



Wai Research

# WHANAUNGATANGA IN RESEARCH

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*Waikato-Tainui*

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Haze White's research journey began at the University of Auckland where he studied health science, public health and specialised in Māori health. He has a deep passion for Māori health and well-being and hopes to create new knowledge from research which can improve outcomes for Māori.

As a researcher within the Wai-Research unit Haze is involved in all aspects of the unit's research endeavors including the "Catalysts of Health" retrospective study of West Auckland whānau well-being.

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## Abstract

This article discusses the concept of *whanaungatanga* as central to the research approach and principles of the Wai-Research unit—a West Auckland urban Māori community-based research unit, located within Te Whānau o Waipareira. The parallels to Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) are examined with a core interest in community at the heart of both research approaches, as well as the notion of *whanaungatanga* being embedded in the relationship between researcher and the community. The specific role Wai-Research has in serving an indigenous urban community is considered in the approach it has developed, specifically a *Kaupapa Māori* research lens, which further gives a legitimate role to *whanaungatanga* in practice as a way to overcoming oppressive traditional research practices and in giving voice to and benefitting the community. *Whanaungatanga* is seen as being naturally located within kaupapa research methods and central to Wai-Research's development of principles and community research methods to serve its own West Auckland whānau.

**Key words:** Kaupapa Māori, indigenous, Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR), urban, indigenous

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*Mā te rongō, ka mōhio; Mā te mōhio, ka mārama;  
mā te mārama, ka mātau; Mā te mātau, ka ora!*

Through resonance comes insight; through insight comes understanding; through understanding comes knowledge; through knowledge comes life and well-being!

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## Introduction

*Whanaungatanga* is one of the many intrinsic Māori principles which underpins Te Whānau o Waipareira and by extension the research arm of the organisation known as Wai-Research. The online Māori dictionary defines “whanaungatanga” as:

A relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of kinship rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of the kin group.<sup>1</sup>

Rose Pere also describes the concept of whanaungatanga within *Te Wheke*, a Māori model of whānau well-being, as: “The principle of working together to support each other across all generations.”<sup>2</sup>

Though many different definitions of whanaungatanga exist, at the heart of each is the value of relationships and connection. The purpose of this article is to explore how whanaungatanga is manifested within Wai-Research and how that impacts the Wai-Research approach to research in the community of West Auckland.

## Background

To better understand the research approach of Wai-Research it is first necessary to provide context as to why whanaungatanga is important to Te Whānau o Waipareira, the establishment of the Wai-Research unit, and the theoretical framework that the unit employs.

### *Whanaungatanga within Waipareira*

Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust is an Urban Māori Authority (UMA) established in West Auckland in 1984. As an urban authority, Waipareira sought to provide services for and advocate on behalf of all Māori residing in the West Auckland area. The founding members of Waipareira deemed it crucial to embed a number of core Māori principles to guide the organisation on its journey supporting whānau. Collectively these principles are known as *Te Kauhau Ora*<sup>3</sup> and allow those involved in the organisation to uphold the *mana* of Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust by:

<sup>1</sup> <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/word/10068>

<sup>2</sup> Pere, R. R., & Nicholson, N. (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Te Whānau o Waipareira Code of Conduct

1. always acknowledging where we have come from and who we are
2. ensuring whānau are the centre of our world
3. always striving to better ourselves for the sake of our whānau

Whanaungatanga is one of the principles within Te Kauhau Ora. At its core whanaungatanga is about connections with *whānau*, with the community, and with our *tīpuna* (ancestors). Te Kauhau Ora illustrates the value that Waipareira places on whānau connections and whanaungatanga as determinants of positive well-being for West Auckland urban Māori whānau.

### *Wai-Research*

On 28 October 2014, Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust officially launched Wai-Research, a West Auckland urban Māori community-based research unit. The purpose of the unit is to gather information which validates the work Waipareira does in the community and to create transformative research. Waipareira previously made a bid in 1996 to establish a community-based research unit, but it was decided that academic institutions (i.e., universities) would be better positioned to develop research for communities. Waipareira Chief Executive Officer John Tamihere stated, “We have struggled to get research that evaluates, measures and informs in a timely rather than historical way...” and that “...there was never a bridge built out to the community [from the universities] and what Te Whānau Waipareira provides is the ability to build on very robust research capability.”<sup>4</sup>

The establishment of Wai-Research nearly 20 years after the original failed bid was a huge achievement for Te Whānau o Waipareira and signified an important milestone for the West Auckland urban Māori community. With the constantly evolving nature of the community it is important that Waipareira, as a provider of services and advocate for their community, can have the most up to date, accurate and timely information. The Wai-Research unit provides this for Waipareira as the unit is:

1. embedded within the community
2. underpinned by Te Kauhau Ora
3. guided by *Kaupapa Māori* research, community research and indigenous research principles and, as such, adopts a unique community-based urban Māori research approach

### *Community-Based Research*

Community-based research, also known as Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), is an approach to research in which researchers and community members/representatives contribute to the decision making and ownership of

<sup>4</sup> Te Whānau o Waipareira Press Release

the research process.<sup>5</sup> Done correctly, CBPR has the potential to achieve a number of positive outcomes:

1. In CBPR, researchers work with the community to determine the best possible methods through actively testing their research approach on the community involved.
2. CBPR bridges the gap between science and the community, especially marginalised communities.
3. It allows communities to be equal stakeholders in research and allows researchers to tap into the expertise of the community.
4. The approach builds the research capacity and skills of the community.
5. CBPR is a potential approach to developing translational research or research that can create real, meaningful on the ground change.

As a “community-based” research unit Wai-Research looks to develop research which can create positive outcomes for the community while minimising any potential risk or harm. The Wai-Research approach to research draws many parallels to the CBPR approach, as with both approaches the “community” remains at the centre of all research endeavours. For example, before any research is commenced by Wai-Research it must first gain approval from the Waipareira Board, consisting of several publicly elected community leaders, ensuring that the interests or concerns of the community are heard. Additionally, the unit must also gain approval from the Waipareira *Kaumātua Rōpū* to maintain the cultural integrity of the unit, participants and the community.

Whanaungatanga is also inherent within CBPR as a crucial component of the approach’s success is dependent on the relationship between the community and the researchers. Wallerstein & Duran (2008) describe this relationship as requiring an equitable distribution of power, responsibility, risk and reward—a description synonymous with whanaungatanga.<sup>6</sup>

Although CBPR is an approach which can aid in bridging the gap between science and the community—CBPR in its current state can fail to recognise or adequately appreciate the cultural and indigenous context of the community in question.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Wai-Research has had to continue to evolve its research approach to be cognisant of the indigenous realities of the West Auckland urban Māori community.

### *Indigenous Research Principles*

Wai-Research is based within an urban Māori community that is unique in many instances, notwithstanding being an indigenous community. That being said, the relationship between research and indigenous communities is, at the very least, contentious. Indigenous peoples are arguably the most studied, scrutinised, prodded and poked peoples on earth.<sup>8</sup> In some instances the study of indigenous peoples provides a means to label, control and marginalise these groups<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Viswanathan, M., Ammerman, A., Eng, E., Garlehner, G., Lohr, K. N., Griffith, D., ... & Webb, L. (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2008).

<sup>7</sup> LaVeaux, D., & Christopher, S. (2009).

<sup>8</sup> Rigney, L. I. (1999).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

and it is little wonder why there is apprehension by indigenous peoples towards the research community.

A separate criticism of traditional research approaches is that researchers have often investigated communities, not in the hopes of creating useful knowledge and positive change, but to self-serve the researcher by boosting their number of research publications and accordingly raising their research profile within the academy (research cohort). Thus creating a relationship of which researchers receive more benefit than the “researched” community.

Various theorists around the world have contributed to “indigenous research” discourse, providing a number of principles and guidelines for conducting “good” research alongside indigenous communities that is relevant, effective and culturally respectful.<sup>10 11</sup> For the purposes of clarity and simplicity, the numerous guidelines and principles have been condensed within this article into three overarching principles:

1. **Partnership**—where research is based upon an equitable relationship between the researchers and the indigenous community. This includes the equitable distribution of skill development and research outcomes.
2. **Participation**—indigenous people should have the right and opportunity to be involved in all aspects of the research, including enjoying the benefits that might result from the research.
3. **Protection**—where researchers ensure the protection of indigenous participants and indigenous resources. This includes the protection of indigenous knowledge and protection from negative impacts that the research could possibly cause to the indigenous community.

Like CBPR, indigenous research theory highlights the significance of the concept of “relationship”. A relationship which, like whanaungatanga, is built upon a basis of rights and obligations and serves to strengthen and protect each member and where every member has an important role in research. The Wai-Research unit applies this idea within their research and looks to first protect the members involved in their research by considering and addressing ethical issues as outlined by the Health and Disability Ethics Committee (HDEC). The unit also provides meaningful participation and partnerships within research through the development of emerging Māori researchers within the community, student placements and significant *kaumātua* contribution.

A crucial component of indigenous research asks researchers to be mindful of the historical context of their indigenous communities. Wai-Research has embedded this concept into their research approach, primarily to be critical of marginalising research approaches and ensuring the legitimisation of Māori epistemologies. Secondly, the historical context of a community is part of the community's *whakapapa* (ancestry) and in *Te Ao Māori* is an essential component

<sup>10</sup> University of Victoria. (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Rigney, L. I. (1999).

of whanaungatanga as it illuminates the shared physical and spiritual connections that people have with each other and the land.<sup>12</sup> While indigenous research principles provide a framework in which ‘good’ indigenous research can take place, the framework is relatively broad and unspecific to any particular indigenous community and hence a Māori approach to research would be more specific to their realities or context.

### **Kaupapa Māori**

Linda Tuhiwai-Smith is one of the predominant Māori theorists who has written extensively about indigenous research in Aotearoa and its associated challenges. She states that—as a function of colonisation—Māori have historically been misrepresented and mistreated within research.<sup>13</sup> Overcoming this is dependent on many factors which includes developing and sharing research agendas from an indigenous perspective, specifically, a Kaupapa Māori perspective.

Kaupapa Māori research theory is a crucial underpinning of all research undertaken by the Wai-Research unit and is part of a broader Māori movement towards tino rangatiratanga.<sup>14</sup> In short, Kaupapa Māori is an approach to research which gives a voice to a colonised, marginalised and oppressed group and shifts their role of being researched “on” to being researched “for” and “by”, where the end outcome is to benefit Māori or the involved Māori community.<sup>15</sup>

In 1990, one of the original champions of Kaupapa Māori theory, Graham Hingangaro Smith, outlined a number of key principles of Kaupapa Māori research which were further expounded upon by other Kaupapa Māori theorists such as Linda Smith and Leonie Pihama, amongst others.<sup>16 17 18</sup> These principles help guide researchers undertaking Kaupapa Māori research endeavours. The key principles are (but are not restricted to):

1. tino rangatiratanga—self-determination
2. *taonga Tuku Iho*—cultural aspiration
3. *ako Māori*—culturally preferred pedagogy
4. *kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga*—Socio-economic mediation
5. *whānau*—extended family structure
6. *kaupapa*—collective philosophy
7. Te Tiriti o Waitangi—The Treaty of Waitangi
8. *Aata*—growing respectful relationships

As a Māori approach to research, whanaungatanga is naturally located within Kaupapa Māori research methods. The principles of Kaupapa Māori guide researchers in building whanaungatanga within the community, ensuring that relationships are built upon a safe, equal and respectful basis and additionally are devoid of marginalising practices. Further to this, Kaupapa Māori ensures that practices associated with whanaungatanga have a legitimate role in research,

<sup>12</sup> Brannelly, T., Boulton, A., & te Hiini, A. (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Smith, L. T. (1999).

<sup>14</sup> Walker, S., Eketone, A., & Gibbs, A. (2006).

<sup>15</sup> Pihama, L., Cram, F., & Walker, S. (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Smith, G. H. (1990).

<sup>17</sup> Smith, L. T. (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Pihama, L., Smith, K., Taki, M., & Lee, J. (2004).

including “*kanohi ki te kanohi*” or “seen face” which is a practice stemming from Māori epistemology that is an “important mechanism for developing trust and sharing information between groups”.<sup>19</sup> Wai-Research is physically based within West Auckland as it is important to be seen by the people as well as being involved in the various community events.

While Kaupapa Māori principles have acted to liberate Māori research and shed light on oppressive traditional approaches to indigenous research, they can become just as limited as conventional theories if they do not evolve with the needs of a particular community—hence every indigenous community should be able to re-invent the Kaupapa Māori theory and approaches so they don't become stagnant or generalised.

## Discussion

Te Whānau o Waipareira is based within a West Auckland urban Māori community which is vibrant, fluid and in some aspects completely unique to other urban Māori communities within Auckland and throughout Aotearoa. For over 30 years Waipareira has been delivering services to and advocating for the whānau of this community. To provide the best possible services and support for these whānau, Waipareira has turned to research as the gatekeeper to the vital information regarding whānau needs, best practice, policy and prevention.

Wai-Research—as a vessel to research—is unique within Māori health research in that it sits outside the traditional academic research institutions. Despite this, Wai-Research is still capable of developing research which meets the same international standards as universities. To do so, the team has had to develop a distinct research approach which draws from Kaupapa Māori Research Theory, CBPR, indigenous research principles and Te Ao Māori which collectively underpins all Wai-Research endeavours. This approach which we have named “Ngā Taumata Rangahau o Waipareira” is the amalgamation of these theories.

### *Ngā Taumata Rangahau o Waipareira*

While Kaupapa Māori, CBPR and indigenous research principles are central to the research undertaken by Wai-Research, so too are principles which are drawn from the realities of our urban Māori community and which allow us to undertake research in which our community is the primary beneficiary. Wai-Research consulted with the community including the Kaumātua Rōpū and Māori research experts to develop five Kaupapa Waipareira research principles. These principles guide and inform our research activity and are therefore incorporated into the design of all our research programmes and methodologies:

<sup>19</sup> Graham, J. (2003).

1. **Tikanga Matatini:** We will undertake research which reflects and supports the cultural realities of our community. Māori custom and processes will be incorporated within the design of our research methods, but will match the diverse cultural experiences and needs of urban Māori.
2. **Whakamana te Tangata:** We will respect and support our research participants and the information they provide. We will ensure that they are acknowledged for their contribution and recognised for their efforts.
3. **Whanake Waipareira:** We will prioritise translational research endeavour by generating information which contributes to the Waipareira community, Waipareira Trust and urban Māori development.
4. **Whakapakari Rangahau:** We will build Māori research capacity and capability. We will support emerging researchers, present them with opportunities and expose them to positive role models and experiences. We will collaborate effectively with other groups and organisations and create mutually beneficial research opportunities.
5. **Tohatoha Mātauranga:** We will take active steps to profile and share the outcomes of our research. We will ensure that the information is widely profiled so that it may contribute to Māori, national, international, and indigenous development.

These principles provide a framework in which not only “good” indigenous research can be produced but also “good” Māori research—specifically within the West Auckland urban Māori community. As can be seen they draw heavily from the other research approaches alluded to in this article. However, they are constantly evolving to stay relevant to the needs of our community.

Whanaungatanga is crucial to the Wai-Research approach as it provides a theoretical underpinning of the “Ngā Taumata Rangahau o Waipareira” and provides a guide to research practice. It guides us as a community-based research entity to build real connections to the community through the research we undertake and the inclusivity of the community as key partners, stakeholders, decision makers and beneficiaries.

## Conclusion

Whanaungatanga—relationships and connections—is integral to indigenous principles of what constitutes “good” research. Whanaungatanga is essential within community and indigenous research, as opposed to traditional or mainstream research which has often operated as separate from the community and has focused on the benefit of the researchers or the institution they represent. The approaches to research presented, including CBPR, indigenous research and Kaupapa Māori research, look to repair the relationship between indigenous communities and researchers, or, in the opinions of Wai-Research, help foster:



A relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of kinship rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of the kin group.<sup>20</sup>

The evolution of the principles around engagement by Wai-Research is an example of how tenets from Kaupapa Māori and community research can be evolved to serve a particular community. Ngā Taumata Rangahau o Waipareira, though specific to the West Auckland urban Māori context, can provide a framework as to how an inherent Māori principle such as whanaungatanga can underpin a research approach. That being said, there are separate principles that are as important to the West Auckland urban Māori as whanaungatanga, such as the remaining Te Kauhau Ora principles. Incorporating them into a research approach is complex but necessary to create new knowledge, which is important and relevant to the contemporary realities of the community.

Ngā Taumata Rangahau o Waipareira also represents a deeply considered process in which a specific Māori research can be developed. This same process has the potential to be replicated throughout Aotearoa to develop community-specific Māori research approaches which can produce research that is translational, of high academic standard, and relevant to the historical and contemporary realities of communities.

<sup>20</sup> <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/word/10068>.

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