



TE TUMU
SCHOOL OF MĀORI, PACIFIC & INDIGENOUS STUDIES

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Title: *Ngā Pūrongo o ia Tari Māori: Reflections on research, teaching, and other developments in Te Tumu*

Year: 2008

Item: Paper presented at Te Kāhui Kura Māori (Schools of Māori Studies Assembly) held at Te Kawa a Māui, School of Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington.

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**Ngā Pūrongo o ia Tari Māori: Reflections on
research, teaching, and other developments in Te Tumu**

Michael Reilly

At the inaugural Te Kāhui Kura Māori conference held at Waikato University in 2007 I reviewed our present School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at Otago University since the establishment of a Māori Studies department in 1990. During its foundational years under Godfrey and Toroa Pōhatu the School was characterised by a large number of students who kept the teaching staff busy. There was only an undergraduate curriculum. Most of the academic staff were underqualified, with only Bachelors' degrees, and as a consequence there was very little in the way of a research culture. Much attention however was devoted to good community links as part of the department's culture. From 1996 Tania Ka'ai addressed her energies to developing a research informed teaching department, with postgraduate degrees, a staff increasingly characterised by the possession of doctorates, and a stronger culture of publications. This took some 10 years of very hard work by all the staff concerned. While linkages were developed with other indigenous scholars in the Pacific and North America, the relationship with more local communities, including the mana whenua, appears to have atrophied. In 2009 the School enters a new phase with the appointment of a new Dean and Professor of Māori Studies, Paul Tapsell. Likely developments include additions to the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum, further internationalisation of both teaching and research, the creation of new strategic alliances with other centres of indigenous research, and a reaffirmation of the importance of mana whenua in the life of the School.

In 2008 about half of the School's total staff holds a PhD, and several are busily developing national and even international research reputations in their field. In addition, there is a broad curriculum across a number of distinctive fields of study, from the classical Māori Studies major, to one focusing on contemporary studies of the Pacific, an on-line Master of Indigenous Studies which is increasingly attracting international enquiries and student enrolments, and a Bachelor of Māori Traditional Arts. In future it is likely that a new Major or qualification will be introduced on Māori Development at the undergraduate level, designed to draw in students less attracted to study of te reo Māori. Supervision for our various postgraduate qualifications concentrates on Māori Studies topics, but increasingly includes contemporary Pacific ones, and others under the rubric of Indigenous Studies; some of the latter on the indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia. Thus the research culture of the School of Māori, Pacific, and Indigenous Studies is beginning to extend well beyond the classical confines of Māori Studies, to embrace oceanic themes, highlighting how much the School now reflects international connections especially between indigenous peoples in Aotearoa, Southeast Asia, the Pacific, and North America.

These research projects, by students and staff, are characterised by certain common assumptions and methodologies. Many make extensive use of qualitative research methods, such as interviews, often to record the knowledge held by older generations. In that sense, a lot of the projects seem concerned with facets of what may be called identity. This includes the changes to identity brought about by migrations to other tribal lands or countries. Some students use their research to establish linkages with indigenous communities that help secure their own personal identity within these locations. For others, the research provides

opportunities to give back to their communities. This may include the writing of texts in te reo Māori designed for children or older learners, the composition of haka, and the recording of knowledge that may otherwise have been lost to younger generations. Such research embraces the subjective element of scholarship, showing how it becomes an asset, helping form linkages and obligations between the researcher and the researched. These linkages are often genealogical ones. Some research is explicitly intended for the researcher's own extended family or wider kin group. Sometimes it contributes to other indigenous-based institutions, such as churches, welfare groups, or schools. Other research bases itself on whānau knowledge, on occasion requiring a respect for the confidentiality of the material provided to the researcher. Others seek answers about larger categories, such as gender relationships in society, or about the changes wrought by colonising processes upon aspects of an indigenous society. The ethical aspects of much of this research are also notable for highlighting the long term relationships that community orientated scholarship entails, with the researcher often working for the community, as part of their work in the academy. Reciprocity between the researcher and those who participate or contribute to the research is a major characteristic of much of the work undertaken.

Reflecting on these kinds of research projects undertaken here at the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at Otago University, highlights the important role played by such a school within the wider university system. It acts as a manifestation of the principle of partnership enunciated in the Treaty of Waitangi, while also providing a service to non-indigenous scholars and students. The school enables non-indigenous scholars to undertake appropriate forms of research on indigenous topics that remain in the control of indigenous academics and community representatives. The School also acts as an intellectual critic of

positions in the academy which assume the researcher is the dominant voice in these transactions.

There always remains however a tension between the expectations of this academic world and those of indigenous communities, that can impact on the work of schools such as my own. The kinds of publications measured most highly, for example, in processes such as the Performance-based Research Fund model, may not always fit well with the expectations of indigenous communities. Research may be disseminated only amongst such groups, or be published in a form that is not subject to accepted forms of academic quality assurance; or that does not rate as highly as other forms of output. In addition, for scholars who research or write in indigenous languages, traditional academic journals or publishers may be reluctant to contemplate publication of texts written in these languages. When I wrote to a well known history journal recently proposing publication of a relatively short manuscript in a Pacific language I was told that historians were not linguists and that I should therefore seek publication in other journals. In my experience, there are few academic publishing outlets in New Zealand or elsewhere ready to embrace writing in indigenous languages, or in forms that might differ from the norm of academic scholarship as it is understood in western institutions. This suggests that indigenous scholars will need to invest in developing their own high quality alternatives for publication, such as a journal. That requires resources in time, staff and of course in money; all commodities in relatively short supply.

These various issues and challenges return us to the uniqueness of the work undertaken by all the departments and schools devoted to Māori, Pacific or Indigenous Studies. The only way

to ensure publication, for example, is to draw on cultural values emphasising cooperation in order that the whole may advance as a collective. I see the prospect of cooperation and collaboration in various aspects of research and publication across all the Māori Studies schools in New Zealand's universities as an instance of this approach. It is one that was drawn on by ancestral generations in their resistance to the dominance of colonial structures of power, and it can be used again as a means of advancing Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies not only here in Aotearoa, but across other lands and continents. Such cooperation assumes goodwill on the part of all the schools, but also of course upon the part of the wider institutions, to show a willingness to change existing attitudes and processes in order to achieve the advancement of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies.