Māori in a fairly broad way to refer to any particular plan of action created by Māori, expressing Māori aspirations and certain Māori values and principles. There might be a range of purposes for the action taking. However, it is generally held that the design of the proposed action is created by Māori, reflecting Māori aspirations, ideals, values and perspectives.

Kaupapa Māori anticipates 'tikanga Māori'. Tikanga Māori are distinctive Māori ways of doing things and cultural behaviours through which kaupapa Māori are expressed and made tangible. This usage of the phrase kaupapa Māori appears in education settings (Kura Kaupapa Māori are a good example), amongst health providers, on marae and elsewhere, to refer generally to a foundation of understanding and knowledge created by Māori and expressing Māori aspirations, values and principles.

The above meaning for kaupapa Māori has been popular since the 19th century primarily as a way of distinguishing Māori values, principles and plans for action from those held by non-Māori. Kaupapa Māori has been used by Māori to mean either:

- values and plans of action decided *by Māori* (emphasis upon who decides what the values and action plans should be)

or

- values and action plans which express a set of deeper cultural values and world view (emphasis upon the values and action plans suggested by traditional knowledge – mātauranga Māori).

On many occasions kaupapa Māori is deployed to advance both ideas. This situation continues today where, in some settings, kaupapa Māori is used as a political tool by Māori to make space for activities and enterprises initiated and controlled by Māori. Similarly, kaupapa Māori is also used to refer to values and principles emerging from within 'mātauranga Māori'. These two themes are coming to a new articulation in contemporary thinking.

The first meaning (above) of the term was expressed most clearly in the universities during the early 1990s, when kaupapa Māori was deliberately evoked as a 'strategy', or 'a plan of action' to 'make space' for Māori people, culture, knowledge and values in the academy. A key aspect of kaupapa Māori in this setting is the political notion of challenging the privileging of Western knowledge in the academy. Its purpose is to allow Māori knowledge, culture and experience to 'find voice' in the academy and to validate its use there. Critically, in such a context, kaupapa Māori is also about transformation. It is concerned with Māori peoples – individuals and communities – achieving cultural, education and social liberation very much in the mode envisaged by the Brazilian education theorist Paulo Freire.

In the university-based approach, kaupapa Māori methodologies are sequences of knowledge-creating actions, and practices of knowledge inquiry which give expression to transformative ideals. The goal of kaupapa Māori methodologies is the creation of knowledge, which enables the envisaged transformation and liberation to take place. A good deal of kaupapa Māori theory is focused upon, and inspired by, the contemporary experience of Māori people. This includes experiences of colonisation, urbanisation, and deculturation. Kaupapa Māori is concerned with overcoming negative statistics and factors of Māori educational underachievement, poor health status and more, through research and theory making.

Some notes on 'Māori'

Before exploring the terms 'kaupapa Māori' and 'mātauranga Māori' further, I want to highlight the historical diversity of meaning that can be found for the word 'Māori'. Today, almost universally, Māori is used as an ethnic and cultural label, hence, the Māori people, Māori culture, and so on. However, in history there were other meanings available for this word.

An alternative meaning of 'māori' is 'natural' such as in waimāori which is fresh water. In this sense, māori communicates ideas of clarity, transparency and cleansing. The word whakamāori means 'to make clear', and hence 'to explain'. It is possible that this sense of 'natural' is employed in *Te Paipera Tapu* (King James Bible) within the famous passage concerning Christ's walking upon water. The translation reads:

A i te wha o nga mataaratanga o te po ka haere a Ihu ki a ratou, i haere *maori* i runga i te moana. (Matiu 14:25)

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. (Matthew 14:25)

This and other usages suggest the mystical aspects of the word *māori*. The term *mātauranga Māori* arose contiguous with the arrival of the biblical world view in Māori communities of the 19th century. In the *Bible*, *atua māori* are pre-Christian deities and *tohunga māori* are magicians, wizards and adepts of pre-Jehovah gods. It is for this reason that, at times, historically, *mātauranga māori* referred to knowledge arising from *atua māori* or non-Christian gods, which was the preserve of *tohunga māori*, the non-Christian priests. In this sense, *māori* communicates something mysterious, mystical and non-Christian.

An additional meaning is provided by Hoani Nahe of Ngāti Maru (1894, pp. 27–35), who argues that the concept of ‘*tangata māori*’ did not arise through encounter with the European, but rather through the encounter between people of Hawaiki and the *patupaiarehe* people who were already living on these islands.

Nō reira i tino mōhiotia ai, ko ngā iwi atua nei ko Patupaiarehe, ehara i te tangata Māori. Nō reira mai rā anō ka takoto wehe mai ēnei ingoa iwi e rua, a Patupaiarehe me tangata Māori.

Hence it is known for certain that those seen are the *atua*, or spirit-like people, the Patupaearehe, &c., and not Tangata Maori, or people of the Maori race. From these circumstances have arisen the distinction of these two names of Patupaearehe [sic] and Tangata Maori.

Nahe quotes a saying in which the difference between *tangata Māori* and *patupaiarahe* is made clear:

E hara i te tangata Māori, he atua, he Patupaiarehe, Tūrehu, Kōrakorako.

They were not Tangata Maori, they were atuas, Patupaearehe (sic), Turehu, or Korakorako.

Finally, Nahe tells us that:

... he kupu tawhito tonu anō a ‘Māori’ nō mua noa atu i te Pākehā nei ...

... the word Maori is of ancient date, long before the time of the Pakehas ...

Thus, we see that in the one word, *māori*, a variety of meaning can be communicated, more diverse and richer than our contemporary use of Māori as an ethnic and cultural label alone. This point becomes salient in the discussion below.

Mātauranga Māori

Graham Hingangaroa Smith, the chief architect of kaupapa Māori theory, states that kaupapa Māori theory is not to be confused with mātauranga Māori. He writes:

... [kaupapa Māori] is not a study of Mātauranga Māori—Kaupapa Māori theory makes space for Māori to legitimately conduct their own studies of Mātauranga Māori in their own terms and own ways. In this sense Kaupapa Māori is not a synonym for mātauranga Māori which some people (who have obviously not read the existing literature or attended the Hui where this issue has been discussed) have mistakenly asserted. (Smith, 2003, p. 11)

The phrase mātauranga Māori does not refer explicitly to any particular kind of methodology or a set of explicit actions and goals, as is the case with kaupapa Māori theory. Rather, mātauranga Māori is a modern phrase used to refer to a body or a continuum of knowledge with Polynesian origins, which survives to the present day albeit in fragmentary form. Mātauranga Māori labels this body of knowledge. I use the following working definition:

“Mātauranga Māori” is a modern term for a body of knowledge that was brought to these islands by Polynesian ancestors of present-day Māori. Here this body of knowledge grew according to life in Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu. Despite an initial period of change and growth, the arrival of European populations in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries brought major impacts to the life of this knowledge, endangering it in many and substantial ways. All, however, was not lost as new knowledge was created through the encounter with the European and through the experience of the creation of the new nation called New Zealand. Important fragments and portions—notably the Māori language—remain today. These fragments and portions are catalysing a new creative period in Māori history and culture and in the life of the New Zealand nation. (Royal, 2009, p. 31)

A critical difference between kaupapa Māori approaches (within the university meanings cited above) and mātauranga Māori approaches is the absence of an explicit interest in the ethnic category ‘Māori’ in mātauranga Māori. As explained above, the term Māori in history was not always used to refer to Māori people, but rather to something that naturally and organically comes to life.

The phrase mātauranga Māori also does not suggest any actions in the way that kaupapa Māori suggests ‘plan of action’. Rev. Māori Marsden (2003) provides a definition of kaupapa as “ground rules, first principles, general principles” (p. 66). In the university-derived meaning, there is an explicit emphasis upon taking certain actions as this may contribute to transforming and liberating an ethnically constituted population entitled ‘Māori’.

Mātauranga Māori, on the other hand, is used merely to label a body of knowledge. It does not tell us what we might do with this body of knowledge, rather it ‘frames’

knowledge in certain ways. The term *mātauranga* itself has two meanings. First, in common parlance it is used broadly to mean ‘knowledge’, and we generally do not use it to mean particular types of knowledge. (Sometimes *mātauranga* on its own is used to mean ‘*mātauranga Māori*’.) Secondly, a less well known and historical meaning of the term *mātauranga* arises through its association with biblical knowledge. This meaning, not surprisingly, arose through translations of the Bible and was popularly used in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The introduction of the bible into Aotearoa also facilitated the introduction of literacy and ‘education’ into iwi communities. At various points in history, *mātauranga* has been associated with biblical knowledge, literacy and education often because these activities were and are deeply connected with one another.

Just as the word Māori has not always been used historically to mean an ethnic category, it cannot be assumed that *mātauranga Māori* has always been translated to mean knowledge created and maintained by an ethnic people called Māori. Indeed, this way of labelling the aboriginal inhabitants (for want of a better term) of New Zealand and their descendants is entirely modern, and even the way of thinking about the meaning of the word Māori is modern. So the ‘frame’ called ‘Māori’ which appears in the phrase *mātauranga Māori* does not always refer to an ethnic group.

Today, many also use the phrase *mātauranga Māori* to communicate something essential about the Māori world, something distinctive and valuable. However, the phrase itself does not suggest any particular action-taking. Action-taking in the *mātauranga Māori* tradition is expressed in ideas concerning the advancement of *mātauranga Māori*. Two foundational statements used by Te Whare Wānanga-o-Awanuiārangi and Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa are good examples of statements expressing aspirations and action taking related to *mātauranga Māori*. (Similar statements can be found elsewhere such as in *Te Aho Matua* of kura kaupapa Māori.) In 1981, the Raukawa Trustees established Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa to fulfil the following purpose:

for the advancement of knowledge and for the dissemination and maintenance of knowledge through teaching and research. (Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, 1999, n.p.)

Although the statement does not use the term ‘*mātauranga Māori*’, this is what is meant here. Later, Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa (2000, n.p.) adopted the following mission statement:

Kia rangatira te tū a Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa hei whare ako, whakatupu hoki i te *mātauranga*.

[The Vision of Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa is to be a greatly expert institution of learning that expands knowledge and disseminates knowledge through teaching and research.]

Again, *mātauranga Māori* is what is meant by *mātauranga* in this statement. The ‘Vision’ of Te Whare Wānanga-o-Awanuiārangi (2012) is as follows:

Rukuhia te *mātauranga* ki tōna hōhonutanga me tōna whānuitanga.

[Pursue knowledge to the greatest depths and its broadest horizons.]
(see www.wananga.ac.nz/about-us/Pages/Our%20Vision.aspx)

Both statements suggest taking actions to advance mātauranga Māori in various directions and in certain ways. Those wishing to advance mātauranga Māori in certain ways are not so conscious of the transformative and liberation goals set for kaupapa Māori. Of course, one could argue, as many do, that, in advancing mātauranga Māori, one is contributing to the transformative and liberation goals of kaupapa Māori, and indeed this would be true. However, we can note that those working in mātauranga Māori may not be as conscious of these goals as a person working in kaupapa Māori (according to the meaning discussed earlier). On the whole, those interested in advancing mātauranga Māori study the ways it explains aspects of existence including personal and collective identity. Thus, mātauranga Māori responds to the three great questions of life, namely:

- Who am I?
- What is this world that I exist in?
- What am I to do?

With respect to the first question, mātauranga Māori assists the person in their understanding of their (usually) iwi and ancestral origins, which has been a powerful and transformative theme of the Māori renaissance of recent decades.

With respect to the second question, today we are interested to explore ways in which mātauranga Māori explains and understands the world. This gives rise to the study of world view, and enables an examination of existing fragments of traditional knowledge on a variety of topics, such as:

- Te Tātai Arorangi (night sky)
- Te Waonui-a-Tāne (forest, birds)
- Te Tini-a-Tangaroa (sea, oceans, the biodiversity of the sea)
- Te Aitanga-a-Punga (amphibious creatures)
- Te Aitanga-a-Tūtewehiwehi (lizard-like creatures).

The creative third question (what am I to do?) leads the individual in a variety of directions as they search out and are guided by their life purpose. In the mātauranga Māori tradition, we find a range of knowledge applications which suggest how one might lead one's life, and what one might do with one's life:

- ngā tikanga o te marae (customs and practices of the marae)
- whakairo (carving)
- te whare pora ('house' of weaving)
- te whare tapere ('house' of entertainment)
- karanga (ritual calling upon the marae).

The list is by no means exhaustive. In recent times, researchers study ways in which mātauranga Māori has historically developed perspectives and explanations on aspects of existence on the phenomena of the world. What is the mātauranga Māori view, for example, of birds or trees or anger or love? Researchers have been interested in understanding the perspectives on aspects of life that can be found in mātauranga Māori. Further, we have been interested to understand: how did mātauranga Māori come to form these views?

This entails a study of mātauranga Māori approaches to the creation of knowledge, which ultimately leads to *wānanga*, a traditional term we can most closely associate with the creation of new knowledge. It is for this reason that I use the term *te wānanga i te mātauranga Māori* to communicate action taking leading to advancements in mātauranga Māori in various ways.

With respect to methodology within the mātauranga Māori tradition, I use the terms 'ngā tikanga, ngā whakahaere o te wānanga' or 'the practices and procedures of the wānanga' which ultimately lead to the creation of new knowledge. This traditional activity was the concern of the *whare wānanga* ('house' of wānanga) where students were initiated into areas of learning through various processes. The ultimate test of the student, however—a test by which a student distinguished themselves as a *tohunga* (master)—concerned the arrival of new knowledge in the mind of the student (see Marsden, 2003). It is when this takes place that the teachers and elders agree that a person has truly come into possession of the wānanga. This process of learning and then research entailed much rote learning, experiential learning and finally whakatiki (fasting) and nohopuku (meditation). There is much more to be said here.

Kaupapa Māori and mātauranga Māori

Of course, mātauranga Māori can never entirely divorce itself from the ongoing contemporary reality of the cultural paradigm called Māori, and it will have much to contribute to the transformative goals set for kaupapa Māori. Hence, the two domains called *kaupapa Māori* and *te wānanga i te mātauranga Māori* are not unrelated and each will have much to gain from the other. I also see these activities as the natural successors to 'Māori Studies' which, as a discipline, is not necessarily focused upon empowering Māori people or Māori knowledge. The status of Māori Studies in the academy remains largely unresolved. The desire to contribute positively to Māori communities through Māori Studies arises from the belief and conviction of individuals working in the field rather than as a disciplinary prescription.

With respect to kaupapa Māori, I see it playing a vitally important role in understanding the historical and contemporary dimensions of power relations in New Zealand society as these relate to Māori. Such study is critical to understanding the 'place' of Māori in New Zealand society, to going forward, and as the basis upon which strategies of empowerment can be designed and implemented. Mātauranga Māori too will make contributions in this domain.

With respect to te wānanga i te mātauranga Māori, I see its role as a place in which questions relating to being in and encountering the world – that are alternative to the conventional Western model – can be employed. Work in mātauranga Māori is not merely concerned with ethnic pride and cultural revitalisation. Its deeper call relates to notions of indigeneity – how we can improve the way in which humankind exists and lives in the world through new strategies of indigeneity, rekindling kinship between people, and between people and the natural world. Kaupapa Māori too will make significant contributions in this direction.

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