Waikato Journal of Education
Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

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Submissions for special sections of the journal are usually by invitation. Offers for topics for these special sections, along with offers to edit special sections are also welcome.

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Special section editorial: Te kōhao o te rangahau—The Indigenous Lens on Research
Carl Mika & Vanessa Paki

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Special section editorial: Te kōhao o te rangahau—The indigenous lens on research

In 2014, the University of Waikato hosted a conference on indigenous approaches to research methods, ethics and approaches. The conference, the name of which was Te Kōhao o Te Rangahau, formed an outcome of the Pedagogies of Educational Transitions (POET) project. POET is a four-year international research partnership between five universities: the University of Iceland; Mälardalen University, Sweden; the University of Strathclyde, Scotland; Charles Sturt University, Australia; and the University of Waikato, New Zealand. The University of Waikato is supported by Royal Society funding and our European partners are funded by the European International Research Staff Exchange Scheme (IRSES) Marie Curie. POET provides the opportunity to extend researchers’ skills and expertise beyond their respective projects to address comparative questions in an international forum. Commencing in late 2012, the programme involves a series of exchanges where researchers from each of the universities come together twice annually to build expertise and strengthen international research partnerships in the area of educational transitions through their local projects. The POET project draws from each country’s own research and therefore enhances strong international linkages to advance knowledge and research through building from each exchange. Among other aims, the POET project encourages interdisciplinary thought on research methods and content.

This special issue arises from that conference, which brought together researchers from a range of disciplines. In reflecting the highly successful and innovative gathering of diverse voices that characterised Te Kōhao o Te Rangahau, this issue aims to present in a more formal voice the presentations that were offered by various participants. All invited authors in this instance are Māori; all of them have something to add to the current academic research corpus; and all of them are excited about their own areas of research practice. Like other indigenous forums, this special issue is seen by the writers as a mirror of their work in progress, with the potential for further discussions emerging both in synchronicity with the POET project itself and, more widely, with Māori/non-Māori communities.

We are very lucky to have these views on research in this form, and their interdisciplinarity builds on the very intention of POET. Broadly speaking, the issue breaks down into the following themes: practice and experience; empirical and ethics; and innovative methods. Te Mana Rollo recounts the success of an intercultural experience of kapa haka and its ability to create new spaces that transcend the ordinary realms of research. Whilst not posing this approach as a self-conscious ‘research method’, Rollo recognises the need to create a pathway to engage with other cultures (in this case, Māori with Japanese) as a metaphor for the production of new possibilities, including knowledge. Taking the approach from the theoretical to the practical was her immediate concern, and the article explores the challenges and outcomes of this cultural engagement.

Karaitiana Tamatea, Margie Hōhepa, Ngārewa Hāwera and Sharyn Heaton bring mātauranga Māori and te reo rangatira into direct contact with their proposition that education needs to be in accordance with iwi (tribal groupings). The authors’ research spans policy, postcolonial discourse and Māori knowledge bases to assert that the training of Māori-medium teachers must involve both reflexivity.
and caution. Intrinsic to these necessary practices is that iwi must be listened to, in terms of their cultural capital and their specific needs and desires for future teachers, so that training institutions can truly synchronise with the stated demands of the Treaty of Waitangi for rangatiratanga and the protection of taonga.

Indigenous students, as Angus Macfarlane stresses, have not been positively catered for by education systems. Part of this problem is sourced in the ideological foundations of Western education itself; however, it also resides in the fact that the specific pedagogical needs of indigenous students are not being met. Macfarlane illustrates for us the complicated nature of those mechanisms that hinder Māori students’ achievement and also the equal complexity that is required when thinking beyond the common deficit idea typically casting the Māori student as a non-achiever. He cites the successful research project undertaken in secondary schools in Te Arawa, which identified the components of success for Māori students.

The final three contributors all ask for a rethink around method for Māori researchers, and are mindful that method itself can either ‘make or break’ Māori research. Lesley Rameka suggests that both critique and proactive affirmation is needed in research, and she draws on an approach that has its practice as ‘whatu’. She turns to the traditional philosophies underpinning finger weaving to suggest ways in which both resistance and revitalisation, as she calls them, can be brought to bear in research. Besides being a mode of organisation of material in text, whatu asks for the researcher to keep in mind the historical and current struggles that must be represented in research. At the same time, the research has a pragmatic side, being able to ethically account for participants’ voices in the text.

Moving research into a realm that immediately calls for a deep understanding of the Māori term ‘whakapapa’, Vanessa Paki and Sally Peters asks for a renewed thinking about research as a process of ‘layering’. With that focus, which is particularly ontological, comes the recognition that research engages with one’s relations and connections. It is hence simultaneously both paradigm and method. Their research sees the whakapapa method as being both stated and subtle in research and relevant in a schooling context in its ability to bind communities, ideas, teachers and students together in that setting.

Finally, Carl Mika proposes that there is another kind of research—philosophical research, which needn’t draw on empirical data collection—that may be of interest to Māori. Here he constructs research as an encounter with ‘things’ and as formative of the Māori self. The self’s perception of the ‘thing’ is crucial to any kind of research but particularly to philosophical speculation, and it is up to the Māori researcher in this domain to try and account for (but perhaps not to definitely explain) the nature of this encounter.

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