

MĀTAURANGA MĀORI

Māori students enjoying and achieving success as Māori

Connected to a Māori world view

Mātauranga Māori is about a Māori way of *being* and *engaging* in the world – in its simplest form, it uses *kawa* (cultural practices) and *tikanga* (cultural principles) to critique, examine, analyse and understand the world.

It is based on ancient values of the spiritual realm of Te Ao Mārama (the cosmic family of the natural world) and it is constantly evolving as Māori continue to make sense of their human existence within the world.

Eminent Māori scholar Dr Charles Royal describes Mātauranga Māori in this way: 'he **whakaatu**, he **whakamārama** hoki i ngā ahuatanga o te Ao. Mā reira e **mōhio** ai te tangata ki te Ao, e **mātau** ai hoki ia ki ētahi whaingā, ki ētahi tikanga. He mea **ako**, he mea whangai' (2008, p.37).

In short, Royal thinks about Mātauranga Māori as something that helps explain and enlighten us about different aspects of the world around us, and in that process, a person gets to know about and understand some of the different purposes and meanings, some of the different ways of learning about his/her world that can be transferred from one person to another.

Mātauranga Māori provides insight into different perspectives about knowledge and knowing. The Māori epistemological penchant for trying to understand the connections and relationships between all things human and non-human first, 'what is its whakapapa?' provides a contrast to the western paradigm that tries to seek knowledge and understanding by a close and deep examination of something or someone in isolation first, 'what does it/he/she do? What is it for?'

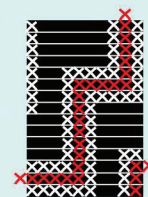
An initial question is, 'who or what is this thing I am seeing in this world and how do I relate to it?' Western knowledge's initial question is, 'what is the role that this person or thing has?' In summary, the emphasis on the human element and the impact on the human element differentiates a Mātauranga Māori approach from a Western Pākehā approach.

Mātauranga Māori in our mahi is not just creating a space for Māori ways of being and knowing, but valuing the richness that these whakaaro (ideas) bring to our kaupapa (agenda). It is understanding that there is no 'one' way to 'know' something. It is also understanding that the strength in our mahi (work) comes from multiple world views and the acknowledgement that Mātauranga Māori can deepen and enhance other theories (e.g. critical theories).

Mainstream discourses

Discourses about Mātauranga Māori in New Zealand are often framed around phrases like 'I don't really understand what it is', 'it means different things depending on who you talk to', 'it is sacred, traditional stuff that is hard to relate to today's context',

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Mainstream discourses cont'd

'we already do pōwhiri and kapahaka at school', 'there aren't any/enough resources to help us learn about it and therefore incorporate it into our teaching', 'it's not my place or I don't feel comfortable using it', 'it's not my culture so why do I need to know about it' and 'if it's not important to Māori students and their whānau why should I bother with it?'

What is most interesting (and disappointing) in looking at these phrases is the lack of value attributed to Mātauranga Māori as a legitimate body of knowledge and a way of knowing - a frame of reference for deepening our understanding of and connection to our context in Aotearoa New Zealand.

'Domains of knowledge are an important concept that I have only recently become aware of. I have spent most of my life in school and yet I had no idea of this concept. In English medium schools, the majority of learning and teaching happens in one domain only and without reference or deference to any other ways of knowing.'

This lack of understanding stems from the often invisible, hegemonic undercurrent that exists in our society, promoting certain bodies of knowledge and ways of doing as being superior to others.

Kia Eke Panuku provides frequent opportunities for schools and their communities to explore the potential that exists from understanding their context through a Mātauranga Māori lens. The conscientisation of people to this new reality can and should play an important play in realising the potential of Māori and non-Māori alike.

Links with practice

We have experienced first-hand the power of having Mātauranga Māori as a pivotal part of Kia Eke Panuku learning conversations.

For example, whakawhanaungatanga embodies a Mātauranga Māori concept. Tangible benefits are always evident when we engage with schools in this practice. This has been so for the people in Kia Eke Panuku and for the kaupapa.

Another link has emerged from observing schools at a regional wānanga use whakataukī (Māori metaphors) as a way of connecting their critical cycle of learning to the kaupapa. The sense-making school leaders were able to make using the whakataukī as the frame of reference was both rich and complex. This is evidence of the robustness of Mātauranga Māori to draw out the tangible and intangible dimensions of any kaupapa in a very inclusive way.

'Having whakataukī as part of the theorising has opened up another layer in my understanding of some of the mahi'.

'At one of our wānanga we had a number of kaumātua who were able to share their unique experiences and knowledge with the group of teachers and principals we were working with. These kaumātua were able to provide all of us with an alternative way of looking at things that opened up our thinking and enabled people to consider whether the current status quo embraces (or not) Mātauranga Māori. One thing that I have noticed is when Mātauranga Māori is at the table, many people (including myself) are able to make stronger links to ideas, concepts, theories that may otherwise seem inaccessible'.

An example of Mātauranga Māori in education is the development and writing of the 'Mārautanga' as a standalone document rather than a translation of English curricula statements as they have been in the past.

Mātauranga Māori contexts

The holding of wānanga with different schools on different marae, from Invercargill's Murihiku marae to Northland's Otiria marae, has been one of the most important institutions of Kia Eke Panuku delivering opportunities to teach and learn (ako) in Mātauranga Māori contexts.

In Kia Eke Panuku we are trying to support schools to establish a wider appreciation of Mātauranga Māori through our focus on culturally responsive and relational pedagogy, on the importance of educationally powerful connections with whānau, hapū and iwi in the education process, and the importance of te reo Māori across the curriculum.

'There is much for us all to learn. Recently at a hui we were set to use whakataukī to begin the day. We had the English translation below and it was succinct and straightforward. As the facilitator, I could make connections with this whakataukī to the day's work.

Just before we began a suggestion was made that perhaps the kaumātua present would like to talk about their understandings of the whakataukī. What followed was a graphic demonstration of the depth and power of Mātauranga Māori. I was incredibly humbled and grateful and at the same time distressed that it had not occurred to me to ask.

I have reflected on the dominance of one knowledge domain thinking that this is within me as a product of the New Zealand education system even though I am Māori. I believe having Mātauranga Māori as an accessible and valued domain of knowledge across all learning and teaching in schools is something we would all benefit from, now and in the future'.