

Kaupapa Māori: A community approach

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Abstract: Although there has been considerable discussion and debate in the literature about the Kaupapa Māori approach to research, it remains unknown for many, including Māori. This paper seeks a clearer understanding of Kaupapa Māori as an academic approach with particular attention to its relevance to Māori communities.

Keywords: community; Kaupapa Māori

Over the last three decades, Kaupapa Māori initiatives have emerged as significant features of Māori development. These initiatives are not only Māori-led, but have actively sought to advance Māori aspirations from a context in which Māori thinking, values, knowledge, language, cultural protocols and views of the world provide the basis of action for Kaupapa Māori. The key questions posed within this article may seem self-evident but nonetheless need to be openly posed and discussed. These questions include: What is Kaupapa Māori? Where does it come from? And to whom does it belong?

As discussion of Kaupapa Māori continues to evolve, there are currently several positions of understanding concerning what it represents (Eketone, 2008). Though discussion is specific to Kaupapa Māori developments driven from the base of Māori communities, the voice that tends to relay the discussion is commonly located within academic discourse. Generally this is because academics have usually led such discussions. But what of the voice of those initiatives that are based and led from Māori communities? Where is that voice to be heard?

Ideally, Kaupapa Māori works from a Māori foundation that seeks positive outcomes (Smith, L., 1999) for the collectives of whanau, hapū and iwi (family, sub-tribal and tribal groupings) and for Māori more generally. It is an approach that views the holistic makeup of Māori, both as individuals and as collective members of community, in working towards advancing the well-being of the collective. A significant aspect of the approach that is particular to Kaupapa Māori is that it asserts Māori language and cultural values as integral to its practice. (Smith, G., 1997; Smith, L., 1999)

As an approach that has been determined by Māori it is important that understandings of Kaupapa Māori are recognised as having originated from Māori concepts, views and values. While this is generally understood with most Kaupapa Māori scholars, the point needs to be consistently stated. Though other approaches may be utilised within Kaupapa Māori, essentially it is the Māori world view and associated Māori aspirations that shape and drive it.

The recognition of the rights of Māori as indigenous or first peoples (Sissons, 2005) is fundamental to the very existence of Kaupapa Māori in which Māori cultural practices and views of the world (tikanga Māori) are crucial to the survival of Māori indigenous identity. With rights consistently diminished by majority culture interests, the need to voice and action treaty rights is an integral element of Kaupapa Māori.

The work of Māori academics has been critical in forging Kaupapa Māori within academic institutions in New Zealand and has also been influential for indigenous people on an international level because it articulates approaches from culturally specific epistemologies, rather than from approaches of Western origin. Although the term 'Kaupapa Māori' was coined by Māori academics, it is nevertheless drawn from tikanga Māori, from Māori cultural

protocols, values, practices and views of the world. It is also acknowledged that Kaupapa Māori continues to evolve as a fledgling research approach.

Kaupapa Māori educationalist, Tuki Nepe (1991) argues that Kaupapa Māori is distinctly different from Western approaches in that it is driven by tikanga Māori. Nepe describes Kaupapa Māori as knowledge that validates a Māori world view and asserts that it is not only Māori owned, but also Māori controlled. Of some significance to this position, Mason Durie (1998, p. 1) defines 'rangatiratanga' as explicit to matters of control where Māori have the "right to self-determination and rights to development" (Smith & Reid, 2000, p. 20).

Graham Smith's doctoral thesis (1997) is a seminal work for the Kaupapa Māori concept and his emphasis on the need for Kaupapa Māori principles to be in active relationship with practice remains fundamental (also see Smith & Reid, 2000). Similarly, Leonie Pihama (2001) argues that a theoretical framework needs to encompass Māori experiences and practices. This position is also emphasised by Sheilagh Walker who states that the term Kaupapa Māori 'praxis' was more apt than Kaupapa Māori 'theory' (Smith & Reid, 2000). Essentially, the Kaupapa Māori approach cannot exist without practice. Walker's argument is useful, she positions Kaupapa Māori as being action based. She argues that, in the experience of Māori, theorising is seen as a luxury not afforded to Māori in the struggle against the many global influences that undermine the basic human rights of Māori as indigenous peoples.

The Kaupapa Māori approach considers Māori understandings as being central to the process of research and analysis (Hohepa & Jenkins, 2004). It is also necessary that such Māori understanding is not located solely within Māori academia, but it should also emerge from the Māori world. Since discussion particular to Kaupapa Māori is heavily situated within academic discourse (Bishop, 2005; Durie, 1998; Hohepa, 1999; Pihama, 2001; Smith, G., 1997; Smith, L., 1999; Smith, L., 2005), it is important to consistently re-assert it as being part of the context of Māori communities. So there needs to be a strong community voice to complement the existing voices from Māori academia.

If we examine the recent history of Kaupapa Māori approaches, it is rarely discussed from the position of community and particularly less so from the experience of whanau and hapū (families and sub-tribal groupings). Although Kaupapa Māori initiatives have been, and are, driven by these groupings, Kaupapa Māori remains as unknown territory for a significant part of the Māori population and in many facets of Māori communities, is unlikely to be heard of, let alone understood. Nevertheless, there are also those that simply live in a way that may be described as Kaupapa Māori, where the way of living is 'inherent and normal' to being Māori (Eketone, 2008). However, this particular grouping is far from generic.

Indeed, Māori communities are more likely to refer to 'tikanga' Māori, rather than Kaupapa Māori, in terms of what is understood as a cultural foundation that is distinctly Māori and driven from Māori world views and values. Tikanga Māori is nonetheless under threat as the elder generations pass on. This is apparent not only in the loss of language and observance of cultural practices, but also in the lack of those proficient in their practice. Tikanga Māori and Kaupapa Māori are instinctively about the very survival of Māori as indigenous peoples.

Although my academic perception of Kaupapa Māori is at times uncertain, whenever I want to clarify its meaning, I reflect on my own experience within developments that have been led by the collective of whanau and hapū. My initial understanding of Kaupapa Māori grew from the grass roots initiative of Māori radio in rural Mangamuka, Hokianga. Te Reo Takiwā o Tautoko (Tautoko FM) is an initiative driven by the collective action of a Māori community that has been in operation for over twenty years.

While the particular term 'Kaupapa Māori' was not used by those involved in Tautoko FM, the radio was considered as 'kaupapa' driven, where themes of Māori authority, self-

determination and Māori language and cultural values were assumed. More general themes particular to information sharing and representation were also key areas of development (Mane, 2000). These themes provided a theoretical base for the practical, collective action that became iwi radio. Although the word ‘theory’ would never be mentioned, ‘kaupapa’ on the other hand, was a term frequently used in discussion associated with the overall operations of the radio station. The defining *raison d’être* is appropriate here because it suggests that kaupapa may also be understood as the reason or purpose for existence. For those involved in radio operations the fundamental approach was on ‘kaupapa’ that is, with a commitment to the survival of Māori identity, language and culture as well as being aligned to the politics of self-determination. Kaupapa, in the experience of this initiative was the foundation, in which the base or the ‘papa’ stays the same. Although developments around the kaupapa may emerge, take shape and evolve, the kaupapa stays essentially the same.

Over twenty years of broadcasting, the emphasis of Tautoko FM’s radio operations has been to represent matters of interest and concern to Māori communities in the region, with a dual focus on the provision of programming in te reo Māori. The very act of so doing is seen by some as political. Although Kaupapa Māori is commonly seen as a radical or political element (Pihama, 2001), the core of its existence is more specific to the retention of indigenous identity as part and parcel of Māori advancement (Durie, 1998).

In the establishing of one of the first Māori radio stations in the country, the involvement of elders as ‘on air’ presenters provided astute role models for younger generations. The elders, who had been brought up in a time where the Māori world was clearly changing due to the multiple impacts of colonisation, were nevertheless distinctively Māori. They spoke Māori, their thinking was Māori, they made doing things in ‘our own way’, a Māori way, seem completely possible and absolutely normal. The role of the female elders was a key strength within the development of radio broadcasting operations in that they provided a visible working model that was Māori. They also had faith in, and encouraged, the younger generation to lead where appropriate.

A significant legacy of the elders was that they promoted and lived by the values of tika, pono and aroha (to be correct, to uphold truth and love). These core values were integral to how they lived and were a central part of their cultural values, where decisions were made primarily for the benefit of the collective of whanau, of the extended family. The ‘kaupapa’ or the thinking was always centred on the well-being of the collective. Tika was about doing things right, for the right reasons, for the long term benefit of the collective. Pono upheld principles of being truthful and acting with integrity, as it was also about spiritual faith and connection to the spiritual realm, the acknowledgement of a greater being; and also of those who came before us. Pono was also about having faith in ourselves. Aroha was specific to the notions of compassion, care and empathy for others and also for the self. Aroha is also expressed as love for who and what we are, our language and culture, our people and our environment.

Central to any discussion of the collective group is the concept of ‘whanaungatanga’ which may be described as kinship, relationships or connectivity (Bishop, 2005; Durie, 1998; Bishop, 1996). In the Māori world, knowing one’s relationships to people and land holds high significance and is usually apparent in the protocol and oratory of cultural gatherings. Relationships through blood ties and kinship are often recited by elders, along with the relationships with other tribes and the links that traverse Polynesia.

The building and maintaining of relationships is a matter of considerable significance highlighting the required sense of reciprocity, accountability and mutual respect (Smith, L., 1999; Tomlins-Jahnke, 2008). Implicit in these relationships are the roles and responsibilities to be fulfilled. While commonly associated with genealogical links, whanaungatanga is also used to describe other relationships, such as those held by people who are like-minded in their

interest to work together in support of a common goal (Smith & Reid, 2000). Building and maintaining relationships is a foundation of Kaupapa Māori methodology. Such relationships are not to be taken for granted and wherever possible, research should involve face to face contact to optimise and further strengthen relationships, ideally these relationships are enduring.

In addressing Māori academics at a research workshop, Kaupapa Māori leader and educationalist, Pita Sharples is emphatic about the responsibilities of Māori involved in research and sets certain expectations of their responsibilities outlined as “gearing research to include interventions and authenticity in total accordance with Kaupapa Māori and tikanga Māori” (P. Sharples, workshop presentation, November 11, 2004). Sharples further directs Māori researchers to mindfully ensure outcomes within their research that will strengthen and progress the Māori world. Researchers themselves need to gain a clear understanding of Kaupapa Māori and tikanga Māori to guide their practice. Being Māori does not necessarily guarantee an understanding of either, and thus challenges put forward by Kaupapa Māori advocates are critical in the shaping of fledgling researchers. For example, Sharples challenges Māori researchers by asking questions concerning the purpose of the research to be undertaken; the role of the Government; the decision-making process that determines the research; the need to communicate Māori rights and protocols; and the need for the research to reflect Māori tikanga or the kaupapa of the Māori world.

Sharples appeals to Māori undertaking research, to be clear in their role as researchers and, to be both discerning and proactive in their work. He asks where are the benefits for Māori, stipulating that Māori researchers must ensure that research undertaken is linked to positive outcomes for Māori as a fundamental requirement. As Māori researchers, do we participate in research that relegates anything to do with Māori as problematic, or do we actively look to participate in research that will bring about positive change? Is our research designed, led and conducted in ways that seek to create positive change, does it influence how we see ourselves as Māori, or as the collectives located within Māori communities? Does our research give voice to its participants, does it show them that they hold power, is it positioned from Māori thinking and world views?

To ensure that such developments occur, Māori undertaking research need to be connected and where possible working with and from the base of grass roots communities. To date, while the latter point has eventuated for some Māori communities, efforts to ensure further development occurs, needs to be prioritised if future research with Māori communities is to advance. This type of movement would further assist in overcoming barriers that have historically separated academic research from the real world experience of Māori communities.

The lack of connection between academic institutions and Māori communities is often seen as a division of class, ethnicity, status and most particularly, of those who hold power. For example, Elizabeth Rata (2004) has argued that Kaupapa Māori is seen by some as being the realm of the elite; which can undermine its initiatives in line with the politics of the day. Such a position seemingly disregards the fact that the mainstream system of education has been historically inclined to accept Māori underachievement as the norm.

As a movement that seeks to be self-determining, Kaupapa Māori arises from the need to express and action freedom from a position of indigeneity (Durie, 2005; Sissons, 2005). As with the situation of indigenous peoples at a global level, Māori seek to develop initiatives that will action positive change. For example, some of the well known and established Kaupapa Māori initiatives, Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori, have contributed significantly to motivating Māori to participate and action alternative education pathways for their children. Such initiatives have created spaces where being Māori is the norm (Smith, G., 1997; Smith & Reid, 2000).

Kaupapa Māori action frequently invites criticism, particularly as it challenges the thinking of the status quo. Initiatives are touted as separatist, though in more recent years they have been peddled by politicians in particular, as race-based initiatives that privilege Māori (Durie, 2005; Sissons, 2005; Slack, 2004). While criticism made of Kaupapa Māori is at times aligned with elitism (Rata, 2004) the same can be said of academia, in that it is often seen as being removed from the real world of everyday people. This particular point is exemplified by the fact that although there has been a consistent growth in Kaupapa Māori education initiatives over the last two decades, the majority of Māori children still remain within mainstream education.

A much simpler point to be made in an analysis of Kaupapa Māori is that concerted efforts need to be made to undertake research that will build its practical developments through critique. Given the frequent mistrust found within Kaupapa Māori initiatives (Bishop, 2005; Pihama, 2001; Smith, L., 1999), it seems reasonable to suggest that if communities were more directly involved in developing research proposals and research design, such concerns might be allayed. Involving communities in proposed research is necessary for several reasons. An obvious one is that communities are very likely to know what issues deserve research and why. They will also understand implicitly the kinds of initiatives that are needed to address local community problems through research. Moreover, they will be in a position to understand, prioritise and enable research projects that emerge from their own community based developments.

In examining more closely the relationship of Kaupapa Māori and communities, it is worth noting that the concept of community based research holds a number of similarities that are recognisable in practices of Kaupapa Māori (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). Both approaches refer to building community strengths in research; particularly research that is driven and led by those who live in the communities of interest. As with Kaupapa Māori, community based research can facilitate self-determination and well-being (Henry, 1999), because it is undertaken for, by, and with Māori. As Māori seek to be self-determining, such initiatives would also re-strengthen interdependency between the different groups within Māori communities. Such research allows us to seek solutions and interventions that change and enhance our lived realities (Smith, L., 1999).

As Māori become increasingly involved in matters of self-determination, research will be at the forefront of many future developments. While it is reasonable to assume that tribal organisations will continue to undertake research, it is suggested that often there is room for a more consistent and concerted commitment to research development. For example, in my own tribal region which is the northern-most region of New Zealand (Tai Tokerau) most of the research undertaken by Māori communities is to do with land claims, where people have had to learn how to develop research skills while carrying out the work. One consequence of the lack of research training is that the bulk of the work and responsibility falls at the feet of the few who hold expertise; and they are those who are usually already over-committed. Unless there is expertise guiding such initiatives, efforts may not do justice to the people, communities and the research goals. Linda Smith speaks of community based researchers needing consistent opportunities to improve their skills; this has particular significance for provincial towns and small rural communities where local opportunities to build such skills are rare (L. Smith, workshop presentation, November 12, 2004). There is a strong need therefore for Māori to build capacity for achieving research excellence within their community settings.

Kaupapa Māori and community based research approaches (Strand et al., 2003), share commonalities in that both work towards gaining positive benefits for their communities. This means that the two approaches are frequently fused. However, Kaupapa Māori research is specific to approaches that are not only by, for, and with Māori; they are also developed from Māori world views, values and cultural norms.

With community based research broadly defined as research conducted by, for, and with, the participation of community members, it aims to achieve the greatest possible benefits for the communities involved (School of Public Health, University of Washington, 2006). The specifics of community based research are similar to the Kaupapa Māori approach. Community based research validates the local knowledge and expertise and recognises “people’s ability to generate their own knowledge independent of outside experts” (Strand et al., 2003, p. 5).

Although an academic institution is able to assist in developing skills that work towards aspirations of self-determination, it needs to see its role as one of supporting processes and actions that work towards self-sustaining communities. Providing necessary resources and training to assist in upgrading the skills of those in the community is a critical role that an academic institution is able to offer in creating research partnerships with communities. Māori need to see positive outcomes from research that involves their communities (Bishop, 2005; Smith, L., 1999; Smith, L., 2005). They also need to see that stated outcomes are negotiated with trust and respect in the interest of collective good (Smith, L., 1999; Smith, L., 2005; Tomlins-Jahnke, 2008).

It is notable that Kaupapa Māori has clearly extended into the wider community of Aotearoa. For example, it has become increasingly adopted in the service and political sectors, particularly so within education, health and social services. In 2000, it was reported that Kaupapa Māori had become an “entrenched part of the official discourse appearing in a range of Ministerial documents in Health, Social Welfare, Employment and Education” (Smith & Reid, 2000, p. 6). While Kaupapa Māori may be well established in the social policies of government agency, the understanding of its implementation is the real challenge and needs to be driven from a clear understanding of Kaupapa Māori, rather than from an approach that struggles to understand the fit of Kaupapa Māori within government agency or the service sectors.

An example of a government agency’s lack of fit can be seen clearly in the action of the Ministry of Education which, in 2006, had all reference to the Treaty of Waitangi removed from its draft curriculum. Although the deleted references to the Treaty were ultimately reinstated, the fact that the directive to remove all mention of it was not intercepted at the time relays a clear absence of understanding concerning Kaupapa Māori (Tomlins-Jahnke, 2008). With the Treaty of Waitangi founded in acknowledgement of the rights of Māori as first peoples (Sissons, 2005), its purpose and function is integral to any assertion of those rights, since the intention of the Treaty was to protect them. Kaupapa Māori action vehemently rejects any move to do away with reference to what is this country’s founding document. While the Ministry admitted to making a mistake in deleting all reference to the Treaty (Tomlins-Jahnke, 2008), if Kaupapa Māori had been ‘entrenched’ the situation is unlikely to have occurred. Such situations demonstrate that the gains made in the last two decades on the basis of Treaty rights, cannot be taken for granted. It remains vital that open, frank, and respectful discussion regarding Kaupapa Māori takes place so that understanding the approach and its relevance to the Treaty is consolidated.

As a major driver of change, Kaupapa Māori continues to have a significant role because it is positioned within Māori understandings, practices and actions, as it further aligns to the contexts of struggle and resistance to majority culture domination. Synonymous with this is that Kaupapa Māori aims to strengthen and progress Māori living as distinct indigenous identities. The approach has the flexibility to align with other research approaches that hold related visions, goals and outcomes. However, as pointed out by Eketone (2008), Kaupapa Māori should not be reliant on other research approaches in order to attain acceptance and validation.

As mentioned previously an area of change is in the way research is carried out and a number of academics have pointed out that in general, research paradigms privilege Western ways of knowing in that research has its roots founded in “imperialism and colonisation” (Smith & Reid, 2000, p.18). In considering Western approaches to research, Māori need to be mindful of the validity of different approaches and at the same time to continue striving to identify our own research needs and to develop appropriate strategies and techniques. Such development requires small steps; taken with care. A major concern is that, as Māori, we do not find ourselves in the distasteful position of being drawn into models that disregard and even dishonour Māori language, cultural practices, knowledge and values.

One example of a complementary Western research approach is the association of Kaupapa Māori and ‘critical theory’ (Freire, 1972; Jones, 1990; Smith, G., 1997; Smith, L., 1999). As a research approach, critical theory is essentially concerned with social change through the exposure of unequal power relations; this is a common theme within Kaupapa Māori research. Leonie Pihama asserts that Kaupapa Māori aligns to critical theory in that both approaches expose underlying assumptions, concealing power relations that work towards the continued oppression of Māori (in Smith & Reid, 2000).

Anaru Eketone (2008) however, argues that his own experience of Kaupapa Māori located in community, conflicts with the position of critical theory articulated by many leading Māori academics. Eketone argues that Kaupapa Māori is more about Māori advancement and development than the struggle for power and he highlights how Kaupapa Māori holds understandings other than those that have led developments. Just as Māori are diverse, the approaches used will also be diverse. Examples of such variability are also illustrated in the example given previously of tribal radio. The practical application of radio operations was as much about reclaiming power, the right to be heard and the right to represent our own language and cultural views; as it had to do with Māori advancement. This particular initiative had its roots in both understandings.

A further point that supports the idea that critical theory is an important ally of Kaupapa Māori research, is that it works to challenge not only others, but also Māori themselves. As a tool of self-review, it is highly valuable in critiquing development. While Kaupapa Māori is in the early stages of its association with academic institutions and formal research, it is nevertheless an age-old approach where rigorous debate questions and challenges actions that may work against the interest of the collective (Smith & Reid, 2000, p. 3).

This article has aimed to highlight how Kaupapa Māori exists in different settings and how Kaupapa Māori initiatives show variability. For discussion around Kaupapa Māori to emerge from its fledgling status, dialogue of its use, application, and thinking needs to be continued in order to share and celebrate what has been a proactive approach in seeking positive change for Māori.

In continuing to struggle to hold to our language, cultural practices, knowledge, lands and ways of being, Kaupapa Māori is at the forefront. Whilst moving towards the third decade of this contemporary era of its development, we would be best served not to take for granted that which has been achieved. Although it is argued that Kaupapa Māori need not always be about struggle and resistance, if the intention is to keep and build on the gains that have been made, we need to be vigilant in asserting our basic rights as tangata whenua. While it is understood that Kaupapa Māori is very much about a way of being, working and interacting in a world where indigenous rights are often breached in the name of progress, and where indigenous languages and their cultures are eroded every day, it would be naïve to think that standing up for one’s indigenous rights is not at the cutting edge of change.

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