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# Mātauranga-ā-whānau – He Kōnae Aronui

*Taina Whakaatere Pohatu*

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Na ngā ringaringa tohunga maha koe i rautaka.<sup>1</sup>

## Hai Tīmata (introduction)

Many initiatives stem from simple and humble beginnings. 'He kōnae aronui' is therefore drawn from Reweti Kohere<sup>2</sup> book of the same name, published in 1951. In explaining the title of his book, Kohere said, 'mine is only a kōnae, a rourou, a little bit of wisdom, so that it humbly announces itself as he kōnae aronui' (Kohere, 1951, p. 10). The same slant guides this article; that of a small piece of writing on mātauranga-ā-whānau. How mātauranga-ā-whānau influences behaviour and the way we engage in kaupapa and relationships is explored. Whānau images, voices, stories and thoughts will be brought forward then talked back to. Processes and patterns will be identified, offering a view of what mātauranga-ā-whānau is and how it has and may guide practice through time. When asking the question, 'where is the first place that we would go to, to draw experience of mātauranga from?', this small piece proposes that whānau is an obvious 'first place' to turn to. It proposes that for Māori, whānau is an acknowledged rich source of applied knowing and experience to draw from, where there is a willingness to invite it as a highly valued companion (hoa-haere) in kaupapa, no matter what it is, where we are and who we are with. A conscientising internalised lens is what it offers Māori in all of our journeys, collectively or individually.

Whānau is therefore highlighted here as a unique cultural source of potentiated power, which can centre within members, powerful memories, images, passions, insights and energies. In doing so, it announces again the significance of belonging to a distinct body of people with unique experiences and legacies. Choosing some stories, then building explanations and interpretations mark ways of developing deliberate steps and details of how to fashion whakapapa-groomed filters, with their frameworks and approaches, for use in any context. It also offers whānau-members opportunities to see and shape its wider usefulness in the many worlds we connect with and move in through our lives.

Mātauranga-ā-whānau is a primary site where the notions of mahana (states of warmth)<sup>3</sup> and mātao (states of coldness)<sup>4</sup> are consistently revealing the various mauri states of being (Pohatu, 2011) in action, throughout our lives' journeys. The presence of mahana is central

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell J H., 1944, p. 207. 'The wisdom of many great experts is in you. You have been elaborately decorated by wise minds and skilful hands'. In the context of this article, these words are used to remind us that within every whānau in its extended sense, these words are a truth that can be researched and validated by members. In this way, its thinking is very liberating and empowering.

<sup>2</sup> There is no letter 's' in the Māori language. It is therefore, deliberately left off Māori words in the English texts, even though the apostrophe is still employed.

<sup>3</sup> Interpreted here as a culturally humanising process of examining, decoding and reading the states of relationships and kaupapa in this context.

<sup>4</sup> The same pattern as 3 above is applied here.

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to signalling success of any kaupapa<sup>5</sup>, mātao signalling the opposite. Mahana marks the willingness of the heart, mind and soul to co-operatively connect their collective wisdom, intelligence, shared and integrated efforts and experiences, with whānau-constructed warmth and its humanising ways. In this manner, we locate processes of how and why we assemble and activate responses in our pursuits. Again, mātao reflects the reverse. Whānau have real contexts and examples where mauri 'states of being' occur, revealing depths of understanding of both mahana and mātao, indicating culturally preferred ways of interpreting kaupapa and mapping choices as we time and again pursue / track mauri-ora (well-being).

Here, we are reminded that we are always travellers in our life's journeys, at all times being at the centre of every moment of our life's time. The whakataukī, '*nā ngā ringaringa tohunga maha koe i rautaka*' (you have been fashioned by the hands of many experts) also gently reminds us that there are always timeless companions (hoa-pūmau) with us, at every stage of our lives. They have a never-ending kaitiaki purpose and obligations (Pohatu, 2003) for us. The image below is of me, with several of my tīpuna generations, sitting on our whakapapa whenua of Manga-Oraka,<sup>6</sup> e raranga whāriki, kete ana hoki rātau mō tō mātau marae i Te Kiekie<sup>7</sup>. In my mind's heart they will always be with me, continually undertaking their principled kaitiaki purpose to me and their future generations.

Sixty-plus years later I sit at my computer with the kaupapa of this article, allowing memories, reflections and questions to constantly flow through me as I look at my tīpuna. They are clear examples of whānau experts, continuing to influence me in my life and kaupapa. Calling them to support me in my kaupapa reignites their 'tiaki' obligations with me, as I seek their support through well-travelled whānau-relational pathways via the intimate yet deep requests of aroha mai (I need you) and āwhina mai (please help). At the same time, there are sets of questions for myself as I plot and navigate a course into a new time for them. Such questions reaffirm my tiaki obligations to them, in this challenging place, 'kia tau ai te ngākau-whānau'<sup>8</sup>.

1. What will their responses be to my issue in this time?
2. What are the messages they have left me and where would I go for these?
3. How might they want me to engage in this kaupapa?
4. What would their expectations be of me?

Affirmation of a whānau and cultural approach of inviting earlier generations to enter into new spaces highlights the 'toro-atu aku ringa, hei piriti mai kī ahau'<sup>9</sup> procedure being triggered. Having a method of reaching out to tīpuna, through time; being certain that they will make a meaningful contribution to kaupapa, is presented here. For me, they represent trusted sources of knowing, application and wisdom, proposing well-tried ways of working with kaupapa and people. My whānau have a long, lived history of seeing, feeling, revisiting and valuing their koha (contributions).

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<sup>5</sup> Issue.

<sup>6</sup> One of our genealogical places where we have occupied, lived, created relationships, events, memories, a valued history of whakapapa presence over a long period of time.

<sup>7</sup> They were weaving mats and kits for our marae at Te Kiekie (in the early 1950s).

<sup>8</sup> So that the whānau heart is settled and at peace.

<sup>9</sup> I reach out that you may be with me – a line from the waiata tangi for Materoa Reedy, written by Tuini Ngawai. This was sung by whānau on many occasions, thereby keeping memories, connections, messages and the consequent closeness especially at whānau and hapū levels, warm.

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An example of this process in action was experienced during the designing of the social work degree for Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. This practice was tested, as I sought inspiration to fashion the thinking and rationales for the programme. I would make my quiet request, then rest and on awakening, I always found that there was a whakaaaro (thought) waiting for me to consider and deliberate upon. This pattern occurred throughout the degree's development, affirming for me that, 'he hoa-haere tonu ōku mātua tīpuna i tēnei kawenga ōku'<sup>10</sup>. Firstly, it was an awakening and 'creative potential' moment for me; the realisation that my old people were in their 'world', travelling in 'parallel columns'<sup>11</sup> with and alongside me, my world and kaupapa. Secondly, it highlighted that at various times when I needed their counsel, I could reach out to them. If the kaupapa was right, they would enter my world, with, 'he paku āwhina' (a small offering of support). This had the potential of extending and deepening into a significant effort. Through such moments, they confirmed for me that whānau had culturally spiritual processes that could be called upon. Finally, as the thinking was drawn from sources from my whānau, so was the notion of obligation made real to me, as I had to be at the appropriate crossroads of the degree's journey, to fulfil my kaitiaki obligations to them and their koha, as they signposted and informed the learning pathways of the Bachelor of Social Work (Biculturalism in Practice) qualification.

To help me gather a deeper sense of what that obligation was, and looked like, I turned into myself with an experience of my mother responding to my query about how to improve my reo. She simply said, 'kei reira tō reo, toro atu ka hara mai, memea kāre, ka noho tonu ki reira'<sup>12</sup>. She left me timeless reminders with their processes. Firstly, like te reo Māori, my old people (including her now), would always be there for me when required. Secondly, she gave me 'ways' to reach out to them, such as through the images, voices, words, thoughts and examples in this small piece of writing. Other options would appear according to the context. Thirdly, the fundamental logic that my own efforts and energy would always be needed to achieve what my heart and kaupapa desired; nothing came without personal effort and endeavour. Finally, she was pointing out a way forward which was to always go to and work from my own centre, where my purpose for being was. This has had a huge influence on my approaches, shaping my positioning in everything that I do. I realised that I was the most appropriate one to instil my old people's koha into and through the structure, intent and patterns of the degree programme and its future travels. Why? Because their contribution provided the degree with its humanising heartbeat, pulse and rhythm, and I was the most qualified reader and interpreter of that.

The two-generational images of my whānau stress that we are all mokopuna, but 'life's times' positions us at different stages of our lives. With this, we each undertake distinctive roles and responsibilities. I am at the centre of my time. I am at the intersection between these two generations, always contemplating my purpose and obligations to them both. They project a new time and place where I am given two central positionings: my kaupupuri (holdership) purpose and obligations to what my old people bequeathed to me, then my kaituku (transmitting) purpose and obligations to my mokopuna.

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<sup>10</sup> I realised that my parent and grandparent generations were my constant travelling companions in this journey.

<sup>11</sup> A.T. Ngata, in Sorrenson – 1986: This is a key cornerstone marker used by the BSW (BiP) to explain and interpret how the degree will engage and action with bicultural practice.

<sup>12</sup> Your language is there, reach out and it will come, if not, it will remain there.

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The above images point to a particular tiaki and arataki purpose with the responsibilities that I have. These images pose two sets of timeless questions, firstly my responsibilities to my mokopuna and so:

1. What will your time be like e moko?
2. How will you be in your time e moko?
3. How real will my time be like for you e moko?
4. What can and must I do for you in my time e moko?

Secondly, to myself:

1. What cultural images and patterns have my tīpuna socialised in me?
2. Have I internalised them?
3. Am I willing and able to utilise them?
4. Are these relevant for the questions facing my mokopuna now and in their futures?
5. How can I ensure that I can reproduce these important values and standards within them for their time?

These timeless questions are reminders of the interconnected relationships between generations, affirming enduring purpose and obligations. The line, 'Ka noho au i konei ka whakaaro noa, me pēhea rā te huri o te ao katoa'<sup>13</sup>, from Ngōi Pewhairangi' waiata, invokes the image of kaitiaki duties of earlier generations to future generations. This is endorsed by the whānau waiata line, 'tau ana te mahana, te noho tahitanga, i raro i te whakaaro kotahi'<sup>14</sup>, emphasising the consequences of connected and successful engagements and responses by people, across generations, when successfully meeting challenges. Purpose for being, requires the duty to act. In doing so, experiences and knowing can be internalised and committed to, as part of a personal practice. Such a process that enables the tracking of the multiple journeys of a kaupapa, its relationships, levels of mahana and how they can be appreciated as validating *hoa-haere*, is experienced and internalised. Recognising the steps taken, understanding the intent and detail of each action, have the potential of leading to ways of comprehending and 'figuring out' how, when and why mahana occur. As a consequence, the possibility of shaping a tool to implement Hirini Moko Mead's thinking on seeking ways of expanding knowledge outwards (*te whānuitanga*), in depth (*te hōhonutanga*) and towards enlightenment (*te māramatanga*)' (Mead, 2003, p. 30), allows the experiencing of mahana, as a vital whānau and human device of deepening learning and perception. Whānau kaupapa bring constant opportunities to engage in such a way. Mātauranga Māori have already evolved options that sit in our language and every whānau has their own examples. Illustrations of this are represented in the phrases of āta (Pohatu, 2004), and the states of being of mauri (Pohatu, 2011). Tracing our own examples provides a rich mosaic of experiences to draw and learn from, a fascinating exercise for whānau to undertake.

To demonstrate the process, I asked an uncle, 'he aha tēnei mea te kaitiaki?' Ko tana whakautu, 'ko te mahi a te kaitiaki he tiaki, he pupuri, he arataki, he tautoko, he tohutohu i a koe. Ko tāhau, te kimi ko tēhea'<sup>15</sup>. When I looked at it closely, I saw that it was in fact, a

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<sup>13</sup> Ka noho au i konei, Ngōi Pewhairangi – I sit here and reflect on the state of the world at this time; what does it hold for the future? This is another waiata that my whānau and hapū groups have enjoyed since it was created, in affirming our memories and cementing our connections.

<sup>14</sup> Warmth and togetherness, go together, when there is the one and united focus.

<sup>15</sup> What is a kaitiaki? His response was, to take care of you; to be a holder of values and ethical behavioural patterns, to guide, support and correct you. It is however, for you to deliberate as to which one it is.

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view of the world that pointed out our timeless purpose for being. It all seemed so simple, the constant 'taking care of' reasoning in kaitiakitanga. However, considering examples from these views of the world brought a dawning that these kaitiaki terms laid out multiple yet potentially complex angles, depths and possibilities to deliberate and select from. These pointed to the importance of context, kaupapa, purpose and obligation when undertaking any action. Deciding to fashion our worldviews kōnae ako<sup>16</sup> of the BSW (BiP) degree, from the thinking in my uncle's kōrero, opened an exciting, exploratory and evolving space for Māori knowledge, insights, language and rationales to actively engage in. It created new spaces and positions from which to consider ways of behaving, approaching and interacting with people and kaupapa. Letting it occur at both individual and collective levels proved challenging and liberating, all at the same time. The following excerpt from a graduate of the programme shows how Mead's framework can highlight the fruits of a personal learning journey.

The learning was really great especially working within a Māori organisation. You're able to implement these principles, into your mahi, especially when you're looking at things like kaitiakitanga. When you think about kaitiakitanga, you're thinking about responsibilities, but the takepū<sup>17</sup> learnings taught us how to go deeper into the learning. Not just about responsibilities, it's about respectfulness it's about obligations from what you've learnt and how you can work with families by using those principles (Bachelor Social Work Report, 2010, p. 57).

Finding courage to create a simple diagram, setting out what mātauranga-ā-whānau would look like in relation to other Mātauranga Māori positionings, is emancipating and yet a connecting act. In doing so, it introduces layers of thinking by Māori on Mātauranga Māori. Therefore, according to Charles Royal, Mātauranga Māori is distinctive knowledge created by Māori from their living circumstances, worldviews and experiences, and that:

'... the state of a person's knowledge is inextricably tied to their 'interior world' – the level of their understanding, their thought life, their ability to learn, and more. In many instances, we use the term, 'knowing' to refer to this internal consciousness through which a person is able to understand things and take decisions which lead to action' (Royal, 2009, p. 91).

Hirini Moko Mead sees Mātauranga Māori as a 'super subject', because of its vast body of knowledge, the endless wealth of possibilities that fitted with his whānuitanga, hōhonutanga, māramatanga framework.

Whatarangi Winiata considers Mātauranga Māori as the explanation of human behaviour that is based upon traditional concepts handed down through the generations<sup>18</sup>, having no beginning and no end, with each new time constantly refining and enhancing those legacies of knowledge. Māori Marsden defined mātauranga as the central systematisation of conceptions of reality to which its members of its culture agreed with, with their worldview at the very heart of their cultural being, influencing every part of it (Marsden, 2003, p.74).

Wiremu Doherty then introduces the mātauranga-ā-iwi positioning, as knowledge specific to an iwi and its rohe, providing the environments and contexts for the basis of establishing

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<sup>16</sup> The term selected for the papers of the BSW (BiP) 2010.

<sup>17</sup> The term selected for the papers of the BSW (BiP) 2010.

<sup>18</sup> C. Royal, Whatarangi Winiata, , Mātauranga Māori, paradigms and politics, paper presented to Ministry for research science and technology, 13 January 1998 p. 246.

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mātauranga as fashioned, exemplified and explained by iwi (Doherty, 2009, p. 73). Wiremu' work pointed me in the direction of recognising just what mātauranga-ā-whānau plays in my life, with the thought of its powerful influence on all Māori. The following table is accordingly set out for discussion.

This frames an order of Mātauranga Māori and its connected worlds. When contemplating their kaitiaki purposes in maintaining cultural integrity, practice and transmission commitments, it introduces and connects new yet old spaces, for us to place the range of purposes we have to undertake, then experience and construct the detail that go into them. Through this it links with Māori Marsden's notion that all worlds have a centre with a special intent, purpose and obligations, reminding us that the 'route to Māoritanga through abstract interpretation' is a dead-end approach. Rather, to him the only way lay 'through a passionate, subjective approach to achieve Māori goals' (Marsden, 2003). Selected and applied mātauranga-ā-whānau reservoirs of known experiences that each whānau grouping can draw upon, validates the positionings of these Māori authors as they in their lives have been fed and nourished from their own mātauranga-ā-whānau sources of knowing. In this way, these essential puna<sup>19</sup> of Māori experience, knowing, insight, perception and analysis are validated.

## **Hai Kapinga (Conclusion)**

Mātauranga-ā-whānau is an important site and source where Māori have the daily opportunity to use our own images, sources, people, experiences, words and knowing, locating messages, then interpreting them into our contexts. Ngā pae o maumahara (the horizons of prized memories), including metaphors, voices and experiences that travel through time, are centred in this article as crucial puna within whānau that we can constantly draw from, to frame and inform how and why we may live our lives. Being able to articulate them firstly to ourselves and then to others, in shared contexts to advance mauri-ora is always the potential outcome.

The question, 'What has mātauranga gained through whānau settings, got to offer any context?', becomes a recurring one. In doing so, mātauranga-ā-whānau moves from the margins of how and what we are directed by, assuming its centralising positioning of being at the heart of what guides us at all levels and stages of our lives. Through the sharing of examples, so is its potential publicised for ongoing dialogue. Wider and deeper discussion can then be invited in through the well-traversed and humanising avenues of hara-mai (welcome) and kuhu mai (come in). As these avenues are warmed with our knowing, conversations, shared events and valued experiences, so can they be reflected upon, then endorsed by the cultural thought, 'mā te pātai, ka hua te kōrero.' Mātauranga-ā-whānau is the natural hoa-haere of whānau-ora. Therefore, they have all the reasons to now reconnect, re-forge their relationships and travel into their shared future.

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<sup>19</sup> Māori Marsden in Charles Royal, 2009, p 74.

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<sup>20</sup> Māori Marsden in Charles Royal, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Valued source of knowledge and wisdoms.