

Old ways of having new conversations: Basing qualitative research within *Tikanga Māori* (Māori protocol)

A 2009 paper based on the incorporation of tikanga-based processes into the Constructive Conversations: Kōrero Whakaaetanga research project.¹

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Abstract

This paper explores how Māori cultural processes can guide research processes. Tikanga Māori (Māori ways/traditions) based dialogue processes acknowledge relationships between people and the reasons why they have gathered together. In this paper we describe the tikanga processes used in the Kōrero Whakaaetanga project to facilitate a safe context for participants to share their thoughts and feelings about new biotechnologies.

Introduction

The 'Constructive Conversations- Kōrero Whakaaetanga Research Project, funded by the New Zealand Foundation of Research, Science and Technology, examined the social, cultural, ethical and spiritual implications, for New Zealanders, of new health biotechnologies. The project was guided by the *whakatauki* (proverb):

Hutia te rito o te harakeke. Kei hea te komako, e ko?

Pluck the heart from the flax bush - where will the bellbird be?

Ki mai ki ahau, he aha te mea nui o te ao?

Ask me, what is the most important thing in the world?

Maku e ki atu

I will reply,

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

it is people, it is people, it is people

This whakatauki highlights the need to maintain balance in the natural world and the importance of understanding the interrelated connectedness between people, the things they do, and the environment. It accentuates the importance of valuing people and human life and connects to the Kōrero Whakaaetanga project by stressing the importance of ensuring emerging biotechnologies technologies are not created at the expense of the natural world. It also relates to *tikanga*-based (cultural protocols) processes by placing at the forefront the guiding principle of ensuring the dignity and *mana* (prestige) of those engaging in the discussions is maintained and respected. The key principle of a tikanga based dialogue process emphasises the maintaining of the mana of participants and on the proper observance of rituals (Everts, 1988, p. 131).

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² Both Bevan and Murray have sadly passed away.

Central to ensuring research participants feel comfortable and safe to participate fully is *manaakitanga* (hospitality), an important Māori value that Māori evaluate themselves against (i.e. the success of a *marae* (Māori meeting place) is measured against how well guests are cared for (Mead, 2003)). Mead (2003, p. 29) writes that 'all tikanga are underpinned by the high value placed on manaakitanga – nurturing relationships, looking after people, and being very careful about how others are treated'. Similarly, Barlow (1991) describes manaakitanga as the most important attribute in a host.

Tikanga Māori

Tikanga Māori (Māori cultural practice) aims to ensure that people who come together for a *hui* (gathering) are well-hosted and cared for. This coming together proceeds through 'rituals of encounter' that are sourced from tikanga, and provide a way for people to gather on Māori terms (Salmond, 1976; Smith, 1999). As Salmond (1976, p. 126) states, '...the ritual is used to open up the proceedings. It is flexible in timing, and can adapt to almost any situation'.

Māori meet for a range of reasons, in a variety of locations, and in varied numbers (Mead, 2003; Salmond, 1976). Regardless of the reason for the hui, there is often discussion and debate among attendees about political affairs impacting on Māori at the time. When a hui is called for the express purpose of these discussions, then the aim of the discussion and debate may be the development of some consensus opinion and/or group decision-making (Salmond, 1976).

The role of talk within these contexts cannot be over-estimated. Talk is a central pillar of Māori society. *Te kai a te rangaira, he kōrero* - the food of chiefs is talk (Māori Proverb). Talk is linked with the transmission of knowledge and with the establishment of identity and a place to stand (Ihimaera et al., 1991; Walker, 1992). For example, before the arrival of the newcomers (i.e., colonists) Māori literature was oral, transmitted by each generation to the next through means such as waiata (song), haka, tauparapara, and karanga (call) (Karetu, 1992). It is therefore central to any 'rituals of encounter' and hui activity.

In his book entitled 'Tikanga Māori' Hirini Moko Mead (2003, p. 12) describes tikanga Māori as 'the set of beliefs associated with practices and procedures to be followed in conducting the affairs of a group or individual'. This broad position on tikanga acknowledges many of the definitions of tikanga that Mead explores in his book, as well as the multiple and varied views on tikanga that are held by different hapū (sub-tribes) and iwi (tribes).

Tikanga provides pathways for Māori wishing to come together and interact (Mead, 2003). Mead (2003) makes two additional points about tikanga Māori that are particularly pertinent in this context: first, that tikanga 'is part of the intellectual property of Māori' (p.13); and second, that tikanga is 'not frozen in time' (p.21).

Tikanga processes have previously been linked to the World Café dialogue process. Rosalie Capper (nd) describes a Café as involving 'hosted conversations with an agreed stated purpose or set of core questions which are important to the life of that organisation or community'. Māori rituals of encounter were central to a three day Café conducted in Aotearoa to progress as iwi's (tribe's) Treaty of Waitangi claims. For example, the coming together of the 400+ people began with *whaikorero* (speeches), *waiata* (songs) and *kai* (food). In addition, *whakatauki* (traditional sayings) and *kaumatua* (elders) provided guidance to the gathering and speaking rules (e.g., not interrupting) were in place.

In the past these processes have been acknowledged as part of ‘by Māori, for Māori’ research (see, for example, Cram, 2001; Irwin, 1994). Cram (2001) includes these processes in her discussion of research ethics, under the Kaupapa Māori (i.e., ‘by Māori, for Māori’) research practice of ‘Aroha ki te tangata’ (a respect for people) (cf. Smith, 1999, for the first discussion of these practices). Tikanga processes of first encounter are described as a way of reducing the space, or any perceived status hierarchy based on academic training, between researchers and research participants. In te ao Māori (the Māori world) these processes also remove other forms of separation between groups coming together (e.g., spiritual separation) (Irwin, 1994). Our task in the current research project has been to continue the formalisation of these processes and the theorisation of their link with dialogue.

In order to create a setting in which these concepts were ‘alive’ and actioned, we engaged in tikanga processes in our ‘rituals of first encounter’ as well as providing food and, when the hui was over, closing and departing according to tikanga. We outline these practices below.

Powhiri/Whakatau (welcome ceremony)

A whakatau is a welcoming ceremony and is used to begin a hui. It is different from a *pōwhiri* (i.e., the welcoming of visitors to a marae (Barlow, 1991)), in that it is considered less formal, with fewer protocols observed and often conducted away from the marae. However Mead (2003, p. 119) observes that many *pōwhiri* ceremonies are ‘low key and friendly occasions’ and the tikanga process used in this project is not unlike the *whānau powhiri* (sic.) described by Mead (2003). Thus the line between *pōwhiri* and whakatau is somewhat blurred.

In the current project the first part of the whakatau involved the exchanges of greetings between the research party and the participant party. It was also likely that the groups had a *karakia* (prayer). The second part of the whakatau involved the researchers providing information about the project. The sharing of the whakatauki described above was an important part of this.

The whakatau was thus the first part of the ritual of encounter in the current project. Although tailored to this project it is also a comfortable and familiar exchange within Māori contexts. At the end of the whakatau the two groups can relate to each other as one group.

Sharing of Kai (food)

The sharing of *kai* (food) by people who have recently come together for a hui is one way of removing the *tapu* (sacredness) that can keep people separate. Whilst provision of food and hospitality (*manaakitanga*) is good practice and appealing to many cultures, it has significance for Māori processes in that as well as enhancing the *mana* (status) of the host food lifts the *tapu* (sacred or restricted) and allows matters to become *noa* (unrestricted). It moves proceedings from the formal to the informal and paves the way for good discussions.

Mihimihi (introductions/setting the scene)

A next key element of the tikanga process is the *mihimihi*, or greeting and introducing of oneself to the group, that occurs near the beginning of the hui. Mihimihi is important as it establishes connections between members of a group. These connections can be about shared *whakapapa* (genealogy), experiences of places, and common knowledge of people and relationships. Similarly, Mead (2003, p. 28) describes the *whanaungatanga* (connection) principle as reaching ‘beyond whakapapa relationships and [including] relationships to non-kin persons who have become like kin through shared experiences’.

Mihimihi is also a response to the kaupapa that has brought the group together and may therefore also be about how the connections between members of the group are suited to the kaupapa. This process is important even if the group knows each other as the kaupapa may be new. Even so, with familiar people the mihimihi process may be brief.

Mihimihi is therefore about establishing relationships, trust, and a safe and comfortable environment in which to speak and share, even if the sharing is debate or argumentation. *Kaumatu* (elders) who are knowledgeable about whakapapa can facilitate this environment by adding to the understanding of how people are connected. Even those who know each other well may receive additional insight into their connectedness through the guiding hand of a knowledgeable elder.

The mihimihi also establishes the context for discussion and debate as a Māori context. Implicit in this are 'rules' for how discussion takes place, how conflict is expressed, and what people take away with them from such a hui. For example, conflict may be acceptably expressed within a *whareniui* (Māori meeting house) but should not be carried into the *wharekai* (Māori eating house). At their heart the establishment of relationships and the 'rules' for conduct are about respecting people.

Poroporoaki (Farewells and acknowledgements)

A poroporoaki is a farewell ceremony (Barlow, 1991). Mead (2003, p. 365) translates *poroporoaki* as 'leavetaking'. According to Barlow (1991, p. 96) the poroporoaki is an opportunity at the end of a hui to 'recapitulate the events of the hui, discuss the benefits that arose out of the meeting, and express the hope that they will continue in their respective ways in peace and happiness'.

We used the poroporoaki to gain feedback about the research process and to reflect on the session as a whole. It instigated a splitting of the group back into researchers and participants and, in this way, facilitated leave taking. Once the participants had spoken they were thanked and we concluded with the project whakatauki. The poroporoaki is crucial for ending matters positively, setting up for any future discussions and identifying key issues needing further consideration.

Key learning

The Kōrero Whakaaetanga project aimed to incorporate Māori perspectives into all components of the research and accordingly it was decided to use tikanga-based processes to conduct research group sessions. We wanted to ensure that this was meaningful and not merely 'window dressing'.

Although it is commonplace for Māori cultural practices... to be included in the planning of public occasions, they are typically additions rather than an integral part of the proceedings, 'clip-ons' carried out by Māori according to tikanga... (Metge, 2002, p. 3).

The implementation of a tikanga process within the Kōrero Whakaaetanga project was done with the realisation that, for Māori, we were formalising the processes of engagement between groups of people that is a natural way of engaging with each other. We were not surprised that the Māori groups were not only comfortable with this approach but in fact insisted upon it, 'it would be an ominous sign if they were omitted' Anne Salmond (1976, p. 19). The effectiveness of these processes within Māori society instilled confidence that the tikanga processes were worth incorporating into the methodology. As stated by Metge (2001, p. 6),

Once these tikanga are brought to consciousness, it is clear that they are rooted in a deep understanding of human psychology. When applied by skilled practitioners, they are highly effective in achieving their aims. They are a resource Pākehā have been foolish to neglect.

Conclusion

On reflection the attempts to date to incorporate tikanga derived tools to complement our dialogue processes have provided us with valuable learning and insights. Anxieties about inappropriate use of Māori cultural icons such as the powhiri and karakia, just getting tikanga wrong (although there is no wrong as we are producing our version of tikanga), causing offence, preferring to concentrate on ways of doing things that we are accustomed to, or not wanting to go into sensitive areas where one feels under prepared or unskilled were all influencing factors here.

Without a doubt, Māori have mixed western ways of doing things with the ancient rituals passed down through the generations resulting in very effective tikanga Māori processes for ensuring the safety and comfort of research participants. Tikanga processes ensure that all those who want to have their say are given the space to do so and whilst these processes will not suit all people or situations, these processes have proven to be very successful within Māori communities for many years. However, the test as to whether non-Māori benefit or embrace these traditions will be tested over time. As New Zealand increases its cultural confidence and maturity and as Māori culture becomes more visible the protocols outlined in this paper may become second nature in this country.

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