

Exploring the knowledge interface: partnership in a Taranaki Māori community health research programme.

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Introduction

Te Pou Tiringa Incorporated and the National Centre for Lifecourse Research (NCLR) have developed a formal partnership relationship in order to conduct a long-term research programme. The first project in the planned research programme has been funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand and will start in early 2014. The second project has received provisional approval for funding from an education sector organisation and is also due to commence in early 2014. It is intended that the research programme will be positioned at the interface between mātauranga Māori and Western Science.

The interface approach is a developing area and there is little published work. Te Pou Tiringa and the NCLR are working together to clarify and articulate the interface approach as it relates to the research partnership. Our initial thinking around what, in terms of our research programme, constitutes an interface approach is being prepared for submission to He Pukenga Kōrero (Massey University Journal of Māori Studies). The current paper arises out of a workshop run at this conference. The workshop provided an overview of the research partners and the proposed research, located indigenous knowledge/ mātauranga Māori in relation to an interface approach and discussed the value of an interface approach and its importance in research partnerships between Māori community and Western academic institutions.

Te Pou Tiringa

Te Pou Tiringa is the governance body for Te Kōpae Piripono, a Taranaki Māori early childhood and whānau development initiative that is committed to the cultural integrity and wellbeing of Taranaki Māori. Te Kōpae was established in 1994 as early

childhood education (ECE). This structure enabled self-management, secure funding and work on the range of envisaged activities (Hond 2013). Te Whāriki, the Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum policy statement (Ministry of Education 1996) is deliberately all-embracing, enabling both whānau development activity and also the expression of Māori understandings of child development.

The name, Te Kōpae Piripono, expresses concepts fundamental to the organisation. Kōpae is the Taranaki word for kōhanga (nest) and this reflects a parallel association with the Kōhanga Reo principles of reo and tikanga revitalisation among whānau. Piripono refers to the high level of commitment required from all of those involved to build a robust and functional collective (Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha 2008). Since its establishment, whānau development has been at the core of Te Kōpae Piripono's activities. The underpinning purpose, however, is to respond to the ongoing and devastating impacts of social and cultural historical trauma experienced by Taranaki Māori communities and contribute to efforts to restore cultural integrity, social cohesion and wellbeing (Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha 2008). While Māori language, culture and immersion education have been key factors influencing whānau to enrol their children in the centre (Te Kōpae is one of the few ECEs that strictly maintain a 100% reo Māori immersion environment), its priority is whānau development (Hond 2013).

Te Kōpae was recognised by the Ministry of Education in 2008 when it was designated as a 'Centre of Innovation' (CoI) and funded to carry out research to explore '...how whānau development fostered leadership across all levels, and enhanced...fulfilled

lives for Māori children and their families” (Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha 2008).

The Pou Tiringa team is led by the Kōpae Directors, Hinerangi Korewha and Aroaro Tamati. They were part of the Kōpae establishment group. The team includes parents, teachers and governance board members with expertise in education, Māori health, kaupapa Māori research and an interface approach, Taranaki reo and tikanga and Māori development. As well, Te Pou Tiringa brings to the partnership access to the community, a high level of credibility locally and knowledge of the lived realities of the community.

National Centre for Lifecourse Research

The institutional research partner is the University of Otago National Centre for Lifecourse Research (NCLR). NCLR undertakes and applies lifecourse research that informs policy and practice (<http://www.nclr.org.nz/>). It is an umbrella organisation for research collaborations between six universities and a Crown Research Institute. Two of the University of Otago internal partners are the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Research Unit and the Christchurch Health and Development Study – which conduct the two most longstanding longitudinal research studies in New Zealand. Lifecourse research carried out by NCLR falls into two main categories. First, etiological development research to inform policy and practice, that is, studies that examine factors from early life that impact on long term outcomes. Second, intervention research.

The NCLR team is led by Professor Richie Poulton and its two other members are a senior academic and a research fellow who is the recipient of an HRC Māori health postdoctoral fellowship. The university partner brings infrastructure, resources and expertise to the partnership.

Motivation for the research

The seed for the partnership was sown in discussions between Aroaro Tamati (Te Kōpae Co-Director) and Richie Poulton (NCLR Co-Director) who served together on the Ministerial Taskforce on Early Childhood Education in 2010-2011. Together they saw the potential for a mutually beneficial partnership that could further each of their organisation’s aspirations while leveraging off their

collective strengths.

Te Kōpae had for some time recognised the need to build on findings of its CoI research. That is, to further articulate, investigate and generate evidence around its model and approaches using robust processes. Kōpae leadership also saw the potential to share the model more widely among Māori and non-Māori early childhood initiatives, particularly given the wide and enduring ethnic inequalities in outcomes experienced by Māori in Taranaki and other regions (Ratima and Jenkins, 2012).

At the same time, from an NCLR perspective, its own research and international studies had shown that influences in early life shape an individual’s access to determinants of health (e.g. education, employment, wealth etc.) and health status later in life (e.g., Danese et al., 2009; Fergusson et al., 2005; Moffitt et al., 2011). It is well recognised that high quality early childhood interventions are one of the best investments a society can make to ensure an optimal start to life, with health and other benefits over the lifecourse (e.g., Aboderin et al., 2002; Heckman, 2006; Paul, 2011). Central concepts that underpin good health and prevention from a public health and prevention science perspective are concerned with early childhood behaviours, self-control being a key construct (Moffitt et al., 2011).

From a Māori perspective, concepts that relate to but are distinct from self-control are often identified as underpinning healthy development for Māori children. These concepts tend to be strengths-based, emphasise responsibility to and for others, and express a concern for reinforcing values and developing the ‘character’ of children. Examples of these types of concepts include manaaki (caring), awhina (support) and whānau development (reinforcing relationships). As well, whānau development has long been recognised by Māori and is increasingly recognised by other groups as an appropriate vehicle for intervention to improve outcomes (King and Turia, 2002; Taskforce on Whānau Ora, 2010; Ministry of Health, 2011).

While there is clear evidence around the potential for early childhood interventions to lead to improved health and other outcomes, what is largely missing is proven interventions that address inequities and can be scaled up for wide implementation. The NCLR was looking for an early childhood intervention

that, in practice, could support and reinforce those important positive behaviours among young children that had been identified in their longitudinal research. Further, its interest was in an intervention that had the potential to be scaled up for implementation in other settings to complement broader measures to address determinants of health, such as poverty. Te Kōpae provides a 'real world' kaupapa Māori child and whānau intervention, supporting and reinforcing positive behaviours among young children, and has the potential to be scaled up.

Proposed research programme

The intention is to conduct a long-term research programme to generate an evidence base around what constitutes effective intervention in the early years, to improve outcomes for children in later life. A key focus will be on the transformative power that quality early life and whānau development programming has in relation to a number of measures of health and social wellbeing. The research programme places high value on indigenous knowledge and has sought an approach to the research that would reflect that position, that is, an interface approach. It is therefore important to understand what indigenous knowledge is.

Indigenous knowledge

Indigenous knowledge has been variously labelled as 'native knowledge', 'local knowledge', 'ecological knowledge', and 'traditional knowledge'. Some of these terms, such as 'traditional knowledge' are broader, incorporating Indigenous and other types of knowledge. Generally however, these terms, rather than capturing the essence of Indigenous knowledge as a whole, describe some core aspects.

Indigenous knowledge is considered to be distinctive from other types of knowledge and harbours insights that are not yet part of 'scientific' inquiry (Nakashima, 2000). A central characteristic of Indigenous knowledge is that it is knowledge generated by Indigenous peoples. It is not only generated at the community level, but may be developed by Indigenous researchers working in a variety of contexts including academic settings (Cajete, 2000).

It is distinct from knowledge that may be generated about Indigenous peoples or their concerns by non-

indigenous individuals or groups. Essentially, this distinction is concerned with the paradigm within which Indigenous knowledge is generated and that Indigenous knowledge can only be generated from within an Indigenous paradigm and therefore framed by Indigenous worldviews.

Indigenous knowledge may be local in nature in the sense that it has been generated by a particular Indigenous group, within their own unique context, with the primary purpose of benefiting Indigenous peoples themselves. There is some concern that Indigenous peoples should remain the primary beneficiaries of Indigenous knowledge, but that this does not exclude wider application and benefits for other population groups (Stewart-Harawira, 2005). Further, Indigenous knowledge should be able to be used in whatever way Indigenous peoples determine. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (2007, p. 6), as chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, stated:

If indigenous peoples choose to use their traditional knowledge to engage with local, national, international economies in a commercially viable manner, then they should be provided the tools and instruments to do this to their own benefit.

Lakota scholar Vine Deloria (1999) asserts that Indigenous conceptions of knowledge are intrinsically connected to the lives and experiences of human beings, individuals and communities. Further, Indigenous knowledge is considered to be based within real life experience (Kawagley, 1995) and to be closely connected to the relationships between human communities and the natural world, in particular seascapes and land (Durie, 2005). In contrast to Western science, Indigenous knowledge emphasises relationships and is therefore cross disciplinary, seeking connections rather than categorisation and disciplinary divisions. Royal (2005, p. 4) points out the holistic, ecological nature of Indigenous knowledge:

...Indigenous knowledge is 'holistic' in the sense that knowledge is interconnected and relational in the same way that all life is interconnected and relational...A 'holistic' view of the world and of knowledge is not blind to parts, boundaries, borders and thresholds but rather sees these parts both as 'wholes' in themselves as well as parts of larger wholes.

While the conceptualisation of Indigenous knowledge is very much connected to the customary beliefs and values of Indigenous peoples, it is not a form of knowledge that is locked in the past. Instead, Indigenous knowledge can be generated at any time and can be applied to contemporary matters. For example, Indigenous knowledge may be applied in diverse fields such as biotechnology, pharmacology, sustainable agriculture, resource management and understanding or addressing social issues. There are risks in using terms such as 'traditional knowledge' as an umbrella term that includes Indigenous knowledge, in that it may lead to the misconception that Indigenous knowledge only concerns ancient matters and has limited relevance to modern times.

While there is no single agreed upon definition of Indigenous knowledge and there is wide diversity between Indigenous peoples, there is generally consensus about a number of characteristics. This consensus relates to similarities in the worldviews of Indigenous peoples, for example the strong emphasis on links between the physical environment and identity, and more recently to some shared experiences of colonisation that may influence knowledge generation. Common characteristics of Indigenous knowledge are that it is generated by Indigenous peoples and it is ecological, integrative and holistic in nature, rather than reductionist.

Western science at the interface

The nature of Western scientific knowledge has been closely defined and critically studied. Given that it is well documented elsewhere, it is not detailed in this paper. Leading Māori scholars including Mason Durie (2004) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) have contributed work in this area. Their work provides a foundation to build on and explore, within a specific research programme, how Western scientific constructs such as epistemology (and especially positivism, scepticism and other significant Western traditions) can be redefined in research practice, at the interface.

The tensions between hegemonic, Western science and mātauranga Māori that come from unequal power relations, the institutional power of Western knowledge, and community based knowledge and language systems are already becoming clearer as we engage in the research.

Realising the value of an interface approach

We are currently developing our version of an interface approach to this research. Our work on the interface approach has been undertaken by the research team through a combination of face-to-face wānanga, Skype workshops and directed reading and draws on the PhD and postdoctoral work of Dr Will Edwards, who is a member of the Pou Tiringa part of our team. We recognise that at the philosophical level there are inherent differences between a mātauranga Māori (i.e. a localised form of indigenous knowledge) and Western scientific approach to research. Our view is that we accept some of the philosophical differences between Western science and mātauranga Māori and negotiate those differences at the practical, localised and applied level. In this way we draw on both knowledge systems in order to enable us to generate credible and relevant evidence to inform intervention and thereby positive transformation for communities.

It is intended that the interface approach will relocate tensions from the philosophical level to the kaupapa rangahau – methodological level. The assumption is that both knowledge systems are equally credible and relevant to disciplined inquiry in the contemporary context. The approach will leverage the strengths of both Western science and mātauranga Māori, reflecting the lived realities of Māori who move between Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Whānui. The interface approach facilitates the generation of new knowledge, which is sourced from both knowledge systems and is applicable to current situations by Māori and non-Māori. The approach may enable researchers to draw on the best of both knowledge traditions.

Consistent with the themes of this conference, the interface approach facilitates research and evaluation activities that build credible and relevant evidence to enhance public health for all of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Māori live in both worlds and this should be reflected in research. From a Māori perspective, the evidence is credible in that it is generated from within a Māori worldview, using processes that fit with Māori expectations and is guided by culturally competent researchers.

The evidence is relevant in the sense that research at the interface specifically seeks to address Māori community identified priority areas and enables

research to reflect the contemporary lived realities of those in the community that we are ultimately aiming to serve. Also, knowledge translation utilises mechanisms that are culturally Māori. For example, research findings may be codified into waiata, haka, karakia and whakatauki. Therefore, Māori narratives, constructs, terminology and language are utilised in such a way as to enable knowledge translation within the day-to-day lives of whānau. From a Western science perspective, likewise evidence generated is credible and relevant in the sense that the research processes meet Western scientific standards.

Research partnerships and the interface approach

Research relationships between Māori communities and Western academic institutions have tended to be sites of major power imbalances, where Māori involvement has often been limited to the role of research participant. Increasingly, Māori community expectations have grown and this has been reflected in the emergence of kaupapa Māori research and a growing number of Māori academics located both within universities and Māori community research bodies. In other spheres such as local government, work has been undertaken to decipher how partnership can be articulated and implemented (Craig and Courtney, 2004). In the academic domain, a natural progression has been the expectation that all institutions will create space for mātauranga Māori. That is, that there will be meaningful research partnerships with Māori that draw on mātauranga Māori and Western science simultaneously – the interface approach.

The interface approach is a mechanism to enable genuine research partnerships between Māori communities and Western academic institutions. Māori are engaged as equals and mātauranga Māori is valued for its potential to contribute knowledge that will advance Aotearoa/New Zealand. In combination, perspectives from mātauranga Māori and Western science enable richer insights, broader interpretations and application to a wider audience. Further, mātauranga Māori is rooted in Aotearoa/New Zealand (and in this case, in mātauranga Taranaki), and therefore is inherently centred on the generation of localised solutions to the challenges that we face. The interface approach is the obvious vehicle for robust research partnerships between Māori community and Western academic institutions.

Concluding comments

The interface approach uses a partnership model to create space for a knowledge tradition that has, for a long period of time, been marginalised. It contributes to efforts to rebalance the major inequities in power (i.e. infrastructure, access to financial resources and workforce capacity) between the two knowledge systems – mātauranga Māori and Western science. The approach claims space for the generation of knowledge that reflects the contemporary lived realities of a South Pacific nation in the 21st century and informs transformational action towards the goal of enhanced public health for all Aotearoa/New Zealand.

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