

The New Wānanga-Scholarship arising from the Creative Potential of Mātauranga Māori¹

Te Ahukaramū

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Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

Interest in mātauranga Māori has increased considerably in recent years. Since the advent of Māori medium education institutions, claims before the Waitangi Tribunal, Māori broadcasting and more, mātauranga Māori is enjoying a renaissance as a distinctive body of knowledge capable of making distinctive contributions to a range of activities in our nation's life and culture. My purpose today is to advocate to you the idea of the 'creative potential of mātauranga Māori'. However, as I am sure I will be preaching to the converted, I thought I would also speak more broadly about the new kinds of scholarship and wānanga activities that are and will be required if we are to realise this creative potential. So let me begin with a working definition of mātauranga Māori.

A Working Definition of Mātauranga Māori: Orientating ourselves

With respect to the meaning of the terms 'mātauranga Māori', I am guided by Sir Apirana Ngata's use of the terms in a letter published in *Te Pīpīwharau* in 1900. Sir Apirana tells us that he attended a meeting in Wellington convened by the Wairarapa elder Tamahau Mahupuku. Apirana explains:

Ko te kupu nui tēnei o ngā huihuinga ki Pōneke i tēnei tau, ahakoa te maha o ngā kupu e puaki ana i ngā tāngata mātau i reira o ngā tikanga e hāngaia ana e ngā rangatira o te motu mō ngā pire i kōkiritia ki Te Whare Pāremata. Nā Tamahau Mahupuku i whakatakoto te take hei tirohanga mā ngā tāngata whai mahara o ia iwi, o ia iwi, arā, kia tukua ki ngā taitamariki ngā kupu me ngā whakahaere mō te iwi a ēnei rā e tū mai nei.²

Among the many things said at this year's meetings held in Wellington – including many things concerning various Bills presented before Parliament - the most important statement was Tamahau Mahupuku's suggestion that the young people be encouraged into positions of leadership and responsibilities.

Inspired perhaps by the conclusion of the 19th century and the arrival of the 20th, Apirana's letter elaborates on the theme of the succession of the next generation. He invokes the well-known, 'Ka pū te rūhā, ka hao te rangatahi':

Kāti ake ngā kaumātua hei tautoko. Ka haupū te kupenga tawhito ki uta, ki ngā parenga o ngā wai tauraki ai ki te rā, ka maroke, ka pakapaka. Kua taha ngā rā i hao ai i te ika o te moana, o te wai māori; ka waiho hei tirohanga kanohi, hei mihi mā nga tira e tuku ana ki te wai, 'Tēnā koutou ngā kaihao o ērā rangi, te manawa o te iti o te rahi.' Kua pū te ruha. Ka tuku ki te wai ko te kupenga hou, nō nanahi

¹ A paper delivered to a conference on Rongoā Māori, Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, Ōtaki, 10 January 2006

² Macrons added.

tata nei i whatua ai, he pakari i te mea e hou ana ngā whiri, kāore anō i pūngohe i te ia o te wai, i te taimaha o te haonga ika. Ka hao ko te rangatahi.

It is for the elders to support. The old nets are piled on shore, at the water's edge where they dry out and perish in the sun. Their fishing days have now passed and they are now lauded by the new fishing parties who head for the water. "Greetings to the fishermen of yesterday, the heart of the great and small". They have been exhausted. The new net goes fishing, the one who was woven only yesterday. It is strong because its bindings are new. They have not been stretched and stressed through the weight of fishing. The new net goes fishing.

Apirana's letter arrives at 'mātauranga Māori' in its later passages:

...kei pōhēhē te Iwi Māori, ko te mātauranga e whakawhiwhia ana ki ngā tamariki i ngā kura ko te mutunga mai tērā. Kāore, he tapatahi te āhua o tērā, ko te mātauranga o te taha Pākehā, ko te mātau ki te tuhituhi, ki te tatau, ki te kōrero pukapuka, ki te kōrero i ngā reo o ngā iwi Pākehā... Tērā atu anō te wāhi o te mātauranga e toe ana, arā, ko te whai kia matatau ki te āhua o te iwi Māori me ana tikanga. Kia taea ēnā ka āhei ai te kī, engari tēnā tangata kei waenganui e tū ana, kei te mātau ki te āhua o tētahi taha, o tētahi taha.

Lest we Māori think that the knowledge our children obtain at school is the only kind of knowledge. I say, no. This is but one kind of knowledge, knowledge of the European – writing, counting, reading and European languages... There is another body of knowledge and that concerns the Māori people and our customs. When a person has obtained this kind of knowledge, then he/she is truly knowledgeable of both 'sides'.

Finally, Apirana's letter speaks directly to the matter of mātauranga Māori and its relationship with other bodies of knowledge:

I pēnei ake ai te whakamārama kia ea ai tēnei pātai, ki hea tuku ai te kupenga, ki hea hao ai te rangatahi? Ko te whakautu, hei waenganui, kua hei ngā taunga tawhito i te wā o te Māoritanga, kua hei ngā taunga hou rawa o te Pākehā, engari hei waenganui, kei reira te mano o te ika e pōrangirangi noa ana. Ko ngā tohunga hei hao i taua waenganui nā, ko te rōpū i whakatapurua tahitia i roto i te mātauranga Pākehā, i te **mātauranga Māori**. Kei runga i a rātou te kupu nei, 'E hao rā e te rangatahi.'...

This explanation is offered so we may answer the question, "where shall we set out net?" The answer is between – not in the ancient conclusions of the time of our Māoritanga, nor in the entirely new conceptions of the European, but rather between. There the multitudes of the fish can be seen gathering. The kinds of experts appropriate to fish in this area are those who are dedicated and educated in both European and Māori knowledge. To this group is directed the expression "Go fishing, young fishing net..."

Apirana's symbolism employs the ancient idea of fishing and fishing nets. It is a powerful symbol renewed by every generation as it speaks meaningful to our experience for the search for knowledge and understanding. The sea represents both the source of life and the abode of knowledge. Fish provide sustenance and direction and the fishing ground is the mysterious floating ground in which this sustenance can be found. Apirana urges us not to set our nets in one fishing ground but between two – between the European and Māori ground where the fish can be seen intermingling.

Apirana's use of the terms 'mātauranga Māori' suggests that the name of the fishing ground itself is called 'mātauranga Māori'. It is a universal set of terms acting much like a basket into which all kinds of knowledge created by our ancestors is grouped and can be found. Following Apirana's example, we can think about a net or a basket perhaps and we can name this net, 'mātauranga Māori'. The name itself does not tell us much about what is in the net or basket, but it does one important thing – it tells us that 'mātauranga Māori' exists.

Following from this idea of 'mātauranga Māori' as a basket or a net, I use the following 'orientating statement' as a way of thinking about the meaning of the *terms* 'mātauranga Māori'. It reads as follows:

'Mātauranga Māori' is a modern term for a body of knowledge that was brought to these islands by Polynesian ancestors of present-day Māori. Here this body of knowledge grew according to life in Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu. Despite an initial period of change and growth, the arrival of European populations in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries brought major impacts to the life of this knowledge, endangering it many and substantial ways. All, however, was not lost as new knowledge was created through the encounter with the European and through the experience of the creation of the new nation called New Zealand. Important fragments and portions – notably the Māori language - remain today. These fragments and portions are catalysing a new creative period in Māori history and culture and in the life of the New Zealand nation.

I stress that this statement is about the net or the basket and has yet to tell us much about what can be found in this basket. This is our next task.

The Contents of the basket called 'Mātauranga Māori'

Now in suggesting that 'mātauranga Māori' refers to the whole continuum of knowledge from pre-Aotearoa days to the present, our next question is to ask, "What might we find in this basket of knowledge? What kinds of creativity can be found there?" There are a number of ways of thinking about the contents of the basket of mātauranga Māori. For many, this is a more meaningful way of thinking about 'mātauranga Māori' because it is more tangible. The contents of the 'basket' called 'mātauranga Māori' are tangible applications of knowledge which achieve certain ends in a living culture and society. Much as the people on shore await the contents of the fishing net rather than the net itself, many wish to see what is the practical effect or application of mātauranga Māori, in history and today.

One way of understanding the contents of ‘mātauranga Māori’ is by considering the traditional institutions of *pā* society. Interestingly enough, *pā* consisted of collections of institutions grouped in certain ways. Each institution represents a particular body of knowledge, a group of experts and a number of distinctive activities. With the fall of the *pā* in the 19th century, many of these *pā* institutions did not continue in the new arrangements and those that did often had to be artificially introduced into the one multi-purpose space called the modern *marae*. Our *marae* today are very much a product of 19th and 20th century colonisation and they had to serve many different kinds of purposes due to lack of resources and the diminishment of land owned by *iwi* and *hapū*. I suggest that it is now time to ‘break out’ of these artificial boundaries placed around our *marae* and create new institutions (this has already begun).

To return to our traditional institutions, there are a number and they are ways of thinking about the contents of the ‘basket of mātauranga Māori’. These institutions include:

- Te Whare Rūnanga – decision making, political centre
- Te Whare Wānanga – teaching, learning, creating
- Te Whare Pora – weaving arts
- Te Whare-tū-taua – military arts
- Te Whare Kōhanga – child birth, young children
- Te Whare Tapere – entertainment, dance, music

There are others such as *puhi* institution in which aristocratic girls are set aside and educated and trained in the traditions of their people³.

Another way of thinking about the contents of mātauranga Māori and its creative potential is by considering various traditional activities of our communities. Here are some examples:

- Ahuwhenua – land based activities
- Te Tahere Manu - birding
- Te Hī-ika - fishing
- Te Whakaora tūrora - healing
- Te Ngaki māra - gardening
- Te Hanga Whare - building
- Te Tārai Waka – canoe building

Finally, here is a brief list of items one can find when one looks into the history, traditions and culture of our *iwi*.

- Fabrics
- Perfumes

³ Our Ngāti Raukawa ancestress Te Rongorito is a good example of a young woman who was schooled in the *puhi* institution. She lived at a place called Te Marae-o-Hine, near Ōtorohanga.

- Cosmetics
- building materials
- cuisine
- art objects
- medicinal plants
- marine engineering
- Stories and storytelling, literature
- Music
- Dance
- Earthworks
- Rituals
- Building design
- Clothing

Perspectives on:

- knowledge,
- education, teaching and learning
- The nature of the expert
- Health and wellbeing
- Healing
- Environment (e.g. water, soil, seasonal activities)
- Dispute resolution

Hence, in looking at the contents of mātauranga Māori in this way, we can see that there are many things for us to explore and use in our lives today. It is for this reason that mātauranga Maori retains a good deal of creative potential and is able to make significant and distinctive contributions to a range of activities and enterprises in our nation's life and culture – including iwi, hapū and whānau. In order to achieve this however, a range of conditions and arrangements need to exist. I group these arrangements into a new *wānanga*-scholarship portions of which have already come into being in the past few years.

Realising this Creative Potential: Giving Birth to the New Wānanga-Scholarship

Given our understanding of the contents of mātauranga Māori and our interest to explore this knowledge with a view to creating enterprises and activities (applying mātauranga Māori), what is required is a new *wānanga*-scholarship which:

- is grounded in a solid understanding of pre-existing mātauranga Māori (various applications, portions, aspects etc.)
- possesses not only a significant understanding of applications of mātauranga Māori (e.g. raranga, for example) but also possesses a *whakahaere*, a set of methodologies for the use of aspects of mātauranga Māori in a creative activity

- fosters new experts, new *tohunga* whereby individuals are able to achieve excellence in their chosen field whilst ensuring that they act in ways that are harmonising of their community (iwi, hapū, whānau)
- possesses an openness to wisdom and knowledge from other cultures and traditions, an openness borne of a confidence derived from a deep knowledge of mātauranga Māori
- possesses a significant knowledge management system which takes into account such things as appropriate intellectual and cultural property arrangements, standards of validation and quality assurance and more

In advancing a new wānanga-scholarship designed to realise the creative potential of mātauranga Māori, there are a number of things we need to recognise.

The Contents of Mātauranga Māori exists in a fragmentary and incomplete form

The first thing to recognise is that mātauranga Māori exists in a fragmentary and incomplete form. Unfortunately, we do not have a complete knowledge and understanding of rongoā, for example. We need to be humble about this. We can also recognise that this can represent opportunities for us rather than being entirely problematic. As John Bevan Ford once said to me, “it is too late for some things, but it is just in time for others”.

The Sources of Mātauranga Māori are varied

In history, the sources of mātauranga Māori were people, particularly gifted individuals with expertise in their chosen fields. Today, however, the situation has changed somewhat. People, elders and experts particularly, still remain vitally important sources of mātauranga Māori, however, we now have a splendid written tradition. From the time of the arrival of literacy to our country, our ancestors embraced writing so much so that today one can read many, many splendid manuscripts, whakapapa books and so on, held by iwi, hapū and whānau, and, of course, held in public collections in libraries and archives. Finally, an important source of mātauranga Māori are the places and localities of the traditional concern of our people. These include mountains, rivers, valleys, caves, sacred sites, the sea and so on. There is much to be learnt by visiting these important places.

Much mātauranga Māori concerns a world in history rather than our world today

If one considers the mōteatea collected by Sir Apirana Ngata in *Nga Moteatea*, for example, we can see that these songs contain knowledge which reflects the forested New Zealand landscape in which people lived in pā villages. Of course this world does not exist any more. Hence, a good deal of mātauranga Māori relates to a world in history. This does not mean that it is not relevant to life today, however, it recognises that much of our work today concerns the reworking and the recreating of mātauranga Māori in order that it *may* relate to our experiences today.

We are already reorganising and reworking mātauranga Māori, this is already taking place.

We need to recognise that we are fundamentally reorganising and recreating Māori culture and mātauranga Māori today. Although we may not feel confident about this, or we may not be conscious of this aspect of our lives today, the fact remains that we are going through a period in which mātauranga Māori is being reorganised and reworked – and this is happening in a variety of circumstances, from Māori television to Māori education, from rūnanga to marae. A key issue is whether this reorganisation is taking place in an organised and planned way or is it haphazard and unplanned?

Utilising Aspects of Mātauranga Māori today always involves a degree of creativity

In using aspects of mātauranga Māori, such as during the teaching of children in kōhanga reo, we should recognise that this involves the re-creation of mātauranga Māori. To a very significant degree, the speaking of the Māori language, the application of certain tikanga Māori, the use of certain aspects of mātauranga Māori in the classroom, for example, is an act of creation as much as preservation and maintenance.

Creativity and innovation strengthens and deepens traditions and pre-existing knowledge

Some are apprehensive about the creativity and innovation believing that these activities undermine traditional and pre-existing knowledge and culture. This idea possibly arises because of the dominating scientific and western approach to creativity which is expressed everywhere in our culture. What lies at the root of this view of creativity is the scepticism of science. That is, a key tenet of science is always to be doubtful of existing understandings and explanations of the world. Further, success in science often occurs when someone has successfully overcome the view of another.

This can be contrasted with the idea that mātauranga Māori is a ‘heritage inspired’ knowledge system. It speaks of the ‘wisdom of the ancestors’. Many critics of indigenous knowledge suggest that this aspect inhibits growth and creativity in indigenous knowledge systems such as mātauranga Māori. This is entirely untrue. Change can and does take, however, indigenous communities are sensitive to the mana of their living ancestors when this change does take place.

Concerning the place of creativity in the maintenance of traditions, it is my view that creativity and innovation deepens traditions and pre-existing knowledge rather than weakens them. This is because in order for an innovation to take place, one has to fully understand all that has gone before. One can not innovate in a vacuum. Rather through one’s deep knowledge of a tradition, of pre-existing knowledge, culture and experience, one is inspired to new possibilities through a mixture of this knowledge and lived experience.

Let me conclude by saying that mātauranga Māori retains much creative potential. Contained with deep pools of iwi, hapū and whānau knowledge can be found creativity of all kinds. These items can be access from iwi members, from visiting the important places of our people, from reading important manuscripts written by our tupuna. These *taonga* can be used for our benefit, however, this needs to take place within certain conditions and with the appropriate arrangements in place.