He Kōrero Whānau o Te Rarawa

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Abstract: He Kōrero Whānau is a component of a wider whānau and hapū development project within Te Rarawa, an iwi located in the Far North of Aotearoa. It aimed to prepare and support whānau and hapū to record their own histories, and in doing so to develop research methods and strategies to suit Te Rarawa purposes and realities. The innovation of the approach is the inclusion of oral and life histories in any interview-based research Te Rarawa might undertake, and the training of community interviewers in the skills of research and oral history interviews. The approach is grounded in iwi and hapū development and responsive to needs and aspirations. It also works to demystify research and focuses on research making a difference in Te Rarawa communities. This paper discusses our experience of developing Te Rarawa research methods and applying them in ways that harmonise with the goals of Te Rarawa iwi development.

Introduction

He Kōrero Whānau essentially began as a distinct sub-project within the Te Rarawa Whānau Development project, a comprehensive whānau and hapū development project which Te Puni Kōkiri funded in 2005. It is discussed in relation to the suite of Te Rarawa research projects in Henwood and Harris (2007). The commentary that follows draws considerably from that article; however, the focus here is on different aspects of the project and the processes applied in our integrated approach to research. Other related projects carried out since the 2007 paper are also included to provide an update and to demonstrate further developments and refinements in the evolving nature of research in Te Rarawa.

He Kōrero Whānau aimed at planning to support whānau and hapū to record their own histories. The project goals weave together three distinct areas of interest; iwi goals (identity and knowledge transfer through oral histories), whānau goals (increased research skills and capacity to gather oral histories) and research goals (development of Te Rarawa research methods and approaches). That sub-project, and since then a series of inter-connected research and hapū planning projects, has documented a widespread marae-oriented interest in recording local histories in a variety of media and an enthusiasm for recording the oral histories (he kōrero whānau) of kuia and kaumātua in particular. Alongside that enthusiasm sits a demand for community-based skills development, specifically a demand for not only training in oral history methods, but also material support for collecting and archiving the results. Hapū and marae histories are regarded as important parts of the knowledge and tikanga infrastructure of each marae, and there is a strong marae-based call for a strategy to strengthen and secure that knowledge base. He Kōrero Whānau, therefore, comprised two distinct planks – the inclusion of oral and life histories in any interview-based research Te Rarawa might undertake, and the training of community interviewers in the skills of research and oral history interviews. Since its inception, the interviews and training at the base of He Kōrero Whānau have been supplemented with additional related aims. Currently, then, He Kōrero Whānau aims to:

1. Ground Te Rarawa research (specifically research interviews) in hapū goals for kōrero whānau;

2. Support whānau and hapū to identify, collect, record and archive their kōrero;

3. Establish a Te Rarawa oral history collection;
4. Identify Te Rarawa records held by other institutions; and
5. Contribute to a strategy and policy for a Te Rarawa archive and taonga collection.

The challenge for Te Rarawa – with all its research, not just He Kōrero Whānau – has been to ensure that any research goals that are set are set for iwi purposes. At the same time, the iwi context for He Kōrero Whānau means that while being mindful of the key underlying principles and organising concepts found in the literature (such as seamlessness, holism, respect and kanohi kitea) plenty of room is also made for the guidelines and protocols of the research participants to prevail. Such an approach ensures the research is fully immersed in the socio-political realities of the Te Rarawa setting. Tuhiwai Smith, (1999, p. 15) concurs, "Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology".

With its use of standard research interview and oral history techniques, He Kōrero Whānau may not seem like a new idea, but it is made innovative because it finesses orthodox ('business as usual') strategies and methods for Te Rarawa purposes. So, for example, in conducting research interviews on past and present Te Rarawa customary fishing practice, the research questions were 'blended' with questions typical of oral and life histories and the recordings archived to form the kernel of the Te Rarawa oral history collection. In this way, the goals of He Kōrero Whānau could be addressed while data collection for a specific (contemporary) research exercise could continue. Similarly, on the surface, training community interviewers is no new thing. However, the particular three-day skills-based training programme that was developed was largely motivated by the stated desire of whānau and hapū members to record their own whānau, hapū and marae stories. The course was exactly the kind of capacity-building activity that participants felt Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa ought to support and resource. Furthermore, the training was designed specifically in relation to five inter-linked research and hapū planning projects that Te Rarawa already had underway. This meant that at the end of the training participants were well-prepared to undertake research interviews as community researchers and work on Te Rarawa projects if they so wished. The reality, though, was that most participants used what they learned for their own purposes – typically study or whānau research – and few went on to conduct research interviews for Te Rarawa. It was a situation that the project team had to accept and even embrace: so long as Te Rarawa aims – conceptually and in practice – to immerse and actively involve research in the current socio-political iwi environment, then the success and effectiveness of that research will have to demonstrate commitment to iwi development and direct practical contribution to iwi development as set by iwi goals.

Application

Currently, He Kōrero Whānau is an approach used by Te Rarawa researchers in Te Rarawa research projects undertaken in Te Rarawa settings. On the surface He Kōrero Whānau is merely a means of conducting research interviews, or the interviews themselves, and not greatly different from research interviews in other research settings. What sets He Kōrero Whānau apart, perhaps, is the underlying principle of constantly checking in to ensure it fits with existing Te Rarawa goals for whānau and hapū development. For example He Kōrero Whānau aligns with the Rūnanga's current strategic goal "Te Rarawatanga: Te Rarawa whānau and hapū have a strong identity grounded in our history, culture and tikanga" – whānau and hapū are supported to gather and record their stories. Its integration with those goals and the several projects that come under the banner of 'whānau and hapū development' also means that it can be difficult to tease He Kōrero Whānau out from the several other research components with which it is integrated.

He Kōrero Whānau: Interviews

The interviews for He Kōrero Whānau were conducted as part of and in relation to other discrete projects, each of which required information gathered from one-to-one and focus group interviews:

1. The Fisheries project on Te Rarawa customary fishing, which focussed on developing and planning for iwi management of customary fisheries;
2. The Mauri o te U-kai-po project which studied the intersections between Te Rarawa environments and notions and expressions of well-being;
3. The Hapū Planning project which required hui with marae communities to be convened and reported on; and
4. The Interconnections project which explored the practical, daily and lived interconnections between Te Rarawa marae and whānau.

The Iwi Research and Development (IRD) advisory group, established to oversee Te Rarawa research, was clear from the outset that it was untenable to support several different but concurrent information-gathering streams; any willing interview contributors would quickly reach exasperation point. Instead – taking some time and care – the interview schedules proposed for the Fisheries and Mauri projects were streamlined into one, and the information gathered was shared between and across all the Te Rarawa research projects. Fortunately there were some natural overlaps. Interviews drew from kōrero about Te Rarawa experiences, histories and perceptions of the environment; land use and practices; fisheries and fishing practice; sites of significance; and links with health and wellbeing.

Interviews are regarded as fundamental to the collection of hapū histories for hapū purposes, and not just the means to achieving contract research goals. An appreciation of both oral history and social science methods therefore influenced the development of the interviews, striking a delicate balance between drawing out life experience as an access to understanding historical context, and extracting current Te Rarawa commentary and views on a selection of interlinked themes. A decision to interview people individually, in a small group, or a larger focus group is not pre-determined, but instead based on what will work best for the people on the day. The process and approach is 'usual' for Te Rarawa researchers; it is always about a kōrero and sharing life experiences. Focus groups for example are seen as occurring naturally in settings and situations. Deliberate opportunities are taken to 'interview' people in groups convened for another purpose. A working party involved in a specific issue, the Rūnanga Trustees, Marae Trustees and Marae Committee members are all examples of groupings that have been used for research interviews. The oral history approach meant that the interviews consistently sought to ground the interviews in the context of the interview contributors, and therefore the context of Te Rarawa lives. This approach gives a distinct Te Rarawa flavour and history to the narratives and information contained in the interviews. The social science aspects give the interviews a consistency of structure across and within the interviews, and aid in the 'selection' of interview contributors.

Initial testing of the draft interview schedule indicated it was unwieldy and cumbersome, and that some parts would not be relevant to all interviews. For example, not all interview contributors would have either the experience or the inclination to talk about resource management practices, especially as they pertain to legislation and local authorities. These challenges were worked through by choosing a focus area for each person interviewed, that is, fisheries, land or wellbeing. Similar questions could be asked in each focus area. For example, questions about transmission of knowledge (how people learned about their environment, who they learned from and who they taught in turn) could be asked in relation to fisheries or land or wellbeing. In reality, many Te Rarawa people could probably give good interviews in any or all of the focus areas. But they would be long interviews, best undertaken in a series of shorter recordings, and only acceptable if undertaken with sufficient preliminary discussion.

The integrated approach of He Kōrero Whānau means that both focus area interviews and broader (oral history) interviews can be undertaken as negotiated with the individual contributors. To have that happen smoothly, clarity is critical. Careful negotiation with interview contributors is standard when undertaking research interviews, and generally governed by the rules and protocols of ethics committees, and fundamental principles such as informed consent. Te Rarawa's research protocols demanded an extra level of care to ensure clear explanation of the all the components of all the research projects, and thorough discussion of how the interview material would be used across the range of research goals. Another consideration was the emphasis He Kōrero Whānau placed on holding the interview recordings for prosperity, as the beginning of what is expected to become an oral history collection. Every person who contributed an interview needed to be sufficiently aware of the multiple ways in which their recording might be used or called upon. One of the main reasons for taking extra care is to ensure that contributors can opt in (or out) of the components of the research freely.

As research for the Fisheries and Mauri projects concluded (He Kōrero Whānau is ongoing) the interview contributors were invited to a lunch to acknowledge their participation in the projects. This made a lot of sense in the Te Rarawa setting, but was something of a departure from standard research practice, particularly as it required interview contributors – who might otherwise be unknown or at least unrevealed to each other – to come together. Besides acknowledging the interview contributors, the idea behind the gathering was to once again ensure that they were clear about how their interviews would be used, and to go over the research findings in an informal setting. This gathering was in addition to and not a substitute for other means of disseminating research findings – such as research reports, widely distributed research summaries, conferences, newsletter items and reports to the Rūnanga.

He Kōrero Whānau: Training

The IRD advisory group developed a three-day skills-based training course as a basic introduction to research and to train community interviewers to undertake the research interviews for the Mauri and Fisheries projects. The course addressed a demand for such training that whānau and hapū members had clearly articulated in their responses to He Kōrero Whānau. For Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa, up-skilling a pool of community people as part of a programme of iwi research was part of a longer term investment in building the Te Rarawa skill base at both an individual level, where hapū and whānau were keen to train their own people to work on their own projects, and collectively as an iwi. The course was offered twice (there being no identifiable budget to run such a course) and of the 20 people who completed the training, several conducted interviews either for Te Rarawa research projects or for their own whānau or marae projects.

The effectiveness of the training was enhanced by being tailored to the aims of Te Rarawa's research goals more generally and for practical application in the Te Rarawa environment. And, like most iwi research, it brought with it its own pitfalls and challenges. Specifically, the strong demand for the training programme was motivated by a range of priorities and circumstances – some participants were university or wānanga students who sought to augment their studies with the acquisition of practical skills, others were keen to apply the training to their own interests in recording whānau histories. All training participants were briefed on Te Rarawa's research and told that, for the Rūnanga especially, one of the main goals was that a core group would be trained to conduct the many interviews the research required. Some reservations about the Rūnanga emerged in this context. A number of participants viewed the training as a service the Rūnanga ought to provide its beneficiaries as a matter of course, and not as a deliverable of one of its own projects. Some trainees were concerned about the political currency of the interview topics. For example, inquiring into Te Rarawa fisheries when distribution of fisheries quota was being debated might attract questions for which community interviewers were ill-prepared. It was a valid concern, and

one that pointed to another of the challenges of Te Rarawa research: research participants often have expectations that draw the researchers beyond the parameters of the project at hand. Ultimately, it was accepted that Rūnanga projects may not be a priority for trainees and that becoming an interviewer for Te Rarawa projects may not be an attractive proposition. Although it may be a disappointing reality, some satisfaction can be taken from the very real contribution the course made to the research capacity of Te Rarawa even though, under current conditions, the Rūnanga can only do so much. Its own research capacity is in its infancy, and the tendency of funders to support research on a project-by-project basis limits the development of consistent and long-term commitment to Te Rarawa-wide research needs.

He Kōrero Whānau: Contestable funding round

Also incorporated under the umbrella of He Kōrero Whānau was a one-off contestable fund (Pūtea Tautoko) which sought applications to support focussed, marae-based historical projects, such as photo restoration and wānanga. The process allowed the Rūnanga to pilot a method for managing such a fund (in anticipation that it might want to do something similar on a regular basis), while at the same time demonstrating some of the possibilities of the overarching goals of whānau and hapū development, and practical ways that Te Rarawa research can contribute to Te Rarawa communities. One of the great results of the fund was that as marae successfully completed their various projects, their stories could be relayed through the quarterly Te Rarawa newsletter *Te Kukupa*.

Kaupapa Māori analysis

There is an extent to which Te Rarawa's approach to research takes for granted its alignment with Kaupapa Māori principles and practices. The guidelines and principles for researching with iwi are familiar, such as those espoused by Linda Smith: for example, aroha ki te tangata (respect for people), and kanohi kitea (the seen face) (Smith, 1999, p. 120). Rigorous ethical considerations are an integral part of best research practice, of treating people and what is important to them with respect, and designing research to work appropriately with communities. Every researcher ought to be concerned about these fundamental principles, and there are many examples of projects that model best practice (Conway, Tunks, Henwood & Casswell, 2000; Moewaka Barnes, 2000a) as well as useful and practical guidelines and advice for research with Māori (Moewaka Barnes, 2000b; Walker, 1997; Walsh-Tapiata, 1998). While these concerns and ideas can be implicitly understood and appreciated, they can also be allowed to recede into the background. Then, rather than being overshadowed or influenced by the researchers' academic and contractual tasks at hand, the daily practicality of managing and carrying out iwi research fully immersed in the socio-political realities of the Te Rarawa setting can occupy the foreground. There is a fundamental respect, therefore, for the contributions that whānau make to iwi research and an appreciation that research interrupts their lives. Stepping off into the research from such a platform is one of the ways of developing research approaches that invite and engage whānau. When participants see the interview as 'a kōrero', something that is more familiar than an 'interview', they relax and contribute freely.

A group interview situation was used by one whānau grouping to gather stories about their church which was preparing to celebrate its centenary. Kōrero rau tau was fashioned around a cup of tea after church one Sunday. This setting meant that all the people involved in the church were available as they always put time aside for a cuppa. Rather than a focus group it was a facilitated discussion that ensured every person contributed, individuals fed off each other, and they were prompted by what others said. Although appearing a bit of a ramble at times it was important to let the kōrero go wherever it needed to as there was no knowing what gems lay ahead. The facilitation ensured some focus and allowed the kōrero to be drawn together. The comfortable natural grouping was conducive to rich kōrero which was enjoyed

by all the participants. The process also provided an opportunity to identify individuals or smaller groupings to be followed up about a specific issue at another time.

A thematic analysis approach is generally used to analyse qualitative research data. Ideally our research group meets for several consecutive days at a quiet location away from other distractions to do this. Transcripts are read, re-read and discussed as a group to draw out the various understandings. Key points are extracted and possible quotes noted. Each researcher then drafts particular sections, which are then circulated by email for input from each other until the final version is complete.

There are a number of examples from the suite of Te Rarawa research projects that are particularly relevant to analysis in terms of policy development. The Mauri project findings revealed that health and wellbeing was about a lot of things, but very little of which was about illness or disease. It was more about belonging and being connected to whānau, marae and community; being able to participate in, contribute to and achieve in whānau and marae activities; and maintaining and preserving natural and human resources for future generations. Therefore shifting the balance from a service model to a community development, wellness model of delivery seems pertinent for policy-making and future development.

In another example, knowing that Te Rarawa ways of teaching and learning tend to be informal and practical provide a clue to the way in which education should be tailored for best outcomes.

Fisheries research findings showed a vast wealth of customary fisheries and marine environments knowledge, including knowledge of creeks, rivers, lakes, wetlands, harbours, the foreshore, and from fishing grounds miles out at sea. Management of Te Rarawa fisheries needs to respond accordingly and ensure that the knowledge and practices are embedded in local and iwi-wide policy areas. These could include; mana whenua, mana moana setting of appropriate methods of monitoring catches to reflect distribution practices, and local ecological restoration strategies to improve fish species stocks, as well as being fed into national policy.

Analysis of the Interconnections findings, research that looked at the practical, daily and lived interconnections between Te Rarawa marae and whānau, also provides good examples for both national and Rūnanga policy development. Current unemployment 'no-go' zones have impacted on the rural communities of Te Rarawa. Unemployed people in these communities play an important role at marae, and help whānau with chores that they cannot manage themselves. Being forced to move away in the current economic environment makes it difficult for whānau to participate or support marae affairs. Businesses and lifestyles that enhance the community and sustain whānau are needed to keep people living in the area and attract whānau home. This research also highlights that marae are fundamental social and cultural assets that contribute to whānau and community cohesion, self-esteem and wellbeing. A functioning marae was a facility of great importance to whānau bringing thousands of whānau together at regular intervals throughout the year. The vital part that marae and whānau play therefore needs to be supported and reflected in social and cultural policy at a national level.

Although we are proud of our record in researching with and among our own iwi, and research findings and experiences to date have informed Rūnanga strategic planning and direction to some extent, we have struggled to consistently influence policy and practice at a practical level. Infrastructure and capacity restraints, and a lack of urgency currently mean that research findings are not being utilised to their full potential. This requires work in several areas; collation and accessible storage of existing research and source material, and a process to present and discuss research findings with Rūnanga staff and governance. A change of thinking by whānau, hapū, iwi and marae about the validity and value of local

evidence could also prove effective. This difficulty is compounded because our contractual obligations typically require written research reports with no assurances about what will happen to the information and advice those reports might contain. Nor is Te Rarawa necessarily included in any policy writing that might build on the research reports we produce. Yet we remain convinced that the research findings that have resulted from He Kōrero Whānau and other related projects are well-suited to policy development. Regardless of which project information is obtained from, the overarching policy consideration relates to the holistic, seamless view of whānau in their hapū and marae communities.

He Kōrero Whānau: Pre-testing with whānau

Te Rarawa 'record of interview' forms applied to He Kōrero Whānau projects have proven to be extremely useful when reflecting on interview experiences. The form used by Te Rarawa interviewers record details about the participant – their name and contact details, the interviewers name, the date and place of interview, the number of tape cassettes and sides used, the participant's background, the main themes raised, the interviewers reflections and comments, and follow up required by the interviewer. The forms have been drawn on to compile this part of the template.

In addition to some of the general comments received from whānau about their research experience e.g. "it was good", "yeah I enjoyed it", the following examples illustrate how whānau have enjoyed being involved in 'research' using the method.

The integrated design of multiple projects and the focus of interviews being a 'kōrero' provided an opportunity for some whānau to talk about their life experiences. In many cases there was a willingness by those interviewed to agree to further invitations to be involved in research and this suggests that participants enjoyed the method.

He Kōrero Whānau methods were able to identify the specific needs of participants in order to make the interview as natural as possible. For example, in order to recall memories from the past, some participants were taken to environments chosen by them for their kōrero. In all cases this has proven to be both useful and enjoyable for the participant and it helped them to draw on their memories relating to those places.

In one particular interview, He Kōrero Whānau methods identified that it was more appropriate for kaumātua to interview kaumātua in preference to a younger person. This was accepted for specific interviews and the project team had a kaumātua who understood the research goals and context and was willing to play the role of interviewer. The community researcher accompanied the kaumātua to the interview to take care of the recording. The approach ensured that the status of the participant was acknowledged and in turn, the interview was successful leaving the participant with good feelings about their experience.

One of the key things that proved to be useful in terms of checking our methods was to trial our approach and interview schedules with a group prior to the research commencing. The trial group were similar to the likely research contributors and made up of a mix of Te Rarawa people who had knowledge of the project and who were willing to provide feedback. The comments received from the group highlighted the importance of adapting language and expressions to suit each contributor, that the purpose of the research needed to appear useful to the contributor, and that flexibility was required in terms of interview times, venues and groupings. The feedback was taken on board and allowed adjustments to be made to the methods so that they fitted in with the realities of whānau and accommodated their needs. This refining of methods has helped to create a strong foundation in the development of other research projects.

Te Rarawa's robust interview processes focussed on informing participants around the intended use of the material, its storage and access to their information. Feedback suggests that knowing what was going to happen to their knowledge gave participants confidence in the research and a sense of security. It also led to whānau providing contact details of other whānau members who might enjoy participating and contributing to the research.

In group interviews, Te Rarawa methods provided a forum for safe and transparent discussion and in some cases included whānau who would otherwise not participate. Feedback from one person indicated that the method allowed for sensitive issues to be discussed in a supportive environment. One specific project required a group to draw on memories relating to a civil defence disaster. Ironically a few said that talking about it was healing for them adding that they were given little support at the time to discuss and share their feelings.

A previous poor research experience had been a barrier to involving other whānau in He Kōrero Whānau in one instance. It didn't matter that our methods were robust or that we had a good track record with the wider community, having one prior bad experience was enough for them to refuse any invitation to participate in research.

Conclusion

The method developed by Te Rarawa is working for Te Rarawa. Although it is flexible and organic, the local context and expectations, and the core principles and ethics developed by the research group, keep the approach grounded.

One of the great challenges for Te Rarawa is to incorporate our organically developed research methods into the contractual obligations of any given research project. Not having a developed pathway beyond iwi research informing operational and governance policy and practice can be seen as a risk. There is an expectation from and accountability to whānau, hapū and marae that we work with that research will make a difference. It therefore needs to influence policy and practice as well.

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