

Kaupapa Maori Research: An indigenous approach to creating knowledge

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This paper seeks to identify how issues of epistemological racism are addressed in practice within an indigenous Kaupapa (philosophy) Maori approach to research, and how such considerations may impact on the Western trained and positioned researcher. One fundamental understanding to a Kaupapa Maori approach to research is that it is the discursive practice that is Kaupapa Maori that positions researchers in such a way as to operationalise self-determination (agentic positioning and behaviour) for research participants. This is because the cultural aspirations, understandings and practices of Maori people implement and organise the research process. Further, the research issues of power; initiation, benefits, representation, legitimisation, and accountability are addressed and understood in practice by practitioners of Kaupapa Maori research through the development of a participatory mode of consciousness.

It is difficult to change one's concept of the self from the pervasive alienated mode of consciousness, involving as it does a self that needs to establish clear boundaries both of the self and other, to a more participatory mode that requires one to release such need. (Heshusius, 1995).

Despite the guarantees of the Treaty of Waitangi, the colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the subsequent neocolonial dominance of majority interests in social and educational research has continued. The result has been the development of a tradition of research into Maori people's lives that addresses concerns and interests of the researchers' (who are predominantly non-Maori) own making, defined and accountable in terms of the researchers' own cultural world view.

Researchers in Aotearoa/New Zealand have developed a tradition of research that has perpetuated colonial values, thereby undervaluing and belittling Maori knowledge and learning practices and processes in order to enhance those of the colonisers and adherents of neo-colonial paradigms. There has developed a social pathology research approach in Aotearoa/New Zealand that has implied, in all phases of the research process, the "inability" of Maori culture to cope with human problems, and proposed that Maori culture was and is inferior to that of the colonisers in human terms. Such practices have perpetuated an ideology of cultural

superiority that precludes the development of power sharing processes, and the legitimisation of diverse cultural epistemologies and cosmologies.

Further, traditional research has misrepresented Maori understandings and ways of knowing by simplifying, conglomerating and commodifying Maori knowledge for "consumption" by the colonisers. These processes have consequently misrepresented Maori experiences, thereby denying Maori authenticity and voice. Such research has displaced Maori lived experiences, and the meanings that these experiences have, with the "authoritative" voice of the methodological "expert", appropriating Maori lived experience in terms defined and determined by the "expert". Further, many misconstrued Maori cultural practices and meanings are now part of our everyday myths of Aotearoa/New Zealand, believed by Maori and non-Maori alike. Traditional social and educational research has contributed to this situation.

As a result, Maori people are deeply concerned about who researchers are answerable to. Who has control over the initiation, procedures, evaluations, construction and distribution of newly defined knowledge? Further, just as control of legitimisation and representation is maintained within the domain of the colonial and neo-colonial paradigms, so too are locales of accountability situated within

Western cultural frameworks, precluding Maori cultural forms and processes of accountability.

Traditional research epistemologies have developed methods of initiating research and accessing research participants that are located within the cultural preferences and practices of the Western world as opposed to that of Maori people themselves. For example, the preoccupation with neutrality, objectivity and distance by educational researchers has emphasized these concepts as criteria for authority, representation and accountability and has distanced Maori people from participation in the construction, validation and legitimation of knowledge. As a result, Maori people are increasingly becoming concerned about who will directly gain from the research? Traditionally, the researcher has established an approach where the research has served to advance the interests, concerns and methods of the researcher and to locate the benefits of the research at least in part with the researcher, other benefits being of lesser concern.

Kaupapa Maori research

Out of this discontent with traditional research disrupting Maori life, an indigenous approach to research has emerged in New Zealand. This approach, termed Kaupapa (agenda/philosophy) Maori research is challenging the dominance of the Pakeha worldview in research. Kaupapa Maori research emerged from within the wider ethnic revitalisation movement that developed in New Zealand following the rapid Maori urbanisation of the post World War Two period. This revitalisation movement blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s with the intensification of a political-consciousness among Maori communities. More recently, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, this consciousness has featured the revitalisation of Maori cultural aspirations, preferences and practices as a philosophical and productive educational stance and resistance to the “hegemony of the dominant discourse”.

There are a number of significant dimensions to Kaupapa Maori research that set it apart from traditional research. One

main focus of a Kaupapa Maori approach to research is the operationalisation of self-determination (*tino Rangatiratanga*) by Maori people (Bishop, 1991, 1996; Smith, G. 1990, 1997; Smith, L. 1991, 1999). Such an approach challenges the locus of power and control over the research issues of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimation and accountability as outlined above, being located in another cultural frame of reference/world view. Kaupapa Maori is challenging the dominance of traditional, individualistic research, which primarily, at least in its present form, benefits the researcher and their agenda. In contrast, Kaupapa Maori research is collectivistic, and is orientated toward benefiting all the research participants and their collectively determined agendas, defining and acknowledging Maori aspirations for research, whilst developing and implementing Maori theoretical and methodological preferences and practices for research.

Kaupapa Maori is a discourse that has emerged and is legitimated from within the Maori community. Maori educationalist, Graham Smith (1992b), describes Kaupapa Maori as “the philosophy and practice of being and acting Maori” (p.1). It assumes the taken for granted social, political, historical, intellectual and cultural legitimacy of Maori people, in that it is a position where “Maori language, culture, knowledge and values are accepted in their own right” (p.13). Further, Kaupapa Maori presupposes positions that are committed to a critical analysis of the existing unequal power relations within our society. These include rejection of hegemonic belittling, “Maori can’t cope” stances, together with a commitment to the power of conscientisation and politicisation through struggle for wider community and social freedoms (Smith, 1992a).

A Kaupapa Maori position is predicated on the understanding that Maori means of accessing, defining and protecting knowledge existed before European arrival in New Zealand. Such Maori cultural processes were protected by the Treaty of Waitangi, subsequently marginalised, but are today legitimated within Maori cultural discourse. As with other Kaupapa Maori

initiatives in education, health and welfare Kaupapa Maori research practice is as Maori educationalist Kathie Irwin (1992) explains, epistemologically based within Maori cultural specificities, preferences and practices.

Addressing issues of self-determination

This paper seeks to identify how self-determination is addressed in practice within a Kaupapa Maori approach, and how such considerations may impact on the Western trained and positioned researcher. Fundamental to a Kaupapa Maori approach to research is that it is the discursive practice that is Kaupapa Maori that positions researchers in such a way as to operationalise self-determination (agentic positioning and behaviour) for research participants. Thus the cultural aspirations, understandings and practices of Maori people implement and organise the research process. In this way the research issues of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimation, and accountability are addressed and understood in practice by practitioners of Kaupapa Maori research within the cultural context of the research participants.

Western approaches to operationalising agentic positioning and behaviour in others are, according to Noddings (1986) and Davies (1990), best addressed by those who position themselves within empowering relationships. Authors such as Oakley (1981), Tripp (1983), Burgess (1984), Lather (1986, 1991), Patton (1990), Delamont (1992), Reinharz (1992) and Eisner (1991) suggest that an “empowering” relationship could be attained by developing what could be termed an “enhanced research relationship”, where there occurs a long-term development of mutual purpose and intent between the researcher and the researched. To facilitate this development of mutuality there is also the recognition of the need for personal investment in the form of self-disclosure and openness on the part of the researcher.

However, in the practice of Kaupapa Maori research there develops a degree of involvement on the part of the researcher,

constituted as a way of knowing, that is fundamentally different from the concepts of personal investment and collaboration as suggested by the above authors. For, while it appears that “personal investment” is essential, this personal investment is not on terms determined by the “investor”. The investment is on terms mutually understandable and controllable by all participants, so that the investment is reciprocal and could not be otherwise. The “personal investment” by the researcher is not an act by an individual agent but emerges out of the context within which the research is constituted.

Heshusius (1994) explains this notion by suggesting the need to move from an alienated mode of consciousness, which sees the knower as separate from the known, to a participatory mode of consciousness that addresses a fundamental reordering of our understanding of the relationship between self and other (and therefore of reality), “and indeed between self and the world, in a manner where such a reordering, not only includes connectedness, but necessitates letting go of the focus on self” (p.15). Heshusius also suggested that :

In a participatory mode of consciousness the quality of attentiveness is characterised by an absence of the need to separate, distance and to insert predetermined thought patterns, methods and formulas between self and other. It is characterised by an absence of the need to be in charge (1995, p.14).

Heshusius identified the ground from which a participatory mode of knowing emerges as “the recognition of the deeper kinship between ourselves and others” (p.17). This form of knowing speaks in a very real sense to Maori ways of knowing, for the Maori term for connectedness and engagement is *whanaungatanga*. This concept is one of the most fundamental ideas within Maori culture, both as a value and as a social process. *Whanaungatanga* consists literally of relationships between ourselves and others, and is constituted in ways determined by the Maori cultural context.

Establishing and maintaining *whanau* (*whakawhanaungatanga*) relationships,

which can be either literal or metaphoric, within the discursive practice that is Kaupapa Maori, is an integral and ongoing constitutive element of a Kaupapa Maori approach to research. Establishing a research group as if it were an extended family (a whanau of interest) by means of the process of spiral discourse, is one form of embodying the process of whakawhanaungatanga as a research strategy. In a Kaupapa Maori approach to research, research groups constituted as whanau attempt to develop relationships and organisations based on similar principles to those which order a traditional or literal whanau. The whanau is a location for communication, for sharing outcomes and for constructing shared common understandings and meanings. Individuals have responsibilities to care for and to nurture other members of the group, while still adhering to the kaupapa of the group. The group will operate to avoid singling out particular individuals for comment and attention, and to avoid embarrassing individuals who are not yet succeeding within the group. Group products and achievement frequently take the form of group performances, not individual performances. The group will typically begin and end each session with prayer, and will also typically share food together. The group will always make major decisions as a group and will seek to operate with the support and encouragement of kaumatua. This feature acknowledges the multi-generational compositioning of a whanau with associated hierarchically determined rights, responsibilities and obligations.

What non-Maori people would refer to as management or control mechanisms are traditionally constituted in a whanau as taonga tuku iho, literally those treasures passed down to us from the ancestors, those customs that tell us how to behave. For example, within Kaupapa Maori the structure and function of a whanau describes and constitutes the relationship among research participants (or in traditional research terminology, the relationship between the researcher and the researched). Research therefore can not proceed unless whanau support is obtained, kaumatua provide guidance and unless

there is aroha (mutuality) between the participants evidenced as an overriding feeling of tolerance, hospitality and respect for others, their ideas and their opinions. The research process is participatory, as well as participant-driven, in the sense that it is the concerns, interests and preferences of the whanau that guide and drive the research processes. The research itself is driven by the participants in terms of setting the research questions, the design of the work, undertaking the work that has to be done, the distribution of rewards, the access to research findings, accountability, and the control over the distribution of the knowledge. What is crucial to an understanding of what it means to be a researcher is that it is through the development of a participatory mode of consciousness that a researcher becomes part of this process. He or she does not start from a position outside of the group, and then choose to invest him/herself. The researcher cannot “position” him/herself, or “empower” the other. Instead, through entering a participatory mode of consciousness the individual agent of the “I” of the researcher is released in order to enter a consciousness larger than the self.

Addressing issues of legitimacy and authority

Kaupapa Maori rejects outside control over what constitutes the text’s call for authority and truth. A Kaupapa Maori position therefore promotes an epistemological version of validity, one where the authority of the text is “established through recourse to a set of rules concerning knowledge, its production and representation” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p.578). Such an approach to validity locates the power within Maori cultural practices where what is acceptable and what is not acceptable research, text and/or processes are determined and defined by the research community itself in reference to the cultural context within which it operates.

Maori people have always had criteria for evaluating whether a process or a product is valued for them. Taona tuku iho are literally the treasures from the ancestors. These treasures are the collected wisdom of ages, the means that have been established over a long period of time which guide and

monitor our very lives today and in the future. Within these treasures are the messages of kawa, those principles that, for example, guide the process of establishing relationships. Whakawhanaungatanga is not a haphazard process, decided on an ad hoc basis, but rather is based on time-honoured and proven principles. How each of these principles is addressed in particular circumstances varies from tribe to tribe and hapu to hapu. Nevertheless, it is important that these principles are addressed.

Just as Maori practices are epistemologically validated within Maori cultural contexts, so too are Kaupapa Maori research practices and texts. Research conducted within a Kaupapa Maori framework has rules established as taonga tuku iho which are protected and maintained by the tapu of Maori cultural practices such as the multiplicity of rituals within the hui and within the central cultural processes of whanaungatanga. Further, the use of these concepts as constitutive research metaphors are subject to the same culturally determined processes of validation, the same rules concerning knowledge, its production and its representation as are the literal phenomena.

Therefore, the verification of a text, the authority of a text, how well it represents the experiences and perspective of the participants, is judged by criteria constructed and constituted within the culture. By using such Maori concepts as whanau, hui and whakawhanaungatanga as

metaphors for the research process itself, Kaupapa Maori research invokes and claims authority for these texts in terms of the principles, processes and practices that govern such events in the literal sense. Metaphoric whanau are governed by the same principles and processes that govern a literal whanau, and as such are understandable to and controlled by Maori people. Literal whanau have means of addressing contentious issues, resolving conflict, constructing narratives, telling stories, raising children and addressing economic and political issues, and (contrary to popular non-Maori opinion) such practices change over time to reflect changes going on in the wider world. Research whanau of interest also conduct their deliberations in a whanau style. Kaumatua preside, others get their say according to who they are, and positions are defined in terms of how it will benefit the whanau.

The Kaupapa Maori position regarding legitimation is based on the notion that the world is constituted by power differentials, and that there are different cultural systems that legitimately make sense of and interact meaningfully with the world. Kaupapa Maori research, based in a different worldview from that of the dominant discourse, makes this political statement while also acknowledging the need to recognise and address the ongoing effects of racism and colonialism in the wider society.

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