Manawa whenua, wē moana uriuri, hōkikitanga kawenga
From the heart of the land, to the depths of the sea;
repositories of knowledge abound

Te Papa Hou is a trusted digital repository providing for the long-term preservation and free access to leading scholarly works from staff and students at Te Tumu, School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

The information contained in each item is available for normal academic purposes, provided it is correctly and sufficiently referenced. Normal copyright provisions apply.

For more information regarding Te Papa Hou please contact maori-studies@otago.ac.nz

Author: Reilly, Michael P J (Professor)
Title: What is Māori Studies?
Year: 2008
Item: Lecture presented as part of the appointment process for Chair in Māori Studies at the University of Otago.
What is Māori Studies?

Michael P.J. Reilly

Opening greeting

Tēnā koutou katoa, kia orana kōtou katoatoa, Tangi kē.

Introduction

The subject of my lecture today is ‘What is Māori Studies?’

Sid Mead once described Māori Studies as ‘the uncomfortable science’. Uncomfortable because its place within the university was often questioned by Pākehā scholars, while those who worked within the subject remained uneasy about their own position within the western university system (Mead 1997:32). This uncomfortable tone has not yet disappeared. For example, at the Māori Studies Subject Conference held at Waikato University in 2007 some participants openly questioned whether the subject had any future. Such existential anxiety indicates to me that asking the question, What is Māori Studies?, in 2008 is still a useful exercise, especially for those of us working here at the University of Otago.

In the following lecture I will highlight important themes and events found in the history of our subject within New Zealand’s universities, including the University of Otago. I will conclude with some observations about what Māori Studies might stand for now and in the future, especially at this institution.
How did I come to Māori Studies?

Let me say from the outset, that I am talking about Māori Studies as a graduate of one of its older departments at Victoria University of Wellington. But how I came to the subject was an accident of history, and helps explain why I come to be speaking here on this particular subject.

In the early 1970s New Zealand experienced one of those favourable conjunctures of events when political action by Māori and a few Pākehā reformers prompted attempts to address various social wrongs that hindered Māori development, including education. As a consequence, the formal teaching of the Māori language began at a number of high schools throughout Auckland. Here broad policy developments intersected with my personal history, for in 1972 Rutherford High School in Te Atatu North decided to introduce Māori as a language option at the fourth form level for the following year. Despite this momentous shift, the school in fact remained extremely cautious, since it proceeded to ask every parent of a third form student at the school whether their son or daughter might be interested in the subject, in order to ascertain if there were sufficient numbers for a class. My Pākehā parents believed that the study of Māori was an important part of being a New Zealander, and so put my name down for the subject. Thus began my formal study of Māori.

Themes and events in the development of Māori Studies at universities

Some significant dates

- In 1929 the University of New Zealand Senate agree to permit the Māori language to be examined for the Bachelor of Arts. This early recognition of te reo Māori fails to prosper.

http://eprintstetumu.otago.ac.nz
In 1952 the subject of Māori Studies begins to be taught at Auckland University College.

From 1967 Māori Studies is taught as a BA subject at Victoria University, with two teaching staff.

The first MA programmes in Māori Studies are introduced in 1978 at Waikato and Victoria Universities.

In 1981 first year Māori language is taught at Otago University.

In 1986 Godfrey Pohatu is appointed at Otago

From 1987 further papers are offered in Māori

In 1990 a Department of Māori Studies is established at Otago University to teach a BA subject.

From 1995 postgraduate qualifications are offered in Māori Studies at Otago University.

---

What is Māori Studies?

Ko te putake o te Maoritanga

Ko te Reo Maori

The tap-root of Maori culture

Is the Maori language (Dewes 1975:55)

Since the successful introduction of Māori Studies at Auckland University in 1952 the subject has consistently comprised two key elements: the first is the core of any Māori Studies course, that is, te reo Māori. In most places it is organised to cater for both those who have already acquired competence, especially at Māori immersion schools, and for those who...
have no prior knowledge. When I started at Victoria in 1976 students in Māori Studies undertook three years of language acquisition papers. At Otago since the curriculum was redeveloped in 1996, students study the language for four years. We recognise that speaking the reo here in Dunedin is much more difficult given the smaller size of the language community. Our students therefore need more time to reach the same levels as those in the north.

In the early years of language teaching staff relied heavily on language text books developed for secondary students, as well as teaching resources put together by each teacher. More recently, there has been a significant development of resources specifically designed for tertiary students, notably the Te Whanake series compiled by John Moorfield. This group of teaching and learning materials were originally developed at Waikato University. Since 1990 Te Whanake texts have been used to teach the language here at Otago. A foundation staff member of the department, Lorraine Johnston, was specifically recruited from Waikato to teach this programme.

The second key element of any university Māori Studies programme is the teaching of papers on aspects of Māori cultural knowledge. In the early 1970s the limited teaching resources in Māori Studies meant that each programme tried to specialise in particular cultural topics. For example, when I started at Victoria there was effectively only one Māori Studies academic, Koro (Te Kapunga) Dewes, with support from Bill (Wiremu) Parker in University Extension. Besides the reo, Koro concentrated on the Māori oral arts, including comparative study of oral literatures in other countries. He also introduced us to the work of Jan Vansina in Africa, and to European efforts to record their oral literatures, notably in the Irish Republic.
As programmes grew into autonomous departments, Māori Studies throughout the country began to introduce a much more ambitious range of culture papers, and recruited appropriate staff for these purposes. Māori Studies at Otago, despite being one of the newest departments, followed the model established at older institutions such as Victoria, Waikato and Auckland.

One effect of this curriculum growth was the recruitment of non-language staff to Māori Studies. Whereas early staff, such as Koro Dewes or Bill Parker, both native speakers, taught reo and culture papers, the latter often in Māori, the trend since then has been to have staff dedicated to teaching the reo, and others with varying degrees of competence in the language who specialise in particular elements of cultural knowledge. This is partly the result of academic specialisation, as staff obtain their higher degrees and pursue research in a particular field.

A result of this evolution is the progressive change since the 1970s in the nature of what Māori Studies is. While language remains a key part of any self-respecting programme, these departments have become more heterogeneous. Indeed the foundation Head of Māori Studies at Otago, Godfrey Pohatu, turned this into an art form, with a series of strategic alliances with other departments, in order to permit the recruitment of joint lecturers, who taught in Māori Studies and another subject. This broadened the academic strengths of the department but meant that language was only one element, albeit an important one, in the curriculum and in the emerging research culture. My own case is not untypical: trained in Māori Studies, I then completed my doctoral studies in Pacific history, and was recruited by the departments of history and Māori Studies at Otago to develop Māori history papers for both subjects. While language informs my interpretation of history, my academic research is actually in the area of indigenous historical writing in Aotearoa and the Pacific.
Since the 1990s this expansion beyond the reo base has become an ever more noticeable part of Māori Studies programmes. Some of the departments began to restructure into schools comprising non-Māori subjects. Again the evolution of Otago reflects the national trends. Founded as a Department of Māori Studies, it became a decade or so later, under the leadership of Tania Ka`ai, the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies, teaching two BA subjects (Māori Studies, Pacific Islands Studies), a specialist Bachelor of Māori Traditional Arts, and an inter-disciplinary Master of Indigenous Studies. The historical core of such a School remains Māori Studies, and indeed, most of its academic staff teach and conduct their research within the parameters of that particular programme. However, these schools now have semi-autonomous branches such as Pacific Studies providing a base for Pacific scholars and those who specialise in the Pacific.

That evolution parallels the historical progress of Māori Studies from semi-autonomous units within older academic departments, often Anthropology, to autonomous departments and schools. In universities such as Victoria that further step has already taken place, with Pacific Studies forming a stand-alone academic entity. At Otago, another pattern seems to be emerging, with a School embracing all these academic subjects within a kind of federal structure.

Another issue raised, for example, at the recent Māori Studies Subject Conference at Waikato University, is the relationship between these departments and schools with the study of Māori at their core, and subject knowledge about Māori taught and researched in other parts of the university. Whereas Godfrey Pohatu created joint lecturers with departments such as Education and History, we now have quite separate programmes in topics such as Māori health, education, law, linguistics, and history, often taught by Māori staff based in the older discipline-based departments. Some academics from those locations now ask whether we still
need Māori Studies as such. Even the language in this view can be taught elsewhere, such as in Linguistics. Mead’s ‘uncomfortable science’ may have become more institutionally autonomous and secure but now must work out its place within the universities in relation to these other Māori subject areas.

What is the purpose of Māori Studies?

Kia mate ururoa

Kei mate wheke

Fight like a hammer head shark

And not like an octopus (Dewes 1975:57)

When the proposals were put to the University of New Zealand Senate, and subsequently, to the Auckland University College Faculty, the proposers were asked both times ‘Where is your literature?’ which Dewes observes became ‘almost a Pakeha proverb’ intended to block the introduction of Māori into the western academy (Dewes 1975:82-3). These bodies effectively acted as gate-keepers, determining what could be accepted as knowledge (Walker 1996:161). Both times, the proposers responded in the academy’s own terms, by referring to the range of written Māori literature available for study. In 1952 Ralph Piddington (Professor of Anthropology) and Bruce Biggs dramatically displayed a large array of writing in Māori in front of the Faculty (Webster 1998:104). Such theatrical gestures were very useful tactics in overcoming resistance, since they exposed in a very public way the ignorance of their critics.

Sir Apirana Ngata was part of that first attempt in 1929, and his own experiences with the colonial education system demonstrate the kinds of dangers his and later generations encountered as they moved into institutions such as the school, and by extension, university.
When he began his own Pakeha education in 1881 at the behest of tribal leaders, he experienced a psychological reaction against the society and culture he came from. As he himself describes it, he put up ‘shutters’ in his mind against the Māori world. Only when his father forced him to take a long break from study in order to immerse himself again in Ngāti Porou society, did this self-imposed obstacle fall away. When he resumed his Pākehā education ‘it was with the clear vision of acquiring thereby the material and mental equipment wherewith to adapt Maori life to the rapidly changing circumstances and to salvage as much as possible of its worth-while elements’ (Ngata 2004:xxxvi). His own experiences in the 1880s, he argued, ‘explains the case of thousands of Maoris, old and young, who entered the schools of this country and passed out, with their minds closed to the culture, which is their inheritance and which lies wounded, slighted and neglected at their door’ (Ngata 2004:xxxvi).

If we use Ngata’s own experiences as a guide, we can argue that the role of Māori Studies is not simply to serve as another subject, or area of research activity, within the larger university, but in addition it should provide a space in which indigenous systems of thought and knowledge are researched and practised in their own terms and transmitted to new generations of scholars, thereby restoring some balance to the educational structures of colonised societies such as Aotearoa.

Dewes, who criticised this educational system as perpetrating a form of cultural or psychological violence upon its Māori students, asked:

What can we Maori aspire to if we are not rooted to the land, if there is no language and literary tradition to speak for our souls, if we have not got an ideology (mauri Maori) for our people, if our creative imaginations and leadership energies are weakened […] Are we not cultural refugees in our own country? Let us put back into
Maori minds, hearts and souls those things that were psychologically bruised in earlier generations (Dewes 1975:66).

Sid Mead equates Māori Studies with mātauranga Māori which represented ‘the heritage of the Maori, the knowledge which the elders are said to pass on to their mokopuna, the wahi ngaro [missing portion], which our youth long for, and the tikitiki mo to mahunga (the topknot for your head)’ (Mead 1997:26). Such mātauranga Māori would help restore the cultural world to those Māori scattered like ‘the shattered pieces of Humpty-Dumpty’ throughout the length and breadth of Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu (Mead 1997:26). He too saw the role of Māori Studies at the university as helping in this struggle to assist the cultural survival of Māori. For him: ‘the university cannot be an institution that stands back and records every poignant moment of the death of Maoritanga, like geologists watching the eruption of a dying mountain, and catching everything on video and various other recording machines’ (Mead 1997:27). Invoking the ideas of the educationalist, Paulo Freire, Mead wrote: ‘Liberation from the present reality of a culture under threat and bound tightly under the machinery of Pakeha government and its institutions helps all who participate become more human’ (Mead 1997:28).

Thus for Mead, Māori Studies at the university is not just an academic subject, but is engaged in the task of rediscovering and reconstructing that Wahi Ngaro, ‘the lost portion of the heritage’, which disappeared through the process of colonisation (Mead 1997:34). With its critical mass of Māori academic staff the subject has the ability to create a space supportive of indigenous ideologies; or ‘mauri Maori’ as Dewes called it (Dewes 1975:60). This explains why it has seemed so natural for Māori Studies departments and schools to embrace areas such as Pacific or Indigenous Studies. All of them are concerned with the contradictions of living in the larger, dominant Pākehā or Western world, while retaining a
distinctive cultural autonomy. Mutual support within the academy has made good sense as a strategy to advance their subjects within what remains a Western system of higher learning.

Those scholars who ask whether Māori Studies continues to have a role forget that this subject creates a site not only for research but for the practice of a distinctive culture. Here scholars can develop their own unique ideas and methods drawing from the indigenous knowledges they study and participate in. The ethos of Māori Studies supports the use of Māori as a day to day medium of communication, and for the practice of important forms of cultural life, without hindrance from others. Māori scholars in other departments can in fact participate in this domain, thereby receiving support for the teaching of specific forms of Māori knowledge within their own disciplines. Māori Studies in an institutional sense serves as the mauri Māori within the academy, protecting and supporting the work of Māori scholars whereever they might be located.¹

What will Māori Studies be like in the future?

The following are some observations about how I imagine Māori Studies may unfold at Otago University.

1. Creating a strong and vibrant research culture

Research is what distinguishes universities from other tertiary institutions. Similarly, research appropriate to an indigenous context should form the basis of any Māori Studies department or school. It is what we can offer others, and pass on to successive student generations. To do that all staff will need to possess PhDs. Associated with research is the development of appropriate outlets for the dissemination of knowledge. Dewes and Mead recognised the importance of developing indigenous publishing forums, such as journals, but a limited intellectual and organisational capacity has affected their success. Currently, Te Tumu and Te
Kawa a Māui at Victoria University hope to put together plans for an e-journal which will be more welcoming of indigenous research, including Māori language texts. Proper resourcing will be the key to such an enterprise.

2. Maintaining strength through diversity

The indigenous communities in the south are small by comparison with the north. As a result we need to maintain the existing productive relationship between the constituent academic programmes here in Te Tumu, notably between Māori and Pacific Island Studies. The close ties between Māori and other Pacific peoples, for example, is a long and intimate one, frequently acknowledged by Māori Studies scholars, such as Bruce Biggs and Sid Mead. According to Mead (1997:32), ‘Maori Studies is Polynesian studies because Polynesia is the region against which we can understand our situation. The Maori case is but one example of events in Polynesia, of which we are an integral part.’ Pacific Studies here at Otago is still developing, and will gain a lot from its stronger partner. However, the School will have to ensure that there is no replication of a colonising relationship between these partners, with one determining or dictating the particular course of development followed by the other.

3. Thinking globally and locally

Mead (1997:33) argues that ‘The world of ideas has always been open to us and we must travel that world and learn from it.’ While Māori Studies has long advocated developing its own theories and research models, it has also recognised that such work goes hand in hand with scholarship in an international intellectual context. Just so, various scholars within Māori Studies explore bodies of theory that may provide points of resistance or criticism against hegemonic structures of the dominant society, thereby establishing an alternative space for Māori as an autonomous group sharing a particular ideology. Examples of such ideas might include the work of Subaltern Studies in South Asia which Edward Said

http://eprintstetumu.otago.ac.nz
considers ‘an analogue of all those recent attempts in the West and throughout the rest of the world to articulate the hidden or suppressed accounts of numerous groups—women, minorities, disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, refugees, exiles, etc.’ (Said 1988:vi). Māori Studies fits well within this kind of intellectual and political activity, which makes connections across countries based on particular indigenous experiences of global phenomenon such as imperialism.

4. Making connections with other indigenous scholars

In addition to the links locally with Pacific Studies and other Māori scholars, Māori Studies at Otago will continue expanding its relationships with other schools and departments of Māori Studies in New Zealand, and with native/indigenous studies around the world. Not only does this enhance our own research interests, in terms of potential collaborations and publications, but enables strategic alliances to be made in the context of dealing with similar colonial structures of control and domination. Some of these connections are already in their development stage: Māori Studies at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology and at Victoria University of Wellington, the University of Alberta, and the National University of Sāmoa, to name the most prominent.

5. Sustaining the relationship between the academy and the community

Scholars like Dewes, Mead and others have always stressed the importance of their ties with iwi communities. Many undertake teaching or research for different Māori groups in the community. Godfrey Pohatu put much effort into maintaining his community relations, probably to the detriment of his own scholarship. Tania Ka`ai’s Memorandum of Understanding with local rūnanga may require reviving and reviewing. These relationships cannot be built in a day, a week or a year, but should form a part of the life of our school.
6. Acting as a model of Treaty partnership

Departments and schools of Māori Studies have not only embraced other subjects concerned with indigenous communities, but have long served as a model for a mutually beneficial partnership between Māori and Pākehā in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu. The lexicographer, Herbert Williams, advocated for te reo Māori before the University of New Zealand Senate in 1929, and Ralph Piddington argued the case for Māori Studies at Auckland University College. Since its inception, Pākehā students and academic staff have participated in the work of Māori Studies. Examples include the work of Jane McRae and Jeny Curnow who have published on Māori newspapers and helped produce the new edition of Ngata’s Ngā Mōteatea; and Neil Grove (a retired American Airforce colonel) who co-authored Ngā Pepeha with Sid Mead. Māori Studies at Victoria University benefitted from the teaching and research of Bernie Kernot, on Māori art, and Agnes Sullivan who introduced innovative papers on Māori pre-history and material culture. Godfrey Pohatu positively embraced Pākehā scholars who had something to offer Māori Studies. He had an enthusiasm for theory and encouraged his staff to develop their own ideas in their classes, strongly supporting them when students complained to him about the non-Māori content of some courses. He had a particular dislike for attacks on individuals based purely on their skin tone. He believed in the liberating potential of books and of ideas generally. This is not a bad legacy for our school today.

7. Working together as a group to sustain the school in the future

A strong Māori Studies subject will continue here at Otago if we think of ourselves as a community of scholars, where everyone has a contribution to make to the life of the school. A collective approach is far stronger than anything we can do on our own. This is also a philosophy found within the ancient whare wānanga themselves, as the following example

http://eprintstetumu.otago.ac.nz
told by Māori Marsden shows. A student dedicated to Tāne went into the forest for two weeks ‘to meditate and fast’ before facing an examination from his teachers at the wānanga. When asked what the spirit of Tāne had taught him, he described how he had sat under some kahikatea trees. He reflected on why these trees had such a shallow root system.

Then he had an illumination. He understood why the kahikatea trees grow together [...] at stormy times, when the wind blows, if the kahikatea tree should grow on its own, then it will fall over because of the shallowness of the roots. However, as they stand together, the roots become interwoven with one another. When the wind blows and a tree should lean over, then it is held in place by the roots of another tree. This was the illumination that came to him. Further, if a person should stand on his/her own, then he/she will fall, according to the model of standing together (Royal 2003:78-79).

Many thanks for your time: kia ora tātou katoa.
Notes

1. A mauri can take two forms. The first is a material object that serves as a medium for the gods, such as a stone. People, places or things are thus protected by the resident atua from any harm. The second form of the mauri is its function as an ‘immaterial ‘life-principle’’ of someone or something that ensures its continuing life and prosperity. According to the early Pākehā ethnographer, Elsdon Best, the material mauri was set up to protect the immaterial one. See Hanson and Hanson 1983:62-64. Māori Studies might be said in this context to be the material mauri set up to protect the immaterial mauri of the various staff and students who study and teach in the domain of Māori knowledge. At Otago, Te Tumu/School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies has a material mauri in the form of local stones, intended to provide spiritual protection for those working in the School.
Bibliography


Hanson, F. Allan and Louise Hanson, 1983. Counterpoint in Maori culture. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.


http://eprintstetumu.otago.ac.nz