



UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO-KĪNGITANGA DAY KEYNOTE

Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori

*Reclaiming Mātauranga, Identity
and the Future of Our People*

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INAUGURAL PROFESSORIAL LECTURE

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Tērā ia te tautara ki maunga Taupiri
 E tū ake nei i te riu o Waikato
 I te take rā o te taupae ki Hūnua
 Ka peka au ki Tauranga-nui, ki Te Awa-mārahi
 Ki te marae o Ngā Tai E Rua
 Ka piki mai ki te rohe o Te Pou o Mangatāwhiri
 Ki Rau-ngāwari, ki te tūranga o Tāne-i-te-pupuke
 Ki Horahora, ki Maurea, ki Rangiriri
 Ki te pā pakanga mō Te Kīngitanga e
 Kua tae mai au ki Hukanui, ki Te Ohākī, ki
 Kaitimu, ki Waahi
 E nohoia nei e Te Ariki Tapairu e
 Ka piki au i Taupiri, te rua kōiwi o te mana,
 o te wehi
 Ka titiro atu ki te rāwhiti, ki a Ngāti Haua,
 Ki ngā uri whakaheke o Tarapipipi
 E noho mai nei i Kai-a-te-mata, i Rukumoana e
 Ki te taha whakararo
 Ko Marutuahu, ko Ngāti Paoa,
 Ko Tama-te-rā ki Te Pai o Hauraki e
 Ka mawhiti rā taku haere ki te tihi o Maungatautari
 Ki Kemureti, ki te oko horoi o taku ūpuna,
 o Tāwhiao e
 I Ōrākau ka tangi au mō te maringitanga o ngā toto
 rangatira o aku ūpuna
 Ka rere atu au ki Pirongia, ki Arekahānara, ki te
 hāona kaha o Tāwhiao e
 Kei Te Nehenehe Nui
 Ko Te Tokanga-nui-a-Noho
 Ko Maniapoto i tōna rohe pōtae e.
 Ka topa atu au ki Kāwhia moana, ki Kāwhia kai,
 ki Kāwhia tangata
 Ki te okiokinga o te waka nei, o Tainui e
 Ki te taha whakarunga ko Rotorua-nui-a-Kahu,
 Ko Pīkiao, ko te ure tārewa o Te Kīngitanga e.
 Huri noa ake au ki Tongariro, ki a Te Heuheu
 Ki Taupō-nui-a-Tia,
 Ki te mātāpuna o taku awa, o Waikato e.
 Ka hoki kōmuri mai au ki a Ngāti Hourua ki
 Whatawhata

*Ka heke mai i te ia o Waipā, ka uru mai ai ki te
wai ūpua o aku tūpuna
E kī nei tōna kōrero, 'Waikato taniwha rau, he
piko he taniwha, he piko he taniwha' e
Ū ana au ki Tūrangawaewae, ki te marae rongonui
o te motu e.
Tēnei rā Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato te mihi atu
nei, te tangi atu
Ki a koutou, e aku rangatira, e manaaki mai nei
I ngā ūri o te rohe e kīia nei tōna kōrero
'Tamaki ki raro, Mōkau ki runga, ko Mangatoatoa
ki waenganui'
Aue! aue! aue! hā! (Kāretu, 1977).*

He hōnore, he korōria, he maungārongo ki te whenua, he whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa. Āmine.

Te Arikinui Kuini Ngā Wai hono i te pō. Nau mai, haere mai, hoki mai.

Kei te Tumuaki e Hone tēnā koe. E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā waewae tapu. Haere mai.

Kei te tumuaki o Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato, Ahorangi Neil Quigley. Tēnā koe.

Kei te Ihorangi Māori, Ahorangi Sarah-Jane Tiakiwai tēnā koe.

Kei taku reo Māori tēnā koe i tēnei rā, i tēnei wiki.

Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori

Reclaiming Mātauranga, Identity and the Future of Our People

This lecture offers a glimpse into research into te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and kapa haka. It presents te reo as the root of tikanga, tikanga as the foundation of mātauranga Māori, and kapa haka as the vehicle through which this knowledge is brought to life.

More than a language, te reo is the mauri through which all people can understand the Māori worldview and deepen their appreciation of Aotearoa, the ancestral homeland, Māori have shared with all who now call it home.

Through kapa haka, whakapapa, histories, values, belief systems, iwitanga and ancestral knowledge are expressed, revitalised and transmitted, connecting the hunga mate with te hunga mate and carrying Māoritanga, identity, knowledge and aspirations forward for future generations.

"He uri nō te Raupatu, he toa nō te Rauora!" (Te Arikinui Kuini Ngā Wai hono i te pō, 2026).

He tīmatanga kōrero

This lecture is organised around three connected pou: te reo Māori, tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori.

Te reo Māori provides a foundation through which our people can enter and express the Māori world.

Tikanga Māori is lived and practised; it governs how knowledge is approached, relationships are maintained and responsibilities are fulfilled.

Mātauranga Māori is not simply a value added to another system. It is a body of knowledge that is understood, applied, tested, transmitted and developed.

These three pou cannot be separated. Te reo gives expression to tikanga and mātauranga;

Tikanga gives integrity to their use; and mātauranga gives depth, purpose and substance to how we do things, our sciences, which are underpinned by te reo. He taonga tuku nā ngā tīpuna.

When te reo Māori is strong, we can understand our world according to the understandings of our tīpuna. We can interpret our histories through our own concepts. We can express te taha wairua through the words entrusted to us. We can debate, create, teach, research and imagine from within a Māori intellectual tradition, Mātauranga Māori.

When the language is diminished, the loss is not confined to vocabulary. Our belief systems, our ways of seeing, remembering, relating, knowing, and being, are also at risk.

I am, He uri nō Te Raupatu. 1866 Te Whakatōhea was rendered landless. The killing of one person saw the attempt at genocide of my people, the loss of te reo, tikanga, Mātauranga, our way of being, living and economic power.

Kīngitanga Day:

Kīngitanga Day honours the vision of the late Kīngi Tūheitia Pōtatau Te Wherowhero VII, who entrusted Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato with an enduring responsibility to uphold and advance the kaupapa of the Kīngitanga by agreeing to Kīngitanga Day after long deliberation. Conceived as a Poukai in its own right, the day must “feed the hinengaro” and embrace Kotahitanga through remembrance, manaakitanga, learning, sharing and service. Ultimately, Kīngitanga Day calls on the University to ensure that te reo and mātauranga Māori shape its teaching, research, governance, and relationships as authoritative intellectual traditions, true to tika, pono, and aroha. Paimārire!

Te reo Māori as a living repository

My research into te reo Māori is an aspiration for me and a necessity for my iwi. He uri nō Raupatu. It is a lifetime commitment, grounded in kaupapa Māori methodologies, guided by tikanga, and shaped by the knowledge, histories and aspirations of whānau, hapū and iwi.

I understand te reo Māori as more than a means of communication. It is a living repository of whakapapa, tikanga, mātauranga, spirituality, identity and collective memory.

Every kupu carries more than its dictionary meaning. It may hold the memory of an event, a feature of the landscape, a spiritual teaching or an obligation between people. This is why translation, although necessary, is never complete. *Whakapapa* is more than genealogy, *whenua* more than land, and *mana* more than status. Their meaning also lies in relationships, tone, metaphor, context and generations of use.

A central focus of my research has been the revitalisation, preservation and intergenerational transmission of te reo Māori. I investigate how language is sustained through kapa haka, waiata, mōteatea, poi, haka, whaikōrero, karakia, pūrākau and oral histories. I do not regard these traditions as cultural decoration, performance alone or historical artefacts. They are living systems through which our knowledge, values and histories are remembered, practised, transmitted and lived.

One language, many distinctive voices

The revitalisation of te reo Māori must recognise and protect the unique reo and mātauranga of individual iwi and hapū. A standard form of language has been important in education, broadcasting and the creation of resources. It has helped many people begin or renew their language journeys. Yet standardisation also carries a risk. If one form becomes the measure of correctness, the distinctive voices of iwi may be marginalised within the very movement intended to save the language. “*Tētahi, ētahi, wētahi, tētahi, ngētehi*”. “*Ehara, ehake*”. “*Poroporoāki, poroporoake*”. “*Pūpū and Būbū*”. Then there’s “*Dudu*”.

Our differences are not problems to be corrected. They show the depth, adaptability, and historical reach of te reo Māori. Pronunciation locates us. Kīwaha give spice. Whakataukī, carry environmental and historical knowledge. Whakapapa identifies relationships. Pūrākau determines how Mātauranga Māori concepts are understood. The language becomes richer, not weaker, when we protect these differences.

Tohekura: bringing the language home

An important expression of this commitment was my establishment of Tohekura, the annual wānanga reo of Te Whakatōhea. Tohekura is now in its tenth year and has become an established event on the Te Whakatōhea calendar.

Approximately 200 uri participate each year, returning from throughout Aotearoa and overseas. This year an uri returned from the UK off the plane to Tohekura. Their journeys remind us that distance does not extinguish whakapapa. The desire to return, reconnect and reclaim remains powerful. This is reflected in this waiata.

“Manene ki te motu, manene ki te ao, aha pēhea. E kore e wareware ki taku ūkaipō he uri nō Te Whakatōhea” (Maxwell, Te Tawhito, 1997).

E te Arikinui he uri nō te Raupatu, he Toa nō te Rauora!

A defining principle of Tohekura is that its kaiako must whakapapa to Te Whakatōhea. This principle is not intended to exclude the expertise of others. It recognises that the wānanga has a particular purpose: to restore Te Whakatōheatanga through those who carry the whakapapa, te reo and responsibilities of the iwi.

A distinctive feature of Tohekura is its annual rotation among the marae and hapū of Te Whakatōhea, acknowledging the mana, histories and reo of each hapū. Through the takahi whenua, we learn from the iwi kāinga and reconnect to te reo Māori, walking the whenua, touching and smelling the whakapapa, knowing wāhi tapu, and talking the pūrākau the ancestral narratives from which each hapū have emerged.

Tohekura tōreo karangatia rā ki tī, ki tā ki Te Whakatōhea, tātakina, tātakina Te Whakatōhea kua tata mai nei haere mai. Tohekura tō karangatia rā ki tī, ki tā ki Te Whakatōhea, tātakina, tātakina Te Whakatōhea tāngia te arero kia kōrerotoa. A, E, I me te O me te U. Haere mai Tohekura tankiu ae kotiu (Maxwell, 2026).

Kapa haka: scholarship embodied

Kapa haka occupies a central place within my research and cultural practice. I regard kapa haka as unique whare wānanga, an intellectual, educational and cultural domain in which te reo Māori and Tikanga is lived, composed, embodied, interpreted and transmitted.

Through my longstanding leadership of Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti, I have composed over 200 waiata and about 250, including kura and kapa from other iwi.

Original waiata and haka that record significant tīpuna, historical events, whakapapa, relationships, politics, social issues, and protest. These compositions enable contemporary generations to engage with ancestral knowledge and current affairs while extending te reo Māori into new creative contexts.

I understand composition as both a research methodology and a form of iwi archiving. Before a composition can be created, histories must be gathered, names confirmed, relationships understood and language carefully chosen. Decisions about metaphor, rhythm and structure require intellectual as well as artistic judgement. Once performed

and transmitted, the composition becomes a repository that communities can carry collectively. This is evident when the youth stand to whaikōrero, to karanga, to takutaku.

Two weeks ago my sister Mereana passed away. My whānau had no speaking rights, today I don't have speaking rights this my tikanga. Mā te inoi anake, mā te nohopuku. By remaining silent it allows the whānau, individual to heal. The rangatahi maintained and upheld the tikanga upon my marae carrying out the rituals of encounter, the karakia. Again, at the Koroneihana, the rangatahi of my iwi spoke and represented Te Whakatōhea. My own, which I have taught, as I was taught in the whare wānanga of home. The impact is in the action, producing speakers, practitioners, exponents.

Today is a different Tikanga where I have to speak.

He toa nō te rauora, taonga tuku iho, mō te ake, ake.

Taone Reo Māori – Te Reo Māori Towns, communities, kapa haka are these.

Ngā Orio me Ngā Iere a Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti, Sweet Harmonies in Song by Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti 2025. This bilingual book and audio collection brings together twelve waiata through a collaboration between Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti and the Auckland Philharmonia. It records the kapa haka's 30-year history and the stories behind each waiata, including its lyrics, composition, and first performance, alongside reflections from the artists involved on the experience, and details the participating artists.

Ōrokī, Orokē is currently with Huia Publishers; all is going well. This book will be launched in February 2027.

Te Hāhi Ringatū: language, spirituality and identity

Founded in 1858, 1868, and 1918, respectively, Te Kīngitanga, Te Hāhi Ringatū, and Te Hāhi Rātana are among the longest-standing Māori institutions to have sustained te reo Māori through colonisation, the land wars, restrictive legislation, and generations of protest.

My relationship with Te Hāhi Ringatū cannot be adequately described as conventional academic research. My research into Ringatū is passive: I was born Ringatū. I did not simply research Ringatū; Ringatū researched me. It formed me, tested me and continues to teach me. For me, Ringatū is life—a life's teaching and a lifetime of seeking *māramatanga*. I became a Ringatū tohunga at eighteen. As I approach sixty, I have carried that responsibility for forty-two years, yet I remain a learner.

Sometimes *māramatanga* comes gradually. Sometimes it seems to drop from heaven—BOOM! A teaching carried for years suddenly opens. I had sung *Te honi i roto i te pōhatū* for as long as I could remember, having been instructed by the late Sir Mōnita Delamere: “*Kua whakamākonatia koe e ahau ki te honi i roto i te pōhatū*”—“I will sustain you with

the honey from the stone.” Honey from the stone? For years I wondered what those words meant.

In 2023, after the signing of the Te Whakatōhea Treaty settlement, my uncle Danie Poihipi and I were discussing the waiata. I asked him its meaning. He replied: “The raupatu. The Government is the stone, and the settlement is the honey.” BOOM! I understood. The honey does not make the stone good or erase the suffering of raupatu. It speaks to the perseverance required to draw something sustaining from hardness. Te Whakatōhea endured 157 years of debate, turmoil, negotiation, land loss, and loss of life before reaching settlement and beginning to lift the iwi from bondage. The waiata, Sir Mōnita’s teaching, my uncle’s kōrero and our lived history came together as māramatanga. Ringatū had researched me again.

Te Honi i roto i te pōhatū: nothing is free or easy. You have to work diligently, set goals, and have a strategy to achieve your goals.

A significant part of this research involves decoding *karakia* and *kupu whakaari* to understand their continuing guidance. These teachings contain layered biblical, prophetic, historical, environmental and iwi meanings. When considered alongside their context and validated with Ringatū knowledge holders, they can illuminate contemporary questions of leadership, justice, collective wellbeing, environmental responsibility, and survival.

This is particularly important to my current climate change research with Te Whakatōhea and Lincoln University.

The messages carried within *karakia* and *kupu whakaari* can operate as *rongoā*—a remedy that restores balance, orientation and the capacity to act. The remedy is not a simple technical answer to environmental disruption. It is a way of restoring the whakapapa relationships among people, whenua, wai, atua and generations. It reminds us that environmental change must be approached spiritually, culturally, socially and practically, as well as scientifically.

My task is not to force contemporary meanings upon these teachings, but to listen, test my interpretations with the appropriate communities and respect their cultural authority.

Te reo Māori and mana motuhake

A recording does not remove the tikanga that governs it, and digitisation does not automatically create a right to distribute it.

Through its Strategic Research Fund, the University of Waikato supports *Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho*, a collaboration with Auckland University of Technology to digitise my 30-year archive of te reo, waiata and karakia. The project preserves the dialect, intonation and

voices of kaumātua—*he toa nō te rauora*—for whānau, hapū and iwi. Using these audio and video recordings, we aim to create a virtual reo platform and lexicon.

This work is not simply about preservation or visibility. My scholarship seeks to restore Māori authority over our knowledge, histories and cultural practices. Visibility alone is not *mana motuhake*. Reclamation requires governance. Whānau, hapū and iwi must be able to determine how *mōteatea*, *haka*, *pūrākau*, oral histories, compositions, recordings and digital collections are recorded, interpreted, accessed and transmitted.

This is not an argument against collaboration. I have benefited greatly from working across iwi, universities and disciplines. However, collaboration must begin by recognising Māori rights, relationships and authority.

These opportunities raise serious questions: Who has the mana, and who owns the data? Who decides whether restricted recordings may be used? Who is accountable when iwi language is removed from its context or interpreted incorrectly?

Artificial intelligence does not remove the need for tikanga; it intensifies it. The speed and scale of technology allow errors and cultural harm to travel further than ever before. Māori data sovereignty, cultural and intellectual property rights, informed participation and iwi authority must therefore be embedded in these systems from the beginning.

The test is not whether the technology is impressive. The test is whether it strengthens relationships, grows speakers, protects cultural authority and returns value to whānau, hapū and iwi.

Te reo, tikanga and mātauranga across my research and service

The first pou, te reo Māori, guides my work through teaching, Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti, Tohekura, and Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho. In protecting collections of reo, performance and oral history, each item must remain connected to its speaker, iwi, context and cultural authority.

This understanding informs my service as a member of the Kīngitanga Tekaumāarua, governance, and my work within Te Hāhi Ringatū, including my responsibilities as Chair of the Project Governance Group for the Te Hāhi Ringatū National Marae Complex. These roles require cultural judgement, discretion, service and collective decision-making. They remind me that leadership is not simply the authority to decide. It is the obligation to protect the mana of the kaupapa and the people who have entrusted it to us.

Tikanga is part of how I live each day. It guides my work in kapa haka, governance and iwi development, shaping practical decisions about people, resources, succession and the future. Te Kīngitanga, Kīngitanga Day, Te Hāhi Ringatū, Paimārire, Rātana, Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti, Te Matatini, Tohekura, and iwi wānanga and marae are living institutions and gatherings where relationships are renewed and collective identity is expressed.

The third pou is mātauranga Māori. My research extends beyond language as a subject to ask how Māori knowledge can contribute to the wellbeing and future of our people. It encompasses whenua, climate adaptation, kai sovereignty, traditional and fermented foods, cultural heritage and Indigenous data sovereignty.

As an Adjunct Professor at Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki Lincoln University, I work with iwi and colleagues across the tertiary sector on landscape planning, agricultural systems and long-term adaptation. I have also presented oral histories as an expert witness before the Waitangi Tribunal and the courts, while upholding the mana of iwi knowledge and aspirations.

The kōrero I collect and interpret must ultimately serve the communities from which it comes. It is not mine simply because I have recorded, analysed or published it. Validation is therefore an enduring relationship of listening, returning, correcting and confirming with the appropriate knowledge holders.

Together, these three pou determine how I evaluate research. In a Mātauranga Māori way. I ask: does the work strengthen te reo Māori? Is it conducted according to tikanga? Does it protect and advance mātauranga Māori? Does it return benefit to the people whose knowledge makes it possible?

I continue to ask: how will this knowledge return to the people to whom it belongs? Research should build capability, protect relationships and create resources that remain after the project has ended.

Reclaiming identity

Colonisation disrupted the ordinary transmission of identity. Whānau moved from the rohe, language was lost within homes, and some grew up carrying whakapapa without opportunities to learn what it meant.

Reclamation must therefore be approached with manaakitanga. People returning to their reo and iwi should not be shamed for what was taken from their whānau. The responsibility of those who hold knowledge is not to create new gates where colonisation created the distance. It is to uphold tikanga while opening pathways of return.

At Ōpōtiki Mai Tawhiti, Te Hāhi Ringatu and Tohekura, those who arrive uncertain discover through history, whenua and reo that whakapapa has continued to hold them. Their task is not to prove an unbroken record of cultural competence, but to return with humility and contribute to the future.

The future of our people

What, then, does it mean to reclaim the future of our people?

It does not mean attempting to reproduce the past unchanged. Our tīpuna were innovators. They observed, adapted, travelled, composed, debated and responded to new circumstances. To honour them is not to freeze their knowledge. It is to carry forward the principles and intellectual confidence that enabled them to meet their world.

The future I seek is one in which te reo Māori is ordinary and authoritative: spoken in homes, on marae, in education, workplaces, public institutions and digital environments. Our children should not have to choose between cultural strength and participation in the wider world.

It is a future in which iwi-specific language remains audible. National success should not be purchased through the disappearance of local voices. Each hapū and iwi should have the resources to record, teach and renew its own reo. Te reo Māori should be funded and free for to learn.

It is a future in which mātauranga Māori is not treated merely as a set of values placed beside established knowledge. Mātauranga is a body of knowledge: understood, applied, tested, transmitted and developed through generations. It adds value because it offers distinctive concepts, methods and relationships through which we can address contemporary challenges.

I offer five commitments arising from my research and experience.

First, we must grow speakers and domains of use together. Language learning cannot end at the classroom door. Te reo Māori must be heard wherever decisions are made, knowledge is created, and our people live their daily lives.

Second, we must restore the distinctive reo of iwi and hapū. Resources, archives and wānanga should enable communities to recover their own vocabulary, idiom, pronunciation and narrative traditions, pūrākau, tikanga.

Third, we must reconnect language to whenua, whakapapa and practice. A living language is sustained through relationships and use, not through word lists alone.

Fourth, we must uphold mana Māori over Mātauranga Māori. Data sovereignty, intellectual property, tikanga and consent must shape research and technology from the outset.

Fifth, we must invest in the next generation as knowledge creators, not only knowledge recipients. Our rangatahi should be supported to compose new waiata, conduct research, develop technologies, lead institutions and extend mātauranga Māori into fields we cannot yet imagine.

He kupu whakakapi

As I bring this inaugural professorial lecture to a close, I return to its title: *Ko te Reo te Mauri o te Mana Māori*.

E te Arikinui, e te Wiki o Te Reo Māori:

Tino rangatiratangatia te Reo: Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato is a Taone Reo Māori, Te Tohu Paetahi he toa nō te rauora!

In Tohekura, I have seen uri return physically, linguistically and spiritually to Te Whakatōhea.

Mana Motuhaketia te Taiao: Through kapa haka, I have seen history become embodied and carried by new generations. Creating mana motuhake environments, cultural, social and economic. Ōhanga ki te Ao. He uri nō te Raupatu, he toa nō te Rauora!

Tino rangatiranga te Hauora: Through Te Hāhi Ringatū, empowering our iwi through whakaponu, belief in ourselves. Health in body mind and wairua.

Mana motuhaketia te pāharakeke: I have learned again that language, spirituality and identity cannot be separated. Through teaching, I have seen students recognise that their whakapapa is not an obstacle to scholarship, but a source of intellectual authority. Through research, I have seen what becomes possible when communities are treated not as subjects of knowledge, but as its owners, interpreters and creators.

This professorship is therefore not a conclusion. It is another point of responsibility. I accept the honour with gratitude to my whānau, hapū, iwi, teachers, colleagues, students and communities. Their aspirations will continue to guide my work.

We must receive the taonga from those before us, restore what has been diminished, use it courageously in the present, and pass it forward with greater strength. The future of our people will not be secured by preservation alone. It will be secured by active transmission, creative use, cultural authority and the confidence to think beyond the limit's others have placed upon us.

Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori.

Ka ora te reo, ka ora te mātauranga.

Ka ora te mātauranga, ka ora te tuakiri.

Ka ora te tuakiri, ka ora te mana Māori motuhake o te iwi.

He uri ahau nō te Raupatu, he toa nō te Rauora

Tākiri tū te Kotahitanga! Tākiri tū te mana Māori motuhake! (Kīngi Tūheitia Pōtatau Te Wherowhero Tuawhiti, 2023).