

# Kaupapa maori: explaining the ordinary

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## Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the kaupapa and processes of a Maori health research unit and its researchers within the university environment. It begins with an understanding that research is often viewed with suspicion by Maori, is implicated in the process of colonisation and that Maori research has, in part, grown out of dissatisfaction with prevailing methodologies. Unfortunately this has also involved confronting the argument that there is no such thing as kaupapa maori research. Defining kaupapa maori research is therefore not a comfortable exercise. The need to define, discuss or explain its existence in itself serves as a reminder of the power of colonisation. Kaupapa maori begins as a challenge to accepted norms and assumptions about knowledge and the way it is constructed and continues as a search for understanding within a Maori worldview. If kaupapa maori is about taking for granted a Maori worldview, then this discourse in itself subverts our right to be maori – ordinary. We are now the other in our own country. While kaupapa maori research may be seen as taking a distinctive approach and having underlying principles or aspects which are based on this Maori worldview, methods are likely to be subordinate to the issues and utility of the research and may be drawn from a range of methodologies. By taking a position that challenges norms and assumptions, kaupapa maori research involves a concept of the possibility and desirability of change. The research should aim to make a positive difference (Smith,

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1999) and therefore the use, usefulness and ownership of the research are of paramount importance.

## Introduction

The Whariki Research Group was established in 1995 as part of a process of partnership with the Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit, based at the University of Auckland. The name Whariki arose from a whakatauaiki that underlies the kaupapa of the group.

*Ko tau hikoi i runga i oku whariki  
Ko tau noho i toku whare  
E haukina ai toku tatau toku matapihi*

*Your steps on my whariki, your respect for my home,  
open my doors and windows.*

One understanding of this whakatauaiki is that health involves the wairua, tinana and hinengaro and in order to pursue health, all elements must be respected. A further meaning is that, in order for doors and windows to be opened researchers must tread gently. Information and knowledge cannot be asked for without respecting those who choose to share and without an understanding of the responsibilities and accountabilities of researchers.

This paper gives an overview of our kaupapa and processes as Maori researchers within a university institution. It does not attempt to argue the rights of Maori, but assumes their existence. Rather it is about what the position of tangata whenua means to us as Maori researchers and how this affects our practice. We are very much on a journey that raises questions at each turn. There is no one-way of doing things, either as researchers or as a Maori research group.

For us this journey has meant an examination of research and what it can and can't do, as well as an examination of our

*\*In reference to kaupapa maori the word maori is given here in lower case, referring to and reinforcing its meaning as ordinary, rather than its meaning of te iwi Maori, Maori people.*

position as researchers. This begins with the understanding that research is often viewed with suspicion and implicated in the process of colonisation.<sup>1</sup> Maori research has, in part, grown out of dissatisfaction with prevailing methodologies. Frequently, issues of concern to Maori are not seen to be adequately addressed by non-Maori researchers and fail to answer questions other than those that are causation, disease and individually focused.<sup>2</sup>

## Our kaupapa

Whariki recognises multiple accountabilities that are negotiated with a range of organisations and people. As a group we are responsible for a number of projects as well as working in partnership with other Unit staff. As part of our kaupapa, Whariki aims to tautoko Maori communities and organisations, to provide high quality research and to further the development of a Maori health research workforce. Our overall goal is to contribute to uplifting the health of our people and to work towards Maori development. In order to do this, we do not ascribe to one methodology, but believe that high quality research means providing the appropriate methods for different needs and purposes.

Recruitment and workforce development are an ongoing challenge, with the demand for researchers far exceeding the work available. We continue to grapple with the need to bring on and support less experienced researchers while meeting the requirements of existing staff and projects.

## Worldview

Clearly, we identify ourselves as Maori researchers who carry out Maori research with Maori. Whether this is kaupapa maori research or what kaupapa maori research is, is the subject of ongoing discussion.

Unfortunately this has too often involved confronting the argument that there is no such thing as kaupapa maori research. It is ironic that the concept of maori, arising from its meaning of ordinary,<sup>3</sup> is now seen as the other. Defining kaupapa maori\* research is therefore not a comfortable exercise. The need to define, discuss or explain its existence in itself serves as a reminder of the power of colonisation. Kaupapa maori begins as a challenge to accepted norms and assumptions about knowledge and the way it is constructed and continues as a search for understanding within a Maori worldview.<sup>4</sup> Thus, kaupapa maori is often in the position of being defined in relation to or compared with dominant paradigms, which have now become 'ordinary'. If kaupapa maori is about taking for granted a Maori worldview,<sup>5</sup> then this discourse in itself subverts our right to be maori—ordinary. We are now the other in our own country.

Denying the existence of kaupapa maori research can be seen as a lack of understanding that the worldview of a researcher is integral to the research and how it is carried out, including the way in which methodologies and methods are developed. This dismisses the existence of distinct differences arising from ideology and approach related to ethnicity and culture. It could also be seen as another part of the denial of a Maori voice.

Objectivity, both in design and in analysis, has been an overriding concern in the quest for the 'truth', particularly in epidemiological studies.<sup>6</sup> Kaupapa maori research, on the other hand, may ask, 'whose truth?' and query how it is constructed. Control and ownership, in terms of Maori developing and carrying out the study, are seen as more likely

to enable a greater understanding of issues that are relevant to Maori. There is some concept here that Maori are more likely to be able to reach 'a truth' about their own lives, but there is

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also a recognition that this is more related to worldviews, than an easily defined and clear cut fact, which exists independently of the researcher.<sup>7,8,9,10</sup> The issue of who controls the research goes beyond the need to gain a better understanding of the issue under study and is central to kaupapa maori. As control is closely aligned with power, this is important, not only in terms of tino rangatiratanga, but also in kaupapa maori research's challenge to the dominant culture and 'cultural superiority' of which Bishop speaks.<sup>7</sup> While there is still discussion and debate on whether it is necessary for all researchers to be Maori in order for a particular study to be kaupapa maori, the requirement for Maori control is accepted by most.<sup>1,7,11,12</sup> This control is not solely held by researchers, but is a process of negotiation.

## Methods and methodologies

If we accept that there is no one way of seeing things, then our methods need to reflect this and embrace rather than deny diversity.

While kaupapa maori research may be seen as taking a distinctive approach and having underlying principles or aspects which are based on a Maori worldview,<sup>10</sup> methods are likely to be subordinate to the issues and utility of the research and may be drawn from a range of methodologies. By taking a position that challenges norms and assumptions, kaupapa maori research involves a concept of the possibility and desirability of change. The research should aim to make a positive difference.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the use, usefulness and ownership of the research are of paramount importance.

A number of Maori researchers see qualitative methods as being particularly well suited to Maori. This is seen as

enabling a more equal conversation to take place where power can be negotiated in ways that are not generally considered or thought possible in more quantitative approaches.<sup>13,14</sup> However multi-methods that include quantitative approaches may be adopted to 'serve' the purpose of the study. This means that a range of issues, starting with how the research is initiated, through to ownership, practice and use of the research are examined along with research activities of design, implementation and analysis. The research process is not easily separated out, nor is it subordinate to, the methods.

For these reasons, while most of the earlier work of Whariki was largely qualitative, we do not ascribe to one method, but believe that high quality research means providing the appropriate methods to serve different purposes.

## Research programme

The current Whariki research programme encompasses a range of utilisation-focused activities that include both basic strategic and applied research. A major focus has been on participatory research with communities and on evaluations of programmes that fall broadly under the umbrella of hauora. Our kaumatua is an integral part of our research team and our programme.

While programme evaluation and community action have been a substantial part of Whariki's work, we have become aware of the need and desire for quantitative data on a range of issues of importance to Maori. Although there is still a level of suspicion and scepticism about 'number crunching', we have been increasingly asked for quantitative data and this is evidenced by the widespread distribution of survey findings. This has meant a move towards building up the quantitative

strengths of our group. Much APhRU research has utilised an in-house social survey facility; the CATI system (computer assisted telephone interviewing) that is unique in New Zealand in terms of the validity and reliability of the data collected.

Prior to the existence of Whariki, considerable databases on alcohol and other drug use were amassed, but included little Maori specific analyses. There were a number of reasons for this. General population surveys were seen as a priority and Maori specific analysis was problematic for a mainstream research organisation. It has been the growth of Whariki along with clear directives from Maori organisations that has seen this area develop.

A key part of our quantitative development has been the recreational drug use survey that provided a Maori sample of 1,593. The findings have been released as a separate report

for Maori. We are hoping to build on the quality and success of this survey with further quantitative projects, including an alcohol survey in 2000. It is hoped that these projects will be ongoing and will provide Maori specific data over time. No attempts have been made at this stage to compare Maori with non-Maori in these publications<sup>15,16</sup> but inevitably this is what we are asked to do, particularly by the media. In order not to perpetuate negative images or stereotypes and to pursue our kaupapa of making a positive difference, analyses of this kind need to be carefully thought out, both in terms of their presentation and in light of the usefulness of such comparisons.

While quantitative data can highlight areas of concern and has the potential to persuade policy makers and funders that action is needed, it does not in itself tell us what we can do to bring about change. This is one of the key areas where the interface between quantitative and qualitative data with community action takes place. Quantitative data can highlight particular areas and legitimate community concerns, but it is the communities who are then the experts in determining their own solutions.

Evaluation of programmes often needs to meet multiple stakeholder expectations. Funders may want information that is different from what the communities want. One of our tasks is to make these expectations explicit and try to find ways of carrying out the research that does not compromise any group. For example, providers may want to focus on what is needed to run the best possible programme, while funders may want to know if they received 'value for money'. If we take

on an evaluation, it is with the agreement of all parties. This may involve discussing what we can and can't do. An evaluation of a three-year drink drive programme provided information that was fed back to providers and their communities. The

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focus was on the implementation of the projects and the collaboration between researchers and Maori communities. Longer-term impacts were considered in light of strategies and processes that were known to be likely to lead to change.<sup>17</sup> Rather than trying to describe programmes in terms that are accepted and largely legitimated in non-Maori research, we try to frame evaluations within a Maori worldview. For example, showing how a nutrition programme may have led to strengthening marae and iwi structures and why this is a successful impact has been part of another Whariki evaluation.<sup>18</sup>

By contributing to a body of knowledge that asserts a Maori worldview as legitimate, we hopefully move toward a greater acceptance of what Maori see as 'successful' and 'robust', and reframing what is meant by these terms or using different terms altogether. If communities are not recognised for their

expertise, which includes knowing what processes and approaches work for their people. then the history of suspicion towards research is perpetuated. Community frustration and the need to constantly explain and persuade hinders rather than supports change. Unfortunately, as in the kaupapa maori debate, we are too often in the position of explaining why this 'other' way of seeing, doing and expressing things is legitimate.

## Conclusion

Our approach as Maori researchers does not dictate specifically defined methods that 'belong' to particular disciplines, but tends to emphasise experience and explore new meanings.

Maori research shares a number of concerns with other groups that have been defined and researched by dominant cultures. The charge that a specific kaupapa maori methodology does not exist has been levelled at Maori researchers. The basis of this appears to be that, to be given the status of a methodology, research must employ methods that are distinctive from all other defined disciplines. However, kaupapa maori research takes a distinctive approach which stems from a maori worldview. Thus, arguments against kaupapa maori can be seen as an argument for its existence. The problem arises when Tauwi fail to recognise power and methods which spring from their position of 'normality' and privilege. This necessitates 'others' to place themselves as a distinctive methodology and to argue for the right to exist and define themselves. For us as a Maori research group, this is a constant journey of asking questions about ourselves and our way of doing things. It is also, in line with Maori now being the other in Aotearoa, about being questioned. As Maori, attempting to be seen as maori within Aotearoa and to control our own research and solutions this can be a frustrating process. As researchers within an institution and from an area that carries a history of suspicion, this is a challenge we must address.

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