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

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**Author:** Professor Michael Reilly

**Title:** Reflections: Te Kura Unua 2006

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**Item:** Paper presented at Te Kura Unua. Te Kura Unua is an annual research exchange *hui*, which brings together staff and post-graduate students from Te Tumu and Te Kawa a Māui, School of Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, in an effort to share the research interest of both schools and develop collaborative research relationships between the two schools. Te Kura Unua began in 2004 and is hosted alternately every year by each school.

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These reflections are mere fragments of words and phrases that caught my attention listening to the wānanga (seminar) that has been going on over the last three or four days. These kōrerorero (discussions) are themselves only part of a longer and larger conversation that has been going on for generations and will do so long after any of us are alive. We each have contributed our own portion to it and by so doing have strengthened it, and influenced it in some way. One speaker quoted that valuable proverb: Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi (Your food basket, and my food basket, ensure the survival of the people). I think this is true of our collective work here this week.

We have been celebrating this week the first University marae, Te Tumu Herenga Waka. Perhaps I might venture my own recollection of the early beginnings of Te Kawa a Māui (School of Māori Studies, Victoria University) by way of an introduction to the substance of this reflection. Imagine yourselves back in February 1976. The scene is Kelburn Parade. An extremely young and I might say very naieve 17 year old entertaining the hope of attending university stands in front of a battered old letter box. Screwed onto the front of this box is the name of the university department housed there. The larger and more weathered part of the sign reads: Department of Anthropology. But beside it, on a separate plate, and looking much newer, is the word: Maori. I am reminded that in those days the study of Māori at Victoria was what the English might call a ‘poor relation’; a whāngai child perhaps whose place in this home had been the subject of bitter contestation, but somehow it had managed to survive and to achieve its own small
recognition symbolised by that tiny add-on name plate. How far has it come! Up the stairs and to the back of a run-down house was the office of Koro Dewes. I recall that all its horizontal surfaces were stacked with various papers and books; it seemed to me the very image of what a scholar’s study ought to be. Koro then was Māori Studies at Victoria, supported by Bill Parker who took some courses in language, while located in Adult Education.

Te Ripowai Higgin’s recollection of the old days of Te Kawa a Māui and of its teachers, especially Bill Parker and Ruka Broughton, transported me momentarily back to a place very different to the one many of you inhabit today. I recall staff like Agnes Sullivan who introduced pre-history papers and technology courses in the department: to visit her required finding a space amongst an array of beautiful eel nets and other items of similar technical ingenuity constructed by her students. I also recall my student colleague and fellow Pakeha Neil Grove who not only wrote a thesis on Te Whatahoro with the support of Ngāti Raukawa, but spent many years collecting proverbial sayings to form that marvellous archive of phrases we all refer to today. This work was his passion and I like to think that he lives on in that book, just as Bill and Ruka are remembered in your whare whakairo (carved meeting house). Memories of the past are potent things, but are often laced with ambivalence as Danny Keenan readily understands. One speaker said we should return to first principles and in honour of Te Tumu Herenga Waka, I thought I would draw on some observations made by Sidney Mead, foundation Professor of Māori Studies at Victoria.
In his paper ‘Maori Studies Tomorrow’ he makes the following remark: ‘As a daughter science of anthropology, Maori Studies qualifies very definitely to be described as “the uncomfortable science”’ (Mead 1997, p. 345). He was referring to the suspicions of the subject manifested by both Maori outside the academy and by many vested interests within it. I know that everyone here can understand the kinds of discomfort he may have been alluding to. But I also think that there is something almost inspiring, dare I say comforting, in that description of Māori Studies. For it challenges us to move out of our comfort zones: to raise questions as so many of you have about kawa (protocol) and tikanga Māori (Māori customs). At the same time it provides us with a whakaaro (idea) to which we can turn and find support and sustenance when the arrows of affliction rain down upon us. The statement encourages us to think of Māori Studies not as an isolated or marginal element in the Western educational system, but as something vibrant, brimfull with ideas, desiring to share, as much as to challenge, knowledge with others. In particular, as many speakers have insisted, Māori Studies, its students, and staff, cannot be separated from our communities, or from whānau. Many speakers have stressed how vital it is to connect or reconnect Māori with the domain of whakaaro Māori or mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledges), for both their physical and psychic well being, and as a counter to the violence and violation that colonisation and Pākehātanga (Pākehā practices) so often have brought to that sense of beingness. To do so is to remember how comforting such knowledge can be; a healing source, a wai ora (water of life) for the body and soul wearied with its labours.

In another short quote from the same source Sidney Mead also says this: ‘The world of ideas has always been open to us and we must travel that world and learn from it’ (Mead
Māori Studies has classically been defined by many of us here as te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture). Sidney Mead himself recognised that these two types of courses formed Māori Studies from its inception at Auckland University with the likes of Bruce Biggs, Pat Hohepa and others, and continues to do so today. But Mead’s statement also points to the work of many sitting here in Te Paparewa today which draws on the world for ideas and inspiration in seeking to advance and to celebrate Te Ao Māori and its sister worlds stretching across that enticing green sea, Te Moana nui a Kiva, across which all of our tipuna (ancestors) at some stage have journeyed. In this we are not limited by the constraints of history or of ethnographic writings with their pathetic efforts to portray Māori and other Pacific Islanders as primitive peoples near the bottom of a great racial hierarchy, while the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant sat with great self-congratulation at the top. It is strange to think that such ideas were the work of objective scientists who somehow thought of themselves as possessing the finest attributes of all humanity. If not the ultimate instance of subjective thought, there is certainly an arrogance, even hubris, in such corrupted imaginings. Instead of taking their word for it, the speakers this week have shown how foolish this talk really was, but also how insidious, dangerous and destructive the consequences of it could be, setting off a profound sense of alienation or cultural schizophrenia that we wrestle with today. To say that we are in fact super-human, whether woman or man, is perhaps the best retort to these intellectual discourses still subscribed to by many today. It inspires us to take heart, to find solidarity with others, and in the words of that great Civil Rights song of the 60s to cry: We Shall Overcome. To tell stories about both sides of that binary division between Them and Us is to recognise and to destabilise the foundations of those divisions which have for so long been used to alienate, to cripple or
to blame. Stories about us and our place reclaim the whole: we are no longer divided from ourselves. At the same time Mead’s allusion to that world of ideas reminds us that our story telling need not be restricted to narrow confines, but can take heart and compare or comment on ourselves as part of that world, without diminishing the truth held by others.

To end I want to quote you some whakaaro of distinguished Pacific scholars whose ideas I know excited many of my distance students this year. First, Vilsoni Hereniko (2000, p. 88):

Theory that is appropriate illuminates; when this happens, we are better informed and the quest for knowledge is advanced. ... Theory ought to be informed by practice, by which I mean a commitment to the well-being of those being researched. ... Without such involvement with the concerns of the local population, theory serves only the needs of the researcher, ... . The researcher in the Pacific who is not committed to empowering the native people as they struggle to transform social injustices and inequalities is, ultimately, an agent of the status quo.

Lastly, a statement from that great writer, Epeli Hau`ofa (2000, p. 454):

I believe that in order for us to gain greater autonomy than we have today and maintain it within the global system, we must in addition to other measures be able to define and construct our pasts and present in our own ways.
REFERENCES

