

Exploring Indigenous Knowledge

Te Ahukaramū

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From the late 1980s through to 2000, I was fortunate to spend a lot of time with elders of my own iwi (and other iwi as well) working on projects designed to record, retain and collect aspects and portions of our traditional knowledge. These activities included a number of book projects containing *waiata* (songs) *tātai* (genealogies) and *kōrero* (stories, narratives). It was my great fortune to be able to record elders and to study their writings and aspects of their tikanga (customary practices). Many of the elders that I knew during those years are no longer with us but many of their *taonga* (treasures) are and I hear them saying to me now:

I te ahatia e koe taku taonga?
What did you do with my treasure?²

This statement challenges me to think not only about taking care of their treasures but also to add to them in some way, to grow them, to expand them. And so I have found my thinking moving from concerns about retention only to an interest in cultural creativity.

When I think about mātauranga Māori (traditional Māori knowledge), I find that there is much that we can do with it and I am excited by both what is already happening in our communities and also the prospect of what could happen. In thinking about the creative potential of mātauranga Māori:

- I think we need to be thoroughly knowledgeable of aspects of mātauranga Māori so that one is *informed* when one is creative with mātauranga Māori – let us build on solid foundations
- We should not be afraid of our imagination when thinking about the potential applications and innovations that might be possible when using mātauranga Māori. Let us be courageous and innovative, not undermining or diminishing in the least, the creativity of the past.
- We should also be realistic and humble about those things that mātauranga Māori is well suited to respond to and those areas where mātauranga Māori is less well developed. Like all knowledge systems, mātauranga Māori has its strengths and weaknesses.

By mātauranga Māori I mean a body of knowledge that was first brought to these shores by Polynesian ancestors of modern Māori, a body of knowledge that changed and grew according to life in these islands; a body of knowledge that changed again following

¹ A paper delivered to a conference entitled ‘The Indigenous Knowledges Conference - Reconciling Academic Priorities with Indigenous Realities’, Victoria University, Wellington, 25 June 2005.

² Te Ōuenuku Rene, an elder of Ngāti Toarangatira, used the following version, ‘Tērā te Atua e pātai mai nei ki a tātou, i pēwheatia e koutou te reo rangatira i hoatungia nā e au ki a koutou’, ‘There God asks us, now what have you done with the chiefly language that I gave to you?’ My thanks to my kaumātua (elder) Ngārongo Iwikātea Nicholson of Ngāti Raukawa for sharing this with me.

encounter with European peoples; and a body of knowledge that was to become endangered in major and substantial ways during 19th and 20th century colonisation. Despite colonisation, however, all was not lost, as new knowledge was created during the establishment of the New Zealand nation and fragments and portions remain with us today including, particularly, the Māori language. The fragments and portions that remain today are sufficient to catalyse a new interest in this distinctive body of knowledge. The fact that we are having this conference today indicates the degree to which this body of knowledge, and knowledge held by indigenous peoples worldwide, remains with us and retains much creative potential.

It is important to note that mātauranga Māori of the past century or so did not necessarily find expression in the world in the way that its creative potential might suggest. That is, the practical expression of mātauranga Māori in New Zealand society was seriously inhibited – primarily through a lack of resources, power and influence - and so what we have tangibly seen in recent decades is not necessarily an accurate image of its actual potential. It is my view that mātauranga Māori in the future is most likely to evolve and change in quite unexpected ways – unexpected in the sense that may not reflect practical expressions in the past but not necessarily unexpected from the point of view of its internal meaning and organisation.

We are rightly concerned with the retention and revitalisation of the traditional knowledge bases of our people, and I believe that this concern will remain for quite some time yet. However, I would like to position cultural retention and revitalisation within a larger paradigm of cultural creativity, one which looks to the wisdom of the past to inspire responses to the challenges of the present and future. I see this as a creative activity within which the goals of cultural retention and revitalisation might be achieved.

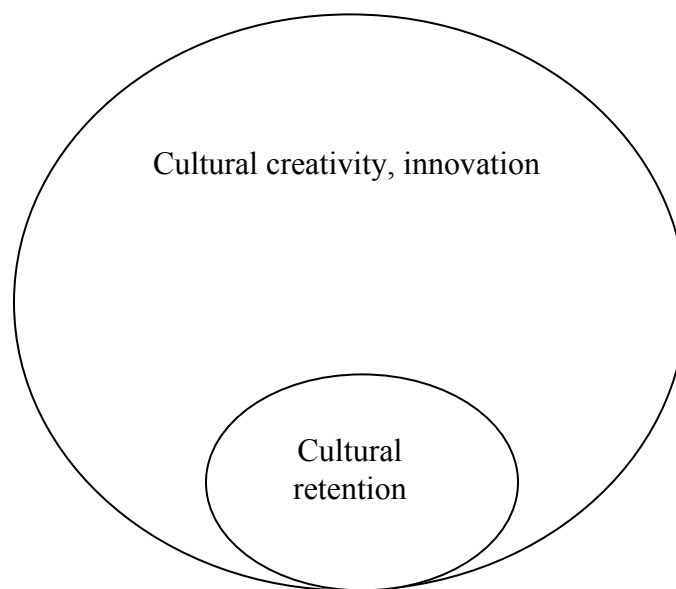


Illustration: Locating Cultural Retention within a larger paradigm of cultural creativity

It is good for us to be inspired by the wisdom of our ancestors but at the same time it is also important to recognise that we live in a world that is vastly different to that experienced by our ancestors. Further, we should recognise that their knowledge reflects *their* experience, universal and timeless as some of its aspects may be. Just as our Polynesian ancestors were faced by the ‘new world’ of Aotearoa when they arrived here, so we too have come to a new place, a new experience in the 21st century. And just as much of the Polynesian worldview and knowledge continued to express itself in subsequent mātauranga Māori within Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu – it is remarkable how the old Polynesian worldview still left its traces within mātauranga Māori several centuries later – so traditional Māori knowledge will leave its traces in an indigenous knowledge of the future.

In this paper, I would like to sketch out a few ideas concerning a possible epistemology of mātauranga Māori specifically and indigenous knowledge generally. The paper contains three parts:

- The first part sketches three themes which I suggest are operative within indigenous knowledge worldwide today. My thought is that these themes *woven together* constitute the major themes of indigenous knowledge.
- Part Two of this paper briefly considers six key concepts on knowledge and knowing that can be found within traditional mātauranga Māori. This discussion demonstrates ways in which our ancestors were thinking about knowledge, knowing and experience.
- Part Three sketches further ideas about an indigenuity of the future, inspired by key ideas that can be found in traditional indigenous knowledge. The task here is to think about indigenuity as a way of being in the world that may improve or at least contrast with current worldwide dilemma of humankind as consumer and exploiter.

Three Major Themes within ‘Indigenous Knowledge’

In my view, the international and cross-cultural body of knowledge entitled ‘indigenous knowledge’ contains three major themes which simultaneously inspires it and defines it. I suggest that these themes when woven together constitute the major features of indigenous knowledge in the world today.

The Search for better relationships between human communities and the natural world

The first theme concerns the search for better relationships between human communities and the natural world environments in which we live. This theme arises from the deep ‘call’ within indigenous knowledge which sees humankind as part of the natural order rather than superior to it. From this idea arises much of the substance of indigenous knowledge such as the notion of the natural world as the embodiment of knowledge, the natural world as a teacher for the human person and that life reaches its fullness when the natural world seems to ‘live in’ and ‘speak into’ the consciousness of the human being and their community. This idea influences the very idea of knowledge itself and presents knowledge as an energy rather than a finite product, and knowledge as equivalent to the

world rather than as representation of it. This theme is also deepened by the lived heritage of indigenous communities in particular land and seascapes.

Knowledge weaving: Cross-disciplinary, cross-boundary thought, discussion and knowledge

The second key theme within indigenous knowledge concerns the weaving of knowledge and experience across domains of knowledge and the boundaries articulated for disciplines. This theme arises from the notion that indigenous knowledge is ‘holistic’ in the sense that knowledge is interconnected and relational in the same way that all life is interconnected and relational. We dwell within the web or weave of life – in Māori we use *tātai* or genealogies for all creation as a metaphor for this aspect of existence – and so our knowledge reflects this reality.

Some see this theme as an attempt to undermine and compromise disciplines. Some might even suggest that this idea is anti-methodological. (One will note how this theme is deeply relevant to notions of power and its expression through knowledge.) However, the idea of weaving across boundaries can not take place without the boundaries themselves existing. Just as the world contains natural borders – as between the sea and land, as between mountains and flatland, as between knowing and ignorance – so there are natural borders within knowledge and they exist for substantial reasons. 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 (confer ‘holon’). Life is a complex and multidimensional whole and the quest to see the ‘whole’ is to render disciplines as part of a complex set of pathways leading to wholeness rather fragmentation. In this way of viewing the world, understanding *relationship* is the key to understanding the world.

The Revitalisation and rejuvenation of the traditional knowledge bases of indigenous communities

A third and important theme within indigenous knowledge is the desire to revitalise and rejuvenate the traditional knowledge bases of indigenous peoples, particularly knowledge that has been in decline through colonisation. This theme is deeply aligned to the desire by indigenous peoples to overcome their experience of colonisation and to build futures upon deep and indigenous foundations. That is, in rearranging indigenous communities and preparing them for the future, this task is not merely concerned with acquiring general knowledge and resources which enable them to participate in a national or regional economy – it is also concerned with understanding ourselves as a distinctive people and what we can distinctively contribute to a wide range of activities within the nation’s in which we live. Contrary to what some critics may say about the rejuvenation of traditional knowledge (‘going backwards’), the revitalisation of traditional knowledge is as much about understanding our future as it is about our past.

In my view, these three themes *woven together* – searching for better relationships with the natural world, cross-boundary styles of thought and knowledge and the revitalisation of traditional indigenous knowledge – are the key ideas within international indigenous knowledge today. There may be other themes – such as the use of traditional knowledge

to improve the harvesting of indigenous flora and fauna – however, I would like to present these three as a starting point for discussion when we think about indigenous knowledge in world terms.

Contiguously all three themes are both indigenous to indigenous knowledge as well as important and substantial contributions to issues and challenges facing humankind throughout the world. For example, theme one provides ample scope to discuss the nature of environmental degradation and stress. The contribution of indigenous knowledge to this issue is to challenge notions of the superiority of humankind to the natural order – humans as consumers. Lying at the heart of indigenous knowledge is kinship between ourselves and the natural world and this idea asks us, how much of the degradation we see in our world today a projection or product of the disequilibrium we see inside ourselves?

Theme two – weaving of knowledge and experience across boundaries – represents a deep and fundamental critique of power and authority as expressed through knowledge. It suggests that there may be there other ways of thinking about power and knowledge than the top-down, bounded and hierarchical model which dominates the world today. As mentioned, the theme does not undermine the position of boundaries and disciplines – discipline here defined by the presence of methodology, power and authority thus vested in those in possession of methodology – but rather it shows how disciplines and fields of knowledge are regions and locations within a larger multidimensional whole. Further, much can be gained when one field encounters another. A cross-over approach can often lead to unexpected and novel innovations and discoveries.

Finally, theme three – the revitalisation of traditional knowledge of indigenous communities – challenges us think carefully about a range of matters including:

- Why is cultural knowledge associated particularly with a population of people so vital to a people's wellbeing and prosperity?
- Why is heritage, and particularly memory, so important to a people's health?
- Do we endanger the wisdom of generations at our peril?

This theme urges humankind to take pause when one group wishes to summarily dismiss whole bodies of knowledge associated with another people.

Towards an epistemology of indigenous knowledge

I would like to turn now to epistemological matters relating to indigenous knowledge. By considering epistemology, or a theory of indigenous knowledge, one is drawn inevitably to think, mediate and reflect deeply upon the way one resides in and experiences the world. That is, like all knowledge indigenous knowledge is derived from a particular way of being in the world and I call this 'way' of being in the world 'indiginity'. As our discussion proceeds, we will see that an indigenous concept of knowledge may not necessarily see knowledge as distinct from experience and hence, at this point, indiginity becomes synonymous with indigenous knowledge.

In considering the potential contribution of indigenous knowledge in our world today, there are a number of avenues worth considering. These include exploring the traditional technologies of indigenous peoples and their uses of flora and fauna, for example, in and the fashioning of materials and objects. We might also consider traditional architecture and the design of settlements, artworks, indigenous concepts of health and social cohesion, identity and so on. There are many items within the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples that could serve as the basis of a new creativity.

This paper, however, looks at what might lie ‘underneath’ indigenous knowledge to discover a particular way of being and experiencing world that may be of assistance to humankind in the future. In the first instance we can use indigenous knowledge:

- To point to or indicate concepts of knowledge and knowing that might be found within the traditional knowledge of ‘indigenous communities’
- To think about indigenous and indigeneity as an experience, as a way of seeing being, thinking and experiencing the world.

In the next section we will consider traditional concepts of knowledge and knowing that are found within mātauranga Māori before moving, in the last section, to consider a theory of indigenous knowledge.

Concepts of knowledge and knowing found within mātauranga Māori

Concepts of knowledge and knowing found within mātauranga Māori move from the idea of explicit, codified and externalised knowledge to knowledge as an internalised knowing through to the experience whereby there is no such thing as knowledge, only the experience of the world expressing itself in human consciousness.

Kai – an ancestral nourishment

In traditional times, knowledge was sometimes referred to as a nourishment (kai), something that was fed (whāngai) from one person to another. This perspective of knowledge as a food is reflected in numerous places in traditional literature such as proverbs (whakataukī) and other expressions. For example, the following proverb appears widely:

Ko te manu e kai ana i te hua o te ngahere, nōna te ngahere
Ko te manu e kai ana i te hua o te mātauranga, nōna te ao.
The bird who partakes of the fruit of the tree, theirs is the forest
The bird who partakes of the fruit of knowledge, theirs is the world.

Another proverb states that knowledge is:

te kaimānga a ngā tūpuna

This is translated as:

the masticated food of the ancestors

Pei Te Hurinui uses a variant of this term in his biography of Pōtatau Te Wherowhero. He writes:

Through the ages the peoples of the world have shown resentment toward any man possessed of the treasures of the Baskets of Knowledge. They are governed by their feelings of envy, and will select those of shallow minds like themselves, or those who will give the *maanga* (chewed-over food). The people who continue long in these ways will become possess of languid souls.³

The term ‘kaimānga’ translates as ‘masticated food’. The image used here is of a mother who chews a piece of food in her mouth before she feeds it to her baby. This is to ensure that the food is supple and digestible and that her baby won’t choke while he or she eats it. Particularly, it ensures that the nourishment contained within the food is released to the child. As the proverb suggests, true or good knowledge is like a food masticated by our mothers before it is fed to us. Knowledge should not be passed in large unpalatable and indigestible chunks. It should be broken down into pieces and carefully ‘chewed over’ before it is passed to another. This is an important statement for education for it tells us that teachers should be like our mothers, chewing through knowledge before it is taught to others. As we all know, the best teachers are those who thoroughly understand the knowledge they are passing to others, they are the teachers who have ‘chewed through’ the knowledge they are imparting to others.

The proverb also states that knowledge is the masticated food ‘of the ancestors’. That is, knowledge is ‘chewed over’ and passed from one generation to the next. It reminds us that the best and most effective learning takes place in a family context where a child partakes of knowledge as if it is a ‘kai’ fed to them by their parents. The proverb reinforces the ‘parent as first teachers’ ethos. It also underlines the idea that knowledge that nourishes has the ‘feel’ of generations upon it.

***Mātauranga* – knowledge externalised, codified**

Whilst *mātauranga* Māori is being used today as a title for a body of knowledge, the word *mātauranga* itself can be considered more directly as a perspective on the nature of knowledge. That is to say, *mātauranga* is often used in everyday parlance to stand for knowledge generally. However, there are a number of aspects to its usage.

Transfer

Firstly, we can say that *mātauranga* is often used to refer to that type of knowledge that is passed, exchanged and transferred between people. For example, the words that one utters to explain something, is a type of knowledge passed from one person (the speaker) to another (the listener). We would refer to this type of knowledge as *mātauranga*. As a result of this *transfer* aspect of *mātauranga*, Rev. Māori Marsden discusses the notion of being able to collect or gather *mātauranga* and place it in one’s *kete* (basket):

³³ *King Potatau: An Account of the Life of Potatau Te Wherowhero, the First Maori King*, by Pei Te Hurinui, Polynesian Society 1959, p. 253.

Nā, ko te mātauranga, hei ā kohikohi. Whakarongo ki te kōrero, kua kohikohia, kia kī ai tāu kete. Tango mai i ngā tohunga kua whāngaia ki ngā kai o ngā kete e toru.⁴

Now, concerning knowledge, this is something we collect. One listens to stories and explanations and gathers these things into one's basket so that it may be full. One gathers together these things from priests and experts who have partaken of 'the food of the three baskets' (sacred knowledge). Your task is to gather together these treasures into your basket.

We might say that mātauranga, in this way, is passive, a finite product (of words mainly) passed between persons.

Active

However, mātauranga also possesses an active aspect in the same way that the English term 'knowledge' is both passive and active. That is, mātauranga can refer to knowledge generally – exchanged between people – and it can also refer to a person's understanding of something. For example:

Ko tāna mātauranga ki te tuhituhi, ko tāna mātauranga ki te kōrero.
His knowledge of writing, his knowledge of speaking.

This usage is derived from the root word 'mātau' meaning to know, to understand. Hence the expression:

He tangata mātau tērā...
He is a knowledgeable person...

And:

Kei te mātau ia ki tāu e kōrero nā
He understands the matter you are discussing.

The Williams *Dictionary* glosses 'mātau' as 'know, to be acquainted with' and provides the following illustration:

E kore au e matau ki nga whakaaro o nga tangata katoa.
I do not know the thoughts of all people.⁵

The *Dictionary* also includes the derived terms of *whakamātau* (make to know, teach) and *whakamātautau* (to make trial of, test). Today, *whakamātautau* is often used for examination.

⁴ *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, edited by Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal. The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden 2003, p.75.

⁵ *Dictionary of the Maori Language*, H.W. Williams, p. 191. Seventh Edition 1971, Reprint Legislation Direct 2000

A Learned Person

Finally, sometimes mātauranga is also used to refer to a learned person. As in:

E ngā mātauranga o te motu, whakarongo mai.
Knowledgeable person of the land, please listen.

This usage is similar to the use of *wānanga* to refer to an expert person:

Kihai i tae ki nga pukenga, ki nga wananga, ki nga tauira.⁶
He did not go to the teachers, the wise persons, the models.

To summarise, mātauranga is used to refer to knowledge generally. We have noted, though, the idea of mātauranga as a kind of knowledge that passes between individuals. It is an entity or a phenomenon that people pass between each other. We have also seen that mātauranga possesses a more active aspect as an adjective describing a person's understanding of a particular matter. This aspect of mātauranga is drawn from the root word 'mātau', meaning 'to know'. We have also seen that mātauranga at times can be used to refer to a wise and knowledgeable person.

Mohiotanga – internalised knowing

Mōhiotanga is a term widely used in Māori language circles. The following quote, again from Rev. Māori Marsden, makes mention of 'mōhio' and also demonstrates the relationship between mātauranga, māramatanga and mōhio:

Tēnei mea, rerekē anō te mātauranga i tēnei mea i te mōhio. He mātauranga anō te mātauranga, he mōhiotanga anō te mōhio. Ā, e ū ai te mohio ki roto ki te tangata. Nā te tae mai o te māramatanga o te wairua pēnei i tā ō koutou mātua titiro. Kia puta te māramatanga o te wairua ki te hinengaro o te tangata, nō te mea, ko te mātauranga, he mea nō te mahunga o te tangata, ko te mōhio he mea nō te ngākau, o te hinengaro o te tangata. Ā, kia tae rā anō ki te wā e mārama ai te wairua o te tangata, tana hinengaro, katahi anō ka kiia kua mōhio ia.

Knowledge (mātauranga) is different from knowing (mohio). When the illumination of the spirit arrives, the one truly knows, according to your ancestors. When the illumination of spirit arrives in the mind of the person (that is when understanding occurs) for knowledge belongs to the head and knowing belongs to the heart. When the person understands both in the mind and in the spirit, then it is said that that person truly 'knows' (mōhio).⁷

Mōhiotanga can be viewed as 'internalised or embodied knowing', one that does not require an exchange (of knowledge) to be present in one's consciousness. An example of

⁶ *Dictionary of the Maori Language*, H.W. Williams, p. 191. Seventh Edition 1971, Reprint Legislation Direct 2000, p. 479.

⁷ *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, edited by Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal. The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden 2003, p.75

this kind of ‘knowing’ is the knowledge of the new-born child to suckle at his/her mother’s breast. In most cases, a child is not taught to suckle, but rather and somehow the child knows what to do. Examples of ‘mōhiotanga’ can be found throughout the natural world. For example, the movement of a leaf toward the rays of the sun, the knowledge of a bird to build a nest, the ‘brace’ of the body when one is struck with fear and so on. These are all aspects or features of ‘knowing’ that do not require the deliberate transfer of knowledge from one to another. ‘Mōhiotanga’ is generally used to stand for this kind of knowing.

The Marsden quote above suggests that mōhiotanga might be a higher form of knowing than that suggested by mātauranga. The sense here is that mōhiotanga is some kind of ‘embodied’ knowing, suggestive perhaps of ‘consciousness’. A key feature of mōhiotanga is the notion that it is *not transferred* as mātauranga is and, further, that somehow it resides in the body.

Māramatanga – understanding, illumination, wisdom

Another kind of ‘knowing’ and ‘knowledge’ considered here is māramatanga which can be literally translated as ‘illumination’. Māramatanga, hence, is connected with degrees of understanding (mārama). One might consider a spectrum of understanding where one end of the spectrum indicates no understanding and illumination. The other end of the spectrum is distinguished by great illumination, understanding and wisdom.

Our usual experience of māramatanga occurs on an everyday basis in such activities as conversation. Here we converse and thereby pass mātauranga between each other. However, with respect to māramatanga, it is up to the receiver to determine whether they understand or not. Hence, māramatanga is that quality and experience of understanding that takes place inside a person when they have received certain knowledge. Curiously, however, māramatanga does not arise solely through the arrival of mātauranga (knowledge) alone to the person. Some rather mysterious alchemy takes place inside a person which transforms what they have heard (mātauranga) into understanding (māramatanga).

From the traditional Māori worldview, it might be argued that māramatanga is the highest form of knowledge and knowing. Such a notion is based upon tribal creation traditions which speak of the rise of Te Ao Mārama or ‘the world of light and illumination’. Hence, the ubiquitous oratorical phrase used on marae throughout the country:

Tihē mauriora ki Te Whaiao
 Ki Te Ao **Mārama!**
 The breath and vital energy of life
 To the Dawnlight
 To the World of Light of **Illumination!**

Finally, we can note that māramatanga was also a popular concept in the 19th century, following the adoption of a Biblical paradigm in many Māori communities. The various *Poropiti* (prophet) were gifted individuals who were said to come into possession of a

māramatanga out of which certain teachings and statements were made. When the gifted individual went through an illuminating experience by which they came to see deeply into some aspect of existence or felt that they received some special knowledge, the expression used was:

Ka tau mai he māramatanga ki a ia
An illumination and an understanding came upon him/her.

The sense here is that the person had experienced a profound learning the expression of which took various forms.

***Wānanga* – process and energy leading to understanding**

A further important concept relevant to knowledge and knowing is *wānanga*. There is much that can be said for this term (it is worthy of its own study), however, we will restrict our discussion to a few comments only. In its simplest form, *wānanga* means to discuss, to debate and to analyse.

Kei te wānanga te hui i te take.
The gathering is considering the matter.

Wānanga is considered here as an activity, an active process of exploring and considering. Further, we can say that the general purpose of the activity called ‘wānanga’ is the creation of new knowledge and understanding. When some one or some people are conducting wānanga, they are going through a process whose outcome is a new idea, a new understanding, new knowledge. This idea is reinforced in everyday parlance. For example, when we use a phrase like:

kei te wānanga tātou i te pātai nei.

we are saying that:

We are considering/debating/analysing/exploring the question (before us).

The intention, of course, is to find out something new, to come to a new understanding or realisation. Whilst the sense of ‘finding’ or ‘seeking’ is not made explicit in the term *wānanga*, it is nevertheless implied and well understood throughout the community of Māori language users. Hence, we can say that at a very simple and everyday level, *wānanga* is used to stand for a process by which we can come to some kind of new idea or understanding. *Wānanga* is also used to refer to a particular person skilled in the work of the whare wānanga:

Kihai i tae ki nga pukenga, ki nga wananga, ki nga tauira.
He was not taught by the teachers, the learned ones, the exemplars.⁸

⁸ *Dictionary of the Maori Language*, H.W. Williams, p. 191. Seventh Edition 1971, Reprint Legislation Direct 2000

Another perspective on *wānanga* is contained in the narrative concerning the flight of Tāne to the highest heavens there to receive the baskets of the *wānanga*. In the following extract, *wānanga* is referred to almost as an object:

Nā ka mea a Whiro ki ngā tuākana, ‘Ka haere ahau ki te tiki i te wānanga i te Toi-o-nga-rangi...’

Whiro said to the elder siblings, ‘I shall go to fetch the *wānanga* at the highest heaven.’⁹

These few and brief examples offer thoughts and directions with regard to *wānanga*. Whilst *wānanga* is generally concerned with the *process* by which knowledge is considered and created, this process is critical to exploring traditional notions of knowledge and knowing and with the creation of knowledge.

Tohu – a verb used to refer to the arrival of illumination

We shall conclude this section on concepts of knowledge and knowing found in mātauranga Māori with the term *tohu*. We conclude here because the explanations that follow lead us to the inevitable point in which knowledge becomes equated with the world itself. Here the world is seen *as* knowledge and wisdom and the task of the student is to become ‘open’ and ‘receptive’ to the teachings of the world. The student has to ‘cleanse the lens of their perception’ and to not merely see the world as his thoughts incline him/her to see it, but rather remove these lenses to see the world as it actually is.

In an explanation provided by the late Rev. Māori Marsden, *tohu* is the term used to describe the arrival of mana within a person. When mana does arrive, this person is considered a *tohunga*, a vessel of mana. Marsden describes the final examination of a whare wānanga student who is sent out on his own into the wilderness. He is not able to return to the whare wānanga until a new idea or new knowledge has come into his mind. Through fasting (whakatiki) and meditation (nohpuku), the student studies their natural surroundings – a clearing in a forest perhaps – and awaits for a new illumination to arrive in their minds. When this is done, the student is then able to return to the whare wānanga there to be tested by the elders. If the student’s illumination was considered to be appropriate then this was considered as evidence of the arrival of mana into the experience of the student.

Interestingly, the question asked by the teachers to the student who was sent into the forest was:

Pehea nei te kōrero a te wairua a Tāne ki a koe?
What was the teaching of the spirit of Tāne to you?

In this question we see reflected the idea of the forest itself, in the form of Tāne, speaking directly into the experience and consciousness of the student, teaching him and imparting important lessons. In this sense, knowledge was not created by the student, by the human person, but rather it was imparted directly by a ‘higher consciousness’ into the student.

⁹ *The Lore of the Whare Wananga* by S. Percy Smith. Polynesian Society 1913.

Further, in this model, knowledge is not the product or representation of the experience but rather the experience itself.

This illustration serves to show that finally the *kind* of knowing and knowledge of importance to the traditional whare wānanga is that kind of knowledge that arises from an ‘immediate’ and ‘intimate’ experience of the world. Here there is no notion of knowledge per se, a discretely created phenomenon standing as a representation of the world and experience, like a photograph. Rather the world is knowledge.

It is on the basis of this interpretation – particularly the perspective which explains that ‘tohu’ is the adjective used to describe the arrival of mana into a vessel – that I promote the idea that a true tohunga (tohunga is the gerundive of tohu) is a creative person, one who is able to bring forth new realizations, ideas and understandings through the presence of mana within them. A tohunga is not simply a knowledgeable person – although they usually are. Rather a tohunga, is finally a creative person, illuminated with an essential authority which allows them to bring new understandings and knowledge for the benefit of their community.¹⁰

‘The Sympathetic Touch’: Indiginity as an experience, a way of seeing and being in the world

We now turn to explore a few ideas concerning indiginity as a way of seeing and experiencing the world. Our discussion of the ‘tohu’ concept is a springboard into our next discussion concerning the relationship between human person and the natural world. My interest here is to think about an indiginity of the future drawing inspiration from indigenous knowledge of the past. I suggest that it is a feature of the human condition to exist in relationship with the environments in which we dwell. For example, when the day is warm, we feel warm, when it is cold, we feel cold. We could call this a natural indiginity in the sense that it is part of our experience as humans to relate to, reflect and image the places and locations in which we live. We become pictures of the environments in which we dwell and it is remarkable how the world of our upbringing continues to leave traces upon us deep into adulthood.

Today, however, our environments are complex. We live in a mixture of environments – built environments, natural world environments, linguistic environments, value environments, social environments and so on. One of the fascinating features of our lives today is that the environments we live in are increasing in complexity, made more so by the ease with which we are able to travel distances.

However simple or complex our living situations might be, in time we come to reflect those environments. We can not help but have our worlds speak into our experience and for us to reflect that experience. Again I call this a natural indiginity and I see this applicable as much to the long term urban dweller living generation after generation in high rise apartment buildings as much as traditional indigenous communities living generation after generation in natural environments such as forest or beside waterways.

¹⁰ This perspective on *tohu* and *tohunga* is more fully described in *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, edited by Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, The Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden 2003.

(More and more we see young people ‘indigenising’ now to virtual environments of the internet and so on.)

What I think distinguishes *formal* indigenous cultures, however, is the explicit attention paid to the expression of *natural* world environments into human cultural expression. That is, a formal indigenous culture is one which turns human consciousness on its head by allowing the natural world to teach human thinking and experience. Humankind as the consumer and superior to the natural order, conversely, projects itself into the natural world, there to dominate it, to acquire it. Hence, whilst I think we can become indigenous to the built environments of our own conscious projections – the urban dweller for example – a formal indigenous culture seeks to allow the natural world to find form in human consciousness.

Traditional indigenous knowledge abounds with evidence of this idea. This includes the *tohu* example discussed earlier and also includes ideas such as the unification of the human body with the natural world and transformation of individuals in rituals and ceremonies into animals and birds. These are traditional pre-literate and pre-Christian examples. Our challenge now is to consider the import of this principle or aspect of traditional indigenous knowledge for an indigeneity of the future.

I named this section ‘the sympathetic touch’, taking these words from an English translation of the well-known speech attributed to Chief Seattle, a native American chief of the 19th century. The passage reads as follows:

Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people. And the very dust upon which you now stand respond more lovingly to their footsteps than to yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch.¹¹

I love the phrase which says that ‘our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch’ for I think this is what we looking for. We are searching for a way of being in the world that is far less corrosive and invasive of the natural world. We are looking for a ‘sympathetic’ way of being in the world. The aggression of human kind and human cultures needs to be somehow ameliorated or transformed in some way. How might we do this?

One way of considering these matters is by contrasting aspects of an oral culture with that of a text and latterly screen based culture. Illustrated below is a comparison of the differences between oral and text based cultures and how they differ on matters pertaining to knowledge, experience and memory. In presenting this comparison, it is

¹¹ *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*, edited by Kent Nerburn. New World Library, California 1999, p. 198

recognised that these ideas are approximate only and that it is an assumption to align 'oral' to 'indigenous' knowing that the 'oral' experiences can take in a text based culture as well. The key idea to note is that indigenous knowledge which, till relatively recently, arose predominantly in oral cultures and that way of experiencing the world – with its absence of major technologies, literacy and so on – does bequeath to the members of that culture a particular way of being in the world. The way the physical body encounters the world is tremendously important as is the place of memory in one's consciousness. I think indigenous knowledge can make an important contribution to world knowledge generally in matters relating to the physical body, memory and knowledge itself.

Oral Culture

Knowledge is seen as an *internal* energy in the body

Knowledge is the internal consciousness of a person

Memory is not distinct from cognition
Memory is conscious awareness (te hīringa i te mahara)

Memory is not solely concerned with retaining knowledge of past events

Experience is inseparable from knowledge

Literate Culture

Knowledge is *external*, 'contained' in external receptacles and traded

Knowledge is the *product* of consciousness

The repositories of knowledge (i.e. books) can be separated from the analysis of knowledge and experience (cognition)

Repositories are concerned with retaining pre-existent knowledge

Knowledge is the explanation of experience

There are many, many things to be said about each of these statements. In a rather imprecise way, this is how knowledge, memory and experience occurs to us today and our experience remains a mixture of these things. Whilst there is now a splendid written tradition in indigenous knowledge systems such as mātauranga Māori, the oral experience is a major dimension within mātauranga Māori. We can consider this matter further by discussing the Māori concept of 'aroaro'.

Aroaro: Three Dimensional and Spherical Conscious Awareness

The usual explanation of the term 'aroaro' – the one we teach students of the Māori language – is that the aroaro is the area located immediately in front of the person. What is captured, usually, by the eyes prescribes the physical dimension (height, width, breadth) of the aroaro. For example, if I can see it, it is now in my aroaro. We might say that this is the first or primary form of the aroaro, that prescribed by *sight*.

Now, if one closes one's eyes and listens to the world, it is hearing that prescribes the size of the aroaro. As we know, the aroaro now becomes three-dimensional and stretches out in a spherical fashion and in a 360 degree radius. We can imagine that hearing creates a kind of invisible sphere about the body. Those things that come into that sphere are said to be in the aroaro and those that are not in the sphere are outside the aroaro (although we

know that hearing is not entirely omni-directional.) This is the aroaro prescribed by *hearing*.

If we consider the other senses – taste, touch, smell – the spherical aroaro is intensified and sensitised further for when all five senses are operating in harmony, the entire body encounters the world. Although not all senses work perfectly all of the time, we do dwell somewhat in a sensuous three-dimensional world encountered by the physical senses on a daily basis.

The aroaro concept is drawn further, in Māori thinking, when we consider that the Māori word for thought – whakaaro – is related to the word aroaro. The word ‘whakaaro’ literally translates as ‘cause to be considered’ (‘whaka ‘is the causative prefix) meaning that thought is that experience inside ourselves which brings things into our aroaro. Just as there is an external aroaro defined and prescribed by the physical senses, there is an internal aroaro defined by *thought*. Each, however, is intimately connected with the other.

The relevance of this discussion is that texts – and latterly screens – serve to narrow the aroaro. Consider what happens to our bodies when we spend some time either reading texts or sitting in front of a screen. This experience, this physical position, narrows and sharpens the aroaro. The more time and the more often we do this, the more the aroaro becomes fixed in a certain shape and the less ‘omni-directional’ we become. Hence, an oral culture, one that is not reliant upon text and screen, and more upon hearing, physical touch and so on, is one that fosters the aroaro broadly. Indeed there are times when the aroaro is focused sharply in an oral culture – listening intently, focusing upon detail in artwork and so on. However, on the whole, we can say that an oral culture fosters the aroaro broadly whilst a text and screen based culture narrows and sharpens it.

The implications of these ideas to knowledge, memory and experience are vital. Firstly, with the text and screen as repositories of knowledge, this serves to emphasise the external nature of knowledge, that is, outside of the body. In an oral culture, with its emphasis upon listening and seeing another person, this fosters the view that knowledge resides within the human person, externalised nevertheless at various points. Memory, in this way of being in the world, is concerned with qualities rather than quantities for it is based, again, on the notion that knowledge is within the body. Memory, therefore, is really concerned with *awareness* as much as knowledge of past events. Finally, experience is mediated through the whole body in an oral culture rather than through the images presented by text and screen. All these aspects serve to influence the nature of one’s aroaro and, hence, how one encounters the world.

Paying attention to the *aroaro* is one way of thinking about Seattle’s ‘sympathetic touch’. This issue is concerned with sensitising the body in order to engage the world as it actually is. Today we make great use of ‘fortifications’ – substances such as stimulants like coffee and instruments such as eyeglasses. The aroaro concept challenges use to think about how the whole body encounters the world and how this might influence our ideas about knowledge, memory and experience.

An Indigenous Concept of Knowledge

In considering an indigenous concept of knowledge, we necessarily need to consider the nature of indigeneity itself and understand how this impacts upon our view of knowledge. When we think of knowledge today, our minds usually turn to ideas, concepts, philosophies and language that we pass between ourselves. To a very great degree, knowledge is a constantly negotiated and mediated entity that we pass between ourselves to help us understand and guide our experience of the world. This transfer of knowledge, particularly through the use of the written text, has meant that knowledge has taken on the aspect of a commodity that is traded between individuals and groups. Knowledge has become a resource available to one and all but most of all to those who can afford it.

Our current discussions on the ‘knowledge economy’ and the ‘knowledge wave’ is predicated on the basis that knowledge is indeed a tradeable resource and that the best knowledge that exists is one that can create products for a modern economy. For it is in the economy, the current orthodoxy argues, that the future of our nation is secured. This concept of knowledge stands in sharp contrast to many other perspectives on knowledge and I would argue that the nation would be impoverished indeed if it was held that this is the only purpose for knowledge.¹²

In an indigenous culture, the exchange of knowledge is predicated upon a fundamentally different view of the nature of knowledge and human existence. An indigenous culture would argue that humans are the progeny of the land and we must take our place alongside all the other things that are birthed from the land such as trees, flora and fauna and so on. In Māori culture, for example, the first human is said to be *Hine-ahu-one* whose name reflects the idea of the ‘woman-arising-from-earth’. Hine is said to be the progenitor of humankind.

This perspective on the birth and nature of human kind impacts upon our understanding of knowledge as well. Just as Tāne was born from the earth to separate earth and sky, so the human person is born from Papatuanuku, the land. However, a physical birth is then followed by an intellectual birth (for want of a better term) and a spiritual birth.

What this means is that the human person walks the land having been born from it while the land continues to bequeath its gifts to him or her in the form of thought. As the physical body arises from the land, so thought arises from within the person. This is why the adjective for the appearance of thought within a person is *hua* as in the expression ‘ka hua te whakaaro’. (Also *puta*, *toko* and others) The sense here is that the interior of the individual is an organic ‘arising’ (this is the meaning of the terms ‘toko’ and ‘tikanga’) by which thought ‘arises’ within the person. Thought is a fruit that blooms within the mind. This idea gives rise to expression:

Ka hua te whakaaro
Ka hua te kōrero

¹² Discussions have taken place in recent times, however, concerning these alternative ways of thinking about knowledge. See, for example, *Catching the Wave? The Knowledge Society and the future of education* by Jane Gilbert. New Zealand Council for Educational Research 2005.

Meaning:

Thought blooms
Spoken Words blossom

Hence, an indigenous concept of knowledge is based upon the notion that the entire being of the human person is the fruit of the earth. This includes human cognition, consciousness, thought and more. Life in these terms is understood to be the nature of the flow of earth consciousness and knowledge into the person where the person becomes the living embodiment and 'fruit' of the earth and its progeny. The land and the person becomes one as in the well known term, 'tangata whenua'. The person is the earth, the earth is the person. In this worldview, knowledge is indigenous to the human person who is indigenous to the earth, dwelling in a symbiotic organic relationship. Certainly knowledge is externalised as a 'fruit', a 'nourishment', however, in the first instance knowledge is internal to the body and the earth.

This is an 'indigenous' knowledge tradition in the sense that human beings respond spontaneously to the environments in which they dwell. Thought may, in some traditions, be considered to be the spontaneous production of the mind, but in an indigenous tradition, thought is the product of the environment, of the land and so on. It is a very deliberate 'bequeathing' of that environment into the consciousness of the individual.

In this paper Dr Charles Royal (Te Ahukaramū) will reflect upon his experience of being a researcher in traditional Māori knowledge, mātauranga Māori. Since 1986, Charles has been studying particularly the knowledge systems of his own iwi and has written and presented ideas on mātauranga Māori in a variety of forums. In 2005, Charles will commence a new research project entitled 'Te Kaimānga: Towards a New Vision for Mātauranga Māori' and so he will present an overview of the goals and outcomes of this project. This project will conclude in 2007.

Following this, he will discuss ideas pertaining to an epistemology of indigeneity which arises from both a deep reflection upon the key themes within mātauranga Māori as well as a desire to create a response to the worldwide issue of improving the relationship between human societies and cultures, and the natural world environments in which we dwell. Charles suggests that it is a feature of the human condition to be in conscious and unconscious correspondence with the environments in which we dwell. However, a key feature of a formal indigenous culture is that it is deliberate and conscious to the expression of the forms of the natural environment into the outward activities of the culture.

Charles's presentation will discuss concepts of knowledge and knowing that can be found within mātauranga Māori. He will describe the journey from *mātauranga* (codified and explicit knowledge) through to *tohu*, a term used for an experience in which the natural world seems to speak directly into human consciousness – a concept upon which a view of indigeneity can be constructed. In journeying from mātauranga to *tohu*, Charles will touch upon other concepts of knowledge and knowing including *kai* (knowledge as food), *mohiotanga* (embodied knowing), *māramatanga* (illumination, understanding), *whakaahua* (coming to form) and *wānanga* (a conscious energy).

Finally, Charles will pose a number of questions concerning the possible application of indigenous knowledge in our contemporary circumstances. What might it offer for society and culture today?

Word max = 500

Dr. Charles Royal (Te Ahukaramū) is a researcher, writer and musician. His tribal affiliations are Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tamaterā and Ngā Puhi. From 1996 to 2002, Dr. Royal was Director of Graduate Studies and Research at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, a Māori operated centre of higher learning located at Ōtaki. During that time, he convened a masters programme in Māori knowledge which was presented substantially in the Māori language. In 2001, he was New Zealand Fulbright Senior Scholar and a recipient of a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travelling Scholarship which enabled him to travel to the United States and Canada where he conducted research into indigenous worldviews. Since the beginning of 2003, Charles has been working fulltime for his own company conducting research and developing research policy for the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology. Charles has written and/or edited five books all involving aspects of mātauranga Māori including *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* and *'Native traditions by Hukiki te Ahu Karamu o Otaki Jany 1st 1856'* These were published in 2003. In 2005, Charles will commence a new research project entitled 'Te Kaimānga: Towards a New Vision for Mātauranga Māori'.