

Nā Rangi tāua, nā Tūānuku e takoto nei: Research methodology framed by whakapapa

James Graham

Abstract: This paper explores how traditional and contemporary interpretations of whakapapa can be applied by Māori researchers when engaging in research with Māori communities today. It is through whakapapa that the organisation of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all things legitimates a Māori world-view, which is at the heart of Māori knowledge, Māori ways of knowing and Māori ways of acquiring new knowledge. Accordingly, a research methodology framed by whakapapa not only authenticates Māori epistemology and its rightful place among research traditions, it also supports the notion of whakapapa research methodology throughout the indigenous world; indigenous peoples researching among their indigenous communities worldwide. Indigenous identity is strengthened, as is the contribution of the notion of whakapapa to Indigenous research paradigms worldwide.

Keywords: Indigenous; Māori epistemology; research methodology; whakapapa

Introduction

This paper is drawn from the author's PhD research that utilises the Māori notion of whakapapa as the basis for a research framework enabling Māori researchers to engage in research among their own Māori communities. The discussion explicates the application of both a traditional and a contemporary illumination of whakapapa and its application to Māori research by Māori people among their Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. While the notion of whakapapa as a research framework is the core theme of this research paper, the paper develops this theme from the outset by establishing a context that locates a Māori worldview. These discussions explicate the relevance and connection that whakapapa has with a specific research community; namely, a Māori boarding school in Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, a justification for the application of a whakapapa based research methodology when engaging in research with Māori communities is made. Further, given the distinctive characteristics that emanate from a unique connection with land and the environment, for indigenous people in general, this paper advocates a connection between Māori research and indigenous people worldwide, researching among their respective communities.

Māori notions of whakapapa

What exactly then is whakapapa? According to Barlow (1991, p. 173) "whakapapa is the genealogical descent of all living things from the gods to the present time; whakapapa is a basis for the organisation of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all things". Whakapapa is one of the most prized forms of knowledge and great efforts are made to preserve it. Buck (1949) for instance, referred to expressions of learning as comprising the "sequential ordering of the phenomena of nature before arriving at a genealogical table of human descent and saw such action as providing an opportunity for the expert to add length and prestige to the human line of descent" (p. 433). Whakapapa for example is the credential that gives the author licence to be Māori; whakapapa identifies who I am, where I am from and in doing so identifies a place that I can proudly call my tūrangawaewae. It is this whakapapa knowledge that gives an individual or collective a sense of purpose that as Te Rito

(2007a) reflects, grounds us to Papatūānuku. For instance, my whakapapa and iwi affiliations are my biological and kinship credentials that form my Māori identity and by alluding to my tūrangawaewae I have established a connection to my wāhi tapu.

While tribal histories are distinctive, Māori traditions have their foundations in the creation of the universe that have been maintained and retold through narrative discourse for centuries and therefore have played an important function in mātauranga Māori transmission (Roberts, Haami, Benton, Satterfield, Finucane, Henare and Henare, 2004). Durie (1998) recognises the diversity among tribal traditions but also alludes to the capacity to generalise to the point that narratives concerning the creation traditions are effectively “representative of the genesis of Māori thought” (p. 144).

Walker (1990) expands our understanding of the creation of the universe further by explaining it in three stages “te kore as a state of potential, te pō as the celestial realm, the domain of the Gods and the source of all mana and tapu, and lastly te ao mārama the world of light and reality, the dwelling place of human beings” (p. 11). Māori oral narratives for instance in the form of waiata, described the formation of the universe in a language and framework based on whakapapa or genealogical descent that brought congruent forms of life together, engendering new life form (see Royal, 2003). These interactions eventually materialised as a lattice of relationships connecting people and places; and were invigorated by mutual exchanges as Salmond (1997) states where “tapu, or cosmic power, was the source of all creation bringing together complementary forms of life, generating new beings” (p. 401).

This paper has so far established an epistemological Māori knowledge base by providing examples of what whakapapa means, the traditions associated with the inter-generational transmission of whakapapa and how whakapapa is validated. A contemporary view recognises that whakapapa can be seen as a shared illumination of the interconnections between people and their spiritual and physical connections to the land and not just collective biological connections. Therefore, within the context of this paper, a number of explanations are introduced that culminate in the idea that whakapapa:

- Represents the genealogical descent of living things;
- Legitimises Māori epistemology;
- Is at the heart of Māori ways of knowing and mātauranga Māori and;
- Provides the basis for the organisation of Māori knowledge.

Whakapapa: The research framework and theory

In keeping with Māori traditions, whakapapa becomes the most fundamental aspect of the way Māori think about and come to know the world (King, 1981). Whakapapa is acknowledged as a way of thinking, a way of storing knowledge and a way of debating knowledge (Smith, 1999). This paper therefore contends that whakapapa is also a means and way to acquire new knowledge. It is an important link between the past, present and future. For instance, as an indigenous Māori person of Aotearoa New Zealand, through whakapapa, the past qualifies my ethnicity and position in society today. Secondly, as a Māori researcher researching among my own Māori community, whakapapa again qualifies my role and position. Therefore, by using the skills and knowledge acquired from Māori traditions to accumulate Māori knowledge and examine this knowledge; the capacity to progress is tenable and achievable. As a research framework, a whakapapa research methodology exercises tikanga Māori to guide the research, explicating the inseparable links between the supernatural, land and humanity. The concept of whakapapa is consequently the all-inclusive interweaving mechanism that provides a legitimate foundation from which Māori research

can be conducted and validated today. Whakapapa thus provides the space for Māori knowledge and is a means of considering the world thereby separating Māori-centred research from Western research perspectives.

Royal (1998) in developing Te Ao Mārama: A research paradigm, illustrated its strength as a medium from which the past is drawn upon to enthuse contemporary Māori theorising and philosophical reflection. In doing so, whakapapa was identified as an analytical tool traditionally used by Māori to understand “the nature of phenomena, the origin of phenomena, the connections and relationships to other phenomena, describing trends in phenomena, locating phenomena and extrapolating and predicting future phenomena” (p. 4). That is, in order to explain the presence of a phenomenon, a process of understanding how that particular phenomenon came to exist is explored. How did it come about and what was responsible for its presence? Once these questions have been answered, then this same process can be repeated at this new level and at preceding levels until as such time the researcher has attained the objectives applicable to this analytical process. An important aspect of this research paradigm is the prediction of future phenomena and so, of particular interest is the observation that whakapapa as a research methodology is seen to be organic rather than deconstructive. That is, while whakapapa allows Māori to trace their descent back through the generations, whakapapa also permits movement and growth in the future. This paper develops the theorising of the Te Ao Mārama research paradigm by extending the characteristics of its design to include biological and non-biological ties between the researcher and the research community. Thus, whakapapa noticeably provides the space for indigenous theorising, philosophical reflection and research outside of a common colonial experience (Royal, 2002).

Indigenous Māori researchers have taken up this position and continue to develop and model indigenous Māori perspectives and models of research today. Consequently, whakapapa provides this space and in doing so, validates the rights and obligations of Māori to utilise this space. That is, the whakapapa infrastructure already exists throughout the Māori world and therefore the impetus is on knowing this knowledge and overtly expressing it in a manner that it can be used as a legitimate research methodology. For instance, there is the capacity for the researcher to construct a research framework that embraces the past, present and future to acquire knowledge in order to seek new knowledge. The whakapapa nature of this process is examined by Williams (2007) who speaks of a research framework scaffolded by whakapapa and how “this plan should go forward in time as a general template or model for future research activity” (p. 3). A Māori worldview is already valid and so it is not necessary to validate it, rather it is necessary for Māori researchers to challenge such knowledge when conducting research among Māori communities today in order for its application as a research methodology to be recognised, accepted and therefore legitimised. Challenging and questioning our research techniques as well as the research itself can only serve to strengthen our discipline, thus resulting in a position where whakapapa:

- Legitimises Māori knowledge;
- Provides the basis for the organisation of this Māori knowledge and;
- Is a means and a way of acquiring new knowledge being the all-important link between the past, present and the future.

Whakapapa and indigeneity

Though this research stems from a Māori philosophical base the questions, ideas and discussions that arise from the research are relevant to indigenous peoples worldwide. Land, humanity and the supernatural are co-dependent entities among indigenous traditions; they co-exist and do so by sequenced networks of relationships (whakapapa) linking each entity and maintained by oral narratives and traditions. Despite the cultural heterogeneity among the indigenous peoples of the world a unique spiritual relationship with the land underpins a

belief commonly shared by indigenous peoples that is an impression of unity and harmony with the environment (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992). The assumptions of this innate connection to land assume that, like Māori, indigenous communities throughout the world are at one with their land and so as Durie (2003) states, "people are the land and the land is the people and the tradition is reflected in song, custom, subsistence, work, approaches to healing and birthing, and the rituals associated with death" (p. 298).

The importance of land to the indigenous peoples of the world is reflected on by North American indigenous academic, Deloria (1994) when he stated that "most tribes were reluctant to surrender their homelands to the whites because they knew that their ancestors were still spiritually alive on the land" (pp. 172-73). Durie (2005) notes that these observations underline the "importance of the physical, social and spiritual environments as well as the intergenerational connection to land and the importance of land to the wellbeing and health of the people" (p. 303). Whakapapa and the connections among people have materialised such relationships connecting the indigenous with land. Whakapapa has also provided the basis for the organisation of indigenous knowledge.

Dei, Hall and Rosenberg (2000) refer to indigenous knowledge systems as "traditional norms and social values, and mental constructs that guide, organise, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world" (p. 6). While the word whakapapa is uniquely Māori, all peoples of the world have their own whakapapa. The emphasis of this indigenous approach to research therefore centres on the importance of being able to engage in research with one's own community by developing and employing a research framework developed from indigenous constructs specific to one's own indigenous community. Such practices will naturally assume an indigenous worldview as their epistemological base and this is already occurring across indigenous communities worldwide. For instance, indigenous models of practice have already been developed and implemented and include language revitalisation programmes, health initiatives and environmental management programmes (Durie, 2003, 2005; Royal, 2002; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Howitt, Connell and Hirsch, 1996). The Māori notion of whakapapa and its associated tikanga Māori that form the foundations of this research's methodology can thus demonstrate a research framework that indigenous people can freely choose to adopt, adapt and utilise for their own means.

Whakapapa: A research framework

The importance of whakapapa is especially pertinent where its application as a legitimate approach to research by Māori, about Māori, for Māori has its foundations in indigenous belief systems unique to Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore, while whakapapa literally concerns the retention of family bloodlines and ancestry, this paper also asserts that at a research level today, whakapapa concerns the birth of new knowledge in order to maintain and develop a Māori knowledge base that is inherently indigenous. Accordingly, it is anticipated that for the purposes of this research, a whakapapa-based approach to research will be able to address a number of specific research questions including:

- What is the meaning of research?
- What is the research for?
- What is the relevance of the research?
- What are the benefits of the research?

It is at this point that whakapapa moulds the research process; providing directions, guiding present and future research and maintaining a degree of adaptability (Williams, 2007). While this approach upholds a personal element in terms of connecting the researcher, research community and research framework, it is simultaneously opened to being challenged and contested (Graham, 2005; Williams, 2007) and thus maintains its rigour. The contemporary

meaning and purpose of whakapapa has been shaped by the passage of time, history, experiences, traditions and a Māori worldview. It is also envisaged that future pathways of Māori will continue to be guided by whakapapa. It is therefore appropriate that a whakapapa approach to this research is acknowledged as being legitimate too in order that new knowledge regarding Māori ways of knowing, doing and being may accompany the movement of Māori further into the 21st century.

Pan-tribal institutions

The once geographically distinct Māori tribal communities live and meet together today in a variety of contexts and so today's Māori institutions are not essentially connected through blood ties. It is a common phenomenon among Māori tribes today to function in a pan-tribal nature; especially in urban settings and national forums. There have been examples of pan-tribalism movements throughout Aotearoa New Zealand's history since the first European colonisers arrived in the early 19th century and examples are the Kotahitanga movement (Cox, 1993), Māori boarding schools (Smith, 1996), the Māori Battalions of World Wars One and Two (Gardiner, 1992), the New Zealand Māori Women's Welfare League (Rogers & Simpson, 1993), Urban Marae (Salmond, 2004), Te Kōhanga Reo (Irwin, 1990) and Māori Health and Education Providers (International Research Institute for Māori and indigenous Education, 2002). Māori urbanisation increased around the middle of the 20th century and saw the isolation of Māori from their iwi, hapū and tūrangawaewae. Consequently there was the propensity for the erosion of traditional connections to one's marae and hapū (Te Rito, 2007b). While urban and whānau contexts varied in the urban environment, the nature of pan-tribalism and the forging of kinship ties grew stronger. Today Māori communities and social groupings are associated through a range of interconnecting dynamics that includes similarities in history, experiences, ideals, services, interests and practices.

Māori pan-tribal institutions continually serve to maintain the kinship connections among the diversity of Māori tribes within each community or organisation where this kinship is validated by both biological and non-biological affiliations. For instance, the connections within Māori institutions today are strengthened by whanaungatanga and whānau. These concepts have had a lasting impact on Māori boarding schools given the tribal diversity among the numbers of students that have entered these institutions for over 150 years.

The Māori boarding schools

The advent of increased European immigration in the mid-19th century in Aotearoa New Zealand and the establishment of a Settler Government in 1852 brought about the formation of the Māori boarding schools system, a State mechanism to educate Māori and provide Māori with the ostensible means to survive in the new world (Simon, 2001). The Education Ordinance of 1847 provided Government grants to the various missionary denominations to establish elementary schools for Māori. These schools were funded partly by land endowments with contributions from the Government and from Māori and were supported by annual Government grants. Māori boarding school education is unique in that it is underpinned by tikanga Māori as well as distinctive religious denominational backgrounds. Bearing these characteristics in mind, the Māori boarding schools hold proud rolls of successive generations within individual Māori families who have attended these schools. In many instances today, there are many Māori families who still have a connection to their school where the notion of individuals attending these schools is an institution itself. That is, up to and including today, some Māori families have had successive generations attend these schools since their establishment in the mid-19th century (Wehipeihana, 2005).

In terms of this research, there is an assertion that the basis of this family connection links to the notion of whakapapa. Each school has become intimately linked to members of Māori families by virtue of family choice to attend these schools based on religious denomination and the schools' unique tikanga Māori characteristics. In doing so, whakapapa is recognised as a common denominator that has interconnected with individual families, the students and alumni of their respective Māori boarding schools. From a Māori perspective, the Māori boarding schools are also recognised as having a whakapapa that is interwoven with the past, present and future; including distinctive Māori oral traditions, histories and events relevant to their settings and, therefore to their students. Accordingly, one of the six remaining Māori boarding schools in operation today - Te Aute College, is the topic of this PhD research that has embraced a research methodological framework based on the notion of whakapapa. It is this whakapapa framework that facilitates an examination of the multiple layers of Te Aute College.

The research community

A special feature of the research is the reality that while Te Aute College is a Māori boys boarding school, it also has a special link to the tangata whenua of its region in that it was the local Māori tribe who, in a partnership with the Government, bequeathed the land for the establishment of Te Aute College. The land therefore has a physical and spiritual connection to the research community that dates back to the creation of the universe that is consistent with a Māori worldview introduced earlier. The whakapapa connection therefore is recognised as being multi-layered in that it underpins many aspects of how the institution functions. For instance, at one level whakapapa facilitates the institution's behaviour by upholding the use of a distinctive tribal kawa that guides certain tikanga Māori as opposed to those belonging to other tribes from other regions. At another level, whakapapa evokes whanaungatanga, a concept that links with kinship and whose Western equivalent is brotherhood.

Another feature of this research is the connection between the researcher and the research community. Whakapapa links the researcher to the local tribe in which Te Aute College is located and the researcher is also a past student of Te Aute College meaning that the researcher's genealogical ties with the research community include non-biological or whanaungatanga ties. Therefore within the context of this research, whakapapa is viewed as a shared illumination of all relationships between Māori and not just their collective biological connections. While an essentialist viewpoint of whakapapa might diverge on the discourse that supports a contemporary standpoint on whakapapa as being inclusive of non-biological relationships, the reality for the research community is that there are biological and non-biological connections that have their pedigree grounded in whakapapa. There are spiritual connections that stem from Te Aute College being built on land that was provided by the local tribe. Accordingly, there are hapū, land and tikanga Māori connections. There are also physical interactions that have been borne out of the generations of students who have entered the portals of Te Aute College where a whanaungatanga connection with each other has transpired, a phenomenon validated through tradition, experience and history.

Summary & conclusions

Whakapapa is innately woven throughout the fabric of Māori society and inherently relates with both traditional and contemporary Māori society. The acquisition of new knowledge today is a similar process in that Māori ways of knowing and doing continually develop and are applied to our understanding of the world irrespective of time and place. Māori research today endeavours to preserve connections to past traditions that have stood the test of time in

the quest for advancement. This notion is reflected in a whakapapa based dichotomy that gives rise to one, the advancing of the descent line through the birth of human life and two, the advancing of our understanding of the world through research and new knowledge. In order to gain an understanding of the future, whakapapa recalls the past and examines the present-day. Te Aute College is an educational institution that caters to pan-tribal needs while at the same time fulfilling its tangata whenua obligations and so whakapapa links Te Aute College to Māori community development as well as to the development of Aotearoa New Zealand as a nation since the mid-19th century.

This paper has discussed the capacity to transplant the underlying foundations of a Māori whakapapa based research framework across indigenous communities world-wide based upon the intrinsic bond that the indigenous share with their lands. As the literature base of indigenous knowledge and research develops internationally with greater intercommunication and interrelations; the transparency and access to such knowledge will become more readily available for indigenous scholars to utilise, challenge and develop further for their own means.

The very nature of a whakapapa methodological approach supports a never-ending process where new research gives birth to subsequent research and so on as the knowledge transmission process takes place. Accordingly, this paper suggests that the potential exists to undertake further research on the advantages of a whakapapa research framework and its relevance to indigenous research. Te Rito (2007b) refers to whakapapa providing links among Māori as well as to other communities beyond our shores and so potential research can certainly embrace the explication of the notion of pan-tribalism to be inclusive of the wider indigenous community. In this manner, whakapapa not only permeates the actual research framework (Williams, 2007) but it also serves to represent wider indigenous contexts by binding such communities and institutions together through land, tikanga and whanaungatanga. The importance of the physical, spiritual and social environments to indigenous communities worldwide is not only important within a research context but to the overall wellbeing and health of the people too (Durie, 2005). Collaboration of a pan-tribal nature, indeed of an indigenous wide nature in research across a range of fields will serve to benefit indigenous communities worldwide and provide the infrastructure from which developments can assist the advancement of the people.

References

- Barlow, C. (1991). *Tikanga whakaaro: Key concepts in Māori culture*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Buck, P. (1949). *The coming of the Māori*. Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd.
- Cox, L. (1993). *Kotahitanga: The search for Māori political unity*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Dei, G. J. S., Hall, B. L. & Rosenberg, D. G. (2000). *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.
- Deloria, V. (1994). *God is red: A native view of religion*. Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing.
- Durie, A. E. (1998). Me tipu ake te pono: Māori research, ethicality and development. In Te Pumanawa Hauora (Ed.). *Proceedings of Te Oru Rangahau Māori Research and Development Conference*. Palmerston North: School of Māori Studies, Massey University.

- Durie, M. H. (2003). *Ngā kāhui pou: Launching Māori futures*. Wellington: Huia Publishers Ltd.
- Durie, M. H. (2005). Indigenous knowledge within a global knowledge system, in *Higher Education Policy*, 18, 301-312.
- Gardiner, W. H. (1992). *Te mura o te ahi: The story of the Māori battalion*. Auckland: Reed Publishers.
- Graham, J. P. H. (2005). He āpiti hono, he tātai hono: That which is joined remains an unbroken line - Using whakapapa (genealogy) as the basis for an Indigenous Research framework. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*. 34, 86-95.
- International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education. (2002). *Iwi and Māori provider success: A research report of interviews with successful Iwi and Māori providers and Government agencies - A report prepared by The International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education*. Wellington: Ministry of Māori Development.
- Irwin, K. (1990). The politics of te kōhanga reo in Middleton, S., Codd, J., & Jones, A. (Eds.). *Critical perspectives: New Zealand education policy today*. Wellington: Allen & Unwin.
- Howitt, R., Connell, J., & Hirsch, P. (Eds.). (1996). *Resources, nations and Indigenous peoples*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Kame'eiehiwa, L. (1992). *Native land and foreign desires*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- King, M. (Ed.). (1981). *Te ao hurihuri: The world moves on - Aspects of Māoritanga*. Auckland: Longman Paul Ltd.
- Roberts, M., Haami, B., Benton, R., Satterfield, T., Finucane, M.L., Henare, M., & Henare, M. (2004). Whakapapa as a Māori mental construct: Some implications for the debate over genetic modification of organisms. In *The Contemporary Pacific*. 16,(1), 1-28.
- Rogers, A. and Simpson, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Early stories from founding members of the Māori Women's Welfare League: Te tīmatanga tātau tātau, te rōpū wāhine Māori toko i te ora - as told to Dame Mira Szaszy*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited.
- Royal, T. A. (1998). Te ao mārama: A research paradigm. In Te Pumanawa Hauora (Ed.), *Proceedings of Te Oru Rangahau Māori Research and Development Conference*. Palmerston North: School of Māori Studies, Massey University.
- Royal, T. A. (2002). *Indigenous worldviews: A comparative study - A report on research in progress*. Wellington: Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.
- Royal, T. A. (2003). *The woven universe - Selected writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*. Otaki: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden.
- Salmond, A. (1997). *Between worlds: Early exchanges between Māori and Europeans*. Auckland: Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd.
- Salmond, A. (2004). *Hui: A study of Māori ceremonial gatherings*. Auckland: Reed Publishers.

- Semali, L.M. & Kincheloe, J.L. (Eds.). (1999). *What is Indigenous knowledge: Voices from the academy*. New York: Palmer Press.
- Simon, J. (Ed.). (2001). *A civilising mission? Perceptions and representations of the native schools system*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Smith, G. H. (1996). *The Māori boarding schools: A study of the barriers and constraints to academic achievement and re-positioning the schools for academic success*. Auckland: Education Department, University of Auckland.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: Otago University Press.
- Te Rito, S. J. (2007a). Whakapapa: A framework for understanding identity. *MAI Review*, 2, Article 2, 10 pages.
- Te Rito, S. J. (2007b). Whakapapa and whenua: An insider's view. *MAI Review*, 3, Article 1, 8 pages.
- Walker, R. (1990). *Struggle without end - Ka whawhai tonu mātou*. Auckland: Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd.
- Wehipeihana, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Celebrating 150 years of achievement - Te Aute College*. Te Aute College, Pukehou, New Zealand.
- Williams, L. R. T. (2007). Whakapapa of research: Frameworks for both subject fields and individual development. *MAI Review*, 3, Career Workshop 1, 4 pages.

Author notes

The author expresses gratitude to all those persons and groups who have participated in this research including the wider whānau of Te Aute College.

James Graham (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngai Te Whatuiāpiti) is a lecturer at Massey University College of Education based at the Ruawharo Centre, Napier, New Zealand.

E-mail: J.Graham@massey.ac.nz