

Making space for Kaupapa Māori within the academy

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Abstract: Eketone's target article, 'The theoretical underpinnings of Kaupapa Māori directed practice' makes a significant contribution to a nascent literature on Kaupapa Māori theory. He offers a model that integrates Critical Theory and constructivism (particularly Native theory), and this dual-pronged approach is both complementary and sensible. More importantly, the model helps to clarify the objectives of Kaupapa Māori theory and practice, thereby achieving a more just society via emancipatory action in pursuit of Māori advancement and development 'as Māori'. While there is value in the potential utility of the proposed model, one can challenge the assumption implied in Eketone's use of the term 'the Māori community'. Eketone has raised the issue of whether or not centring Kaupapa Māori within western theoretical frameworks is regressive or progressive to the advancement of Māori peoples. The answer could be that both are possible and the question certainly deserves further consideration. Finally, I draw attention to what may be the greatest challenge for those who seek to advance the goals of Kaupapa Māori in 'making space' within the academy.

Keywords: constructivism; Critical Theory; culture; indigenous peoples; indigenous research; Kaupapa Māori theory; Māori academics; Māori community; language rights

First, the model proposed by Eketone to integrate the key theoretical elements of Critical Theory and constructivism is sensible and useful. His model clearly shows that the two paradigms, although often focused on quite different concerns (constructivism with the social construction and validation of knowledge and Critical Theory with oppression and emancipation) are not necessarily in conflict. In fact, they are complementary in that Critical Theory concerns itself with the 'macro' factors of oppression and emancipation, while constructivism is focused on the 'micro' or specific, idiosyncratic and local construction and validation of knowledge. Theoretically, we have a model more robust than the former (Critical Theory only) which remains to be tested by academics and practitioners for its usefulness and appropriateness (see Eketone, 2008, Figure 1).

Anaru Eketone is a former practitioner who worked in Māori communities in South Auckland and Otago but is now an academic in the field of social work. He states that his community work experience did not match with academic descriptions of Kaupapa Māori (especially with regard to the work of Bishop & Glynn, 1999; G. H. Smith, 2000 and others) and that this provided motivation for his present work. His approach involves expanding on the current dominant theoretical model of Kaupapa Māori from one aligned with or based on Critical Theory, to one based on both Critical Theory and constructivism. The mismatch he mentions may not be surprising as virtually all the early writing on Kaupapa Māori theory came from Māori educationalists who were seeking to theorise the practice of Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori. From my own experience as a Māori educationalist these were and continue to be contexts where conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis are very much a part of everyday life, though they may not necessarily be known by those terms. I would argue that the mismatch experienced by Eketone is not so much the result of a mismatch between the educationalists and the 'Māori community', but more likely it is attributable to Māori educationalists and Māori practitioners from other sectors (like health and welfare) emerging from different paradigms of training to view Māori issues from a different vantage.

Regardless of what part of the Māori community an academic may come from, Eketone makes a valid point that no Māori academic can afford to ignore; that is when attacks come from outside our communities, we must as academics be prepared to articulate a robust theoretical defence of Kaupapa Māori practice. Eketone challenges Rata's contention that Kaupapa Māori educational initiatives have antecedents in Nazi ideology and anti-democratic tendencies because they are based on genetic inheritance. Eketone counters that it is not genetic inheritance but a shared culture and experience of oppression upon which Kaupapa Māori initiatives are based. I would add that there is a fundamental and obvious difference between Nazi ideology and Kaupapa Māori—namely that Kaupapa Māori is open to anyone! Pākehā children and their families are welcome at Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori, as long as they are willing to respect the culture and language of Māori people. It is nonsense to suggest that Kaupapa Māori education is anti-democratic. In fact, making provision for the linguistic and cultural development of indigenous peoples within modern nation states is being increasingly acknowledged as more democratic because it provides support for one of the most basic human rights, that is the right to speak your own language (May, 2004).

An important question to ask is: whether or not centring Kaupapa Māori within a western theoretical paradigm will advance the goals of Kaupapa Māori? Currently there is no consensus about this from Māori academics. On the one hand, Eketone (p. 3) cites Kiro and her assertion that Kaupapa Māori is quite clearly Friereian in orientation, and therefore centred on Critical Theory; while on the other hand, Bishop (cited in Smith, 1999, p. 186) states that Kaupapa Māori has developed in response to the failure of Critical Theory to deliver on its emancipatory goal. In between is Graham Smith who suggests that Kaupapa Māori is aligned with, but not centred on, Critical Theory (also cited in Smith (1999, p. 186).

Despite these different views of alignment, the most substantive gains made in pursuit of the goals of Kaupapa Māori since colonisation have not come as a result of a concerted effort from within the academy. They come from the 'flax' roots (such as Kohanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, Ataarangi, Māori Women's Welfare and Wānanga). This is not to say that Eketone's model is not valuable. Often momentum generated at the flax roots level can be capitalised on and theorised by academics and can ultimately support culturally appropriate research capacity within the academy (this is the primary purpose of Māori initiatives like Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, MANU AO and a host of other Māori units based within academic institutions).

Wherever the best theoretical allegiance may lie for Kaupapa Māori practice, the debate holds a defining challenge for Māori academics. The nature of this challenge is best articulated by Cheryl Waerea-i-te-rangi Smith. Smith calls on Māori academics to stop leaving their culture 'at the door' in order to participate in the academy. She recalls the introduction of Māori language and culture into the academy (at Auckland University) and describes this process as making Māori knowledge and beliefs palatable for Pākehā consumption (C. W. Smith, 2000). Perhaps this is what Eketone is getting at when he asks if centring Kaupapa Māori on Critical Theory might be negating 1000 years of Māori knowledge. However, it was surprising that Eketone did not consider the issue of Māori spirituality to be of significance. For many Māori, spirituality lies at the heart of Kaupapa Māori. Theorising Kaupapa Māori practice while playing down the issue of spirituality might be more of the same thing that C. Smith has taken issue with. She challenges Māori academics to continue to 'make space' for Māori ways of being. Our most fundamental beliefs about the connection between the 'seen' and 'unseen', that all things are living and have a mauri, that the dead should be called upon or directly addressed at appropriate times, have often been 'left at the door' so we might participate in the academy. If the goals of Kaupapa Māori are to be achieved, the time has come for us to refresh our commitment to this challenge.

In summary, Eketone has contributed in a meaningful way to the ongoing debate that seeks to articulate the theoretical underpinnings for Kaupapa Māori practice. He offers a useful model

that remains to be investigated by academics and practitioners as their situations dictate. His observations of an apparent mismatch between Māori community definitions and Māori academic definitions of Kaupapa Māori highlight the diversity of Māori communities and this is no surprise. Such diversity provides a rationale for the integration of Critical Theory and constructivism into a single model. The model needs to be further articulated, critiqued, and when necessary defended. Māori spirituality must remain central to the investigation, and so must the challenge for academics to continue to 'make space' for Kaupapa Māori within the Academy. These issues are part of the territory for anyone committed to Kaupapa Māori and are likely to remain so for a good while to come. We ought to expect this to continue, at least until speaking, thinking, feeling, behaving and being Māori becomes accepted as 'the norm' in our country and within the Pākehā academy, as Eketone asks rhetorically: isn't this what we are striving for?

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