

Te Kaimānga: Towards a New Vision for Mātauranga Māori

Te Ahukaramū

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Tēnā koutou katoa

Thank you for the invitation to speak this evening, to share with you some ideas, to offer some thoughts on the topic of mātauranga Māori and its ‘creative potential’. It is remarkable indeed to note the increase in interest in mātauranga Māori in recent times. From the education system to broadcasting, from health providers to the prisons, from the heritage sector to tourism and more, everywhere we find people interested in mātauranga Māori – experimenting, exploring, playing with it. It is remarkable also to witness this renewed interest in a body of knowledge that at one time in our history was actively undermined or at least ignored and abandoned. Today, creative experimenting is taking place throughout our country and with varying degrees of success. For my part, I believe that mātauranga Māori retains much ‘creative potential’. Given appropriate levels of investment and the right circumstances, creativity utilising and inspired by pre-existing mātauranga Māori may yet make substantial and distinctive contributions to our nations’ life, culture, economy and society. My research and creative work centres upon this question, motivated and inspired by this not inconsiderable opportunity.

In this lecture, I will offer some ideas about the creative potential of mātauranga Māori as these have arisen from a research project entitled ‘Te Kaimānga: Towards a New Vision for Mātauranga Māori. As always, there is much to say about one’s research so I will select a few ideas from it as the foci

¹ Lecture 1 of the Macmillan Brown Lecture Series, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, 16 September 2009. This lecture was also presented as the Directorship Public Seminar for Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, the National Institute of Research Excellence for Māori Development and Advancement, University of Auckland, 7 September. The video of this lecture can be seen here: <http://www.maramatanga.co.nz/PublicSeminars/DirectorshipPublicSeminarCharlesRoyal/ta/bid/1099/Default.aspx> This lecture was also delivered as part of the Manuao Lecture Series, Victoria University of Wellington, 14 October 2009. A video of this presentation is here: <http://tur-media-db1.massey.ac.nz/mediasite/Viewer/?peid=b3126e4f2c9042caa09db120f20b0c9c>

of our discussion this evening. We will begin with the question of the definition of the terms ‘mātauranga Māori’ before discussing expressions and applications of mātauranga Māori in history.

I will then proceed to discuss ‘creative potential’, a theme coming to conscious articulation now in our communities. I will conclude on the extremely interesting question of indigenuity, a theme that arises from mātauranga Māori, and indigenous knowledge generally, but which finds relevance, I suggest, to all peoples.

Defining ‘Mātauranga Māori’

Interestingly, the terms ‘mātauranga Māori’ are not well known in our communities and in our iwi literature. Elders today did not hear these terms in their childhoods and usages of them are very few indeed in our literature. A simple indicator is the absence of the term ‘mātauranga’ in the Williams *Dictionary of the Maori Language*. It suggests that the terms are modern and are used as a way of framing or coming to relationship with the distinctive knowledge and worldview created by forebears of contemporary Māori.

Having said that usages are few, one can nevertheless find a small number of usages and I would like to consider two, which I suggest communicate the two keys ideas that are in peoples’ minds when they use these terms. The two themes are:

- ‘mātauranga Māori’ used in an encompassing, global way to refer to all knowledge created by Māori in history according to their experiences, worldview and lifeways
- ‘mātauranga Māori’ used in a more restrictive fashion to refer to knowledge created under the inspiration of an ‘atua Māori’ (non-Christian ‘god’) that was the preserve of a ‘tohunga Māori’

An Encompassing Term

In 1900, the well-known Ngāti Porou leader and scholar, Apirana Ngata, wrote a letter that was published on 9 December in the Māori-language

newspaper, *Piwiwharauoa*. The letter concerned a hui for rangatahi (youth) that was convened in Wellington. An elder, Tamahau Mahupuku of Wairarapa, welcomed attendees and spoke about the rise of new, younger Māori leaders. Ngata invokes the well-known expression, ‘Ka pū te rūhā, ka hao te rangatahi’ (‘the old net is exhausted and the new net goes fishing’):

I pēnei ake ai te whakamārama kia ea ai tēnei pātai, ki hea tuku ai te kupenga, ki hea hao ai te rangatahi? Ko te whakautu, hei waenganui, kua hei ngā taunga tawhito i te wā o te Māoritanga, kua hei ngā taunga hou rawa o te Pākehā, engari hei waenganui, kei reira te mano o te ika e pōrangirangi noa ana. Ko ngā tohunga hei hao i taua waenganui nā, ko te rōpū i whakatapurua tahitia i roto i te mātauranga Pākehā, i te **mātauranga Māori**. (emphasis added) Kei runga i a rātou te kupu nei, ‘E hao rā e te rangatahi.’²

This explanation is offered so we may answer the question, ‘where shall we set our net?’ The answer is *between* – not in the ancient conclusions of the time of our Māoritanga, nor in the entirely new conceptions of the European, but rather between. There the multitudes of the fish can be seen gathering. The kinds of experts appropriate to fish in this area are those who are dedicated and educated in both European and Māori knowledge. To this group is directed the expression, ‘Go fishing, young fishing net.’

Ngata’s symbolism employs the ancient idea of fishing and fishing nets. It is a powerful symbol which speaks to our experience of searching for knowledge and understanding. The sea represents both the source of life and the abode of knowledge. Fish provide sustenance and direction and the fishing ground is the mysterious floating ground in which this sustenance can be found. Ngata urges us not to set our nets in one fishing ground but between the European and the Māori grounds, where the fish can be seen intermingling.

² Also appears in *Nga Kōrero a Reweti Kohere mā*, edited by Wiremu and Ohorere Kaa, VUW Press 1997, pp.208-211. My translation.

Ngata's wording suggests that it is the fishing ground itself that is called 'mātauranga Māori'. This is a universal set of terms acting much like a fishing ground in which many species (the contents of mātauranga Māori) can be found. A key aspect of Ngata's symbolism is the idea that one must proceed with determination and commitment to the fishing ground. One has to exile oneself, as it were, from the land and go to sea in search of knowledge. This is a metaphor about seeking knowledge upon the sea of our experience.

Ngata uses the term 'mātauranga Māori' in an encompassing way, to denote a body of knowledge. It does not tell us about the *kinds* of knowledge we can find within mātauranga Māori (the kinds of fish in the fishing ground). His key purpose is to assert that this fishing ground – this body of knowledge – *exists*.

Knowledge Derived from an Atua Māori

An alternative usage of the term 'mātauranga Māori', one which is nearly contemporaneous with that by Apirana Ngata, can be found in manuscripts written by the Ngāti Raukawa elder, Kipa Roera Te Ahukaramū. Kipa was an elder of the Ngāti Parewahawaha, Ngāti Kikopiri and Ngāti Huia sections of Ngāti Raukawa. In 1915 he found cause to use the term 'mātauranga Māori' in a discussion concerning Rangiātea, the church erected in Ōtaki by Kipa's elders in the 1840s.

In Rangiātea, pre-Christian views of divinity and mana were married with the Christian worldview and faith in innovative ways. Rangiātea is a Christian church built over a pre-Christian tribal altar (tūahu). Traditionally, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toarangatira and Te Āti Awa considered Rangiātea as both a tūahu and a Christian church. They value it as a sacred place of the highest order. Kipa expresses the esteem his people hold for Rangiātea:

Kaore he whare karakia penei me Rangiātea te hanga i Niu Tireni i te
Ao katoa ranei na te mana na te matauranga Maori ake i hanga Ko

Rangiātea e tu nei hei pupuri hei tiaki manga uri a Raukawa a mo nga wa katoa i tenei Whare miharo.³

There is no church like Rangiātea in New Zealand, nor in the whole world. It was constructed by mana and mātauranga Māori. Rangiātea stands now, to be cared for the descendants of Raukawa for all time, this amazing church.

Kipa is saying that a certain kind of knowledge was responsible for the creation of Rangiātea. He refers to this knowledge as ‘mātauranga Māori’. In making this statement, Kipa is distinguishing mātauranga Māori as a distinctive body of knowledge. It is Kipa’s desire to say that Rangiātea is the product of a distinctive body of knowledge called ‘mātauranga Māori’. He is saying that Rangiātea is not the product of European knowledge but rather of a special knowledge held by his ancestors, one that is replete with mana.

Furthermore, because Kipa deliberately uses the term ‘mana’ in relation to mātauranga Māori, it suggests a non-Christian religiosity and understanding. Kipa is saying that his ancestors possessed something unique and distinctive that was responsible for the erection of Rangiātea – and this something was *mana*. Kipa’s usage suggests that Rangiātea was the product of a non-Christian deity. This idea is reinforced through readings of *Te Paipera Tapu* where the tohunga Māori is the adept of a non-Christian deity. His ‘knowledge’ is derived from this source.

Hence, Kipa’s use of mātauranga Māori is more restrictive referring to knowledge derived from an atua Māori, which was the preserve of the tohunga Māori and out of which such things as karakia Māori come forth. Hence, not all knowledge created by Māori is thus mātauranga Māori but rather knowledge arrived under the inspiration of a non-Christian deity (an atua Māori expressing a mana Māori).

³ Manuscript in private collection. My translation.

Expressions and Applications of Mātauranga Māori

If we follow Apirana Ngata's symbolism, we see that mātauranga Māori are terms used to label a body of knowledge, a *kete* or a *tauranga ika* of knowledge. The next question is what kinds, expressions and applications of knowledge might we find there? There are a number of ways to answer this question. Firstly, we may consider the *traditional institutions* of pā society, as each represent distinctive bodies and applications of knowledge, experts who know how to wield this knowledge and learning pathways into this knowledge. For example:

- te whare pora – house of weaving
- te whare tapere – house of music, dance, storytelling
- te whare kōhanga – house for childbirth
- te whare rūnanga – house for political decision making
- te whare wānanga – house of higher learning
- te whare-tu-taua – military house

There are many more. Another way of looking at these expressions and applications of knowledge is by considering the *material culture* of our people. Here is a brief selection:

- house construction
- perfumes
- clothing
- canoes
- gardening implements
- weaponry
- fishing implements

There are many more. Then there are activities which demonstrate particular *skills and talents*, such as:

- gardening

- fishing
- teaching
- birding
- speaking
- learning
- organising

There is much more. Hence, if we think about mātauranga Māori as a fishing ground, we see that there are many and different kinds of fish, kinds of knowledge to be found there.

Creative Potential

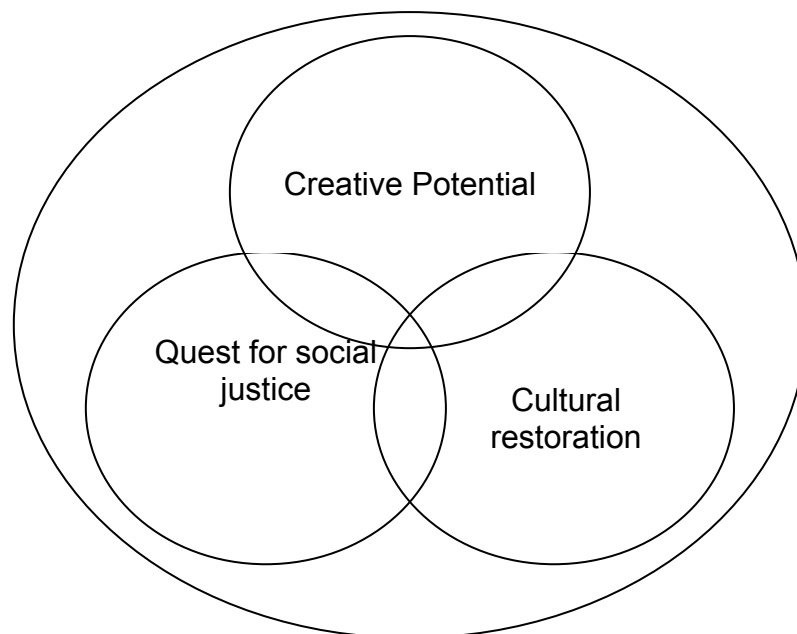
For a century and more, Māori communities have been dominated by two key themes or ideas. I call these themes the *quest for social justice* and the *desire for cultural revitalisation*. These themes have expressed themselves in many and diverse ways including through the advancement of claims before the Waitangi Tribunal and the general sense of protest that emanates out of the Māori world with respect to the way in which Māori people have been treated both historically and perceived imbalances and the inequitable position many Māori face in New Zealand society today. The quest for social justice includes both the desire to seek redress for historical wrongdoing *and* a commitment to address inequalities arising from historical wrongdoing, inequalities which manifest themselves in such things as Māori health disparities and educational underperformance.

The desire for cultural revitalisation expresses itself in such things as initiatives designed to protect the Māori language, emphasis upon tikanga Māori, revitalisation projects such as those concerning taonga pūoro, tā moko and more. This theme also expresses itself in the establishment of kōhanga reo, for example, and Māori television and much more. It is remarkable to witness the amount of positive change that has taken place through the expression of these themes in the past 30-40 years.

A new theme is now emerging, however, and I call this theme ‘creative potential’. Whereas quests for social justice and cultural revitalisation arise primarily as reactions to external forces, ‘creative potential’ is motivated by an internal quality, reacquainting ourselves with our own mana and, among other things, being motivated and inspired by what we have rather than what we have lost. This is why creativity is so important for it brings our people to an experience of their own mana.

This is not to say that Māori communities were not creative in the past, for indeed they were. And some of their inventions and adaptations in changing and challenging circumstances were nothing short of ingenious. What is different now, however, is that there is a *conscious articulation* of creative potential and its correlates – innovation, opportunity, entrepreneurship. Māori and iwi leadership are consciously articulating creativity and opportunity as a cultural determining theme.

Matters of social justice and cultural revitalisation will remain important for some time yet. However, they will be readjusted in response to the movement toward creative potential that has been emerging in our communities for some time. Here is an illustration which helps to summarise these themes:



It is important recognise that all parts of this whole are embraced for the movement to creative potential does not mean an abandonment of social justice and cultural revitalisation but rather a reorganisation of them in light of creative potential.

With respect to Mātauranga Māori itself, I argue for its creative potential. If we embrace a creative ethos and practice in our handling of mātauranga Māori much can be achieved. Some of these creative activities include questions such as the ability of mātauranga Māori to create distinctive and successful education pathways, the use of mātauranga Māori in health provision, mātauranga Māori in the arts (where the potential is enormous) and much more. It is clear that mātauranga Māori retains much creative potential and this realisation, among other things, is moving Māori communities into this ‘creative potential’ paradigm.

Having said that mātauranga Māori retains ‘creative potential’, it is important, also, to be realistic about it. Mātauranga Māori today exists in a fragmentary and disorganised state; a good deal of existing mātauranga Māori concerns a world that only exists in the past and so a great deal of work needs to be done to bring about relevance and utility within this body of knowledge in our contemporary circumstances. Much has also been lost, and much mātauranga Māori has been superseded by other kinds of knowledge. So it is important not to make claims for mātauranga Māori that can not be substantiated.

Other Implications of the ‘Creative Potential’ paradigm

As a consequence of embracing the creative potential paradigm, there are other ideas arising. They include notions such these:

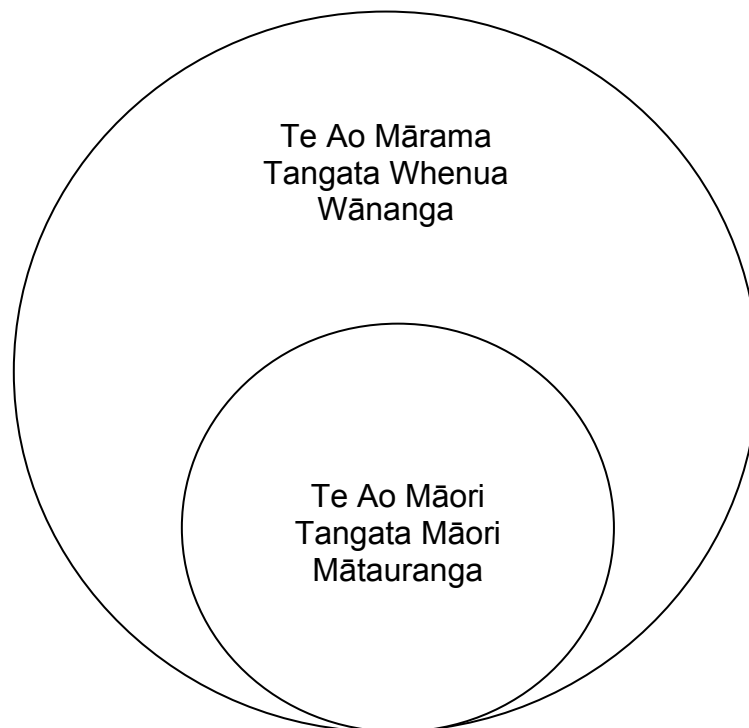
- *Māori activities and enterprises a source of national pride* – no longer dwelling in shadowy enclaves in our nation, but rather brought into the light of national consciousness (where appropriate)
- *an interleaved distinctiveness* – Māori activities are interleaved with others whilst retaining their distinctiveness

- *a mana inspired quest for social justice and cultural revitalisation* – moving away from victimhood to a mana inspired view and experience of social justice and cultural revitalisation

There are other ways too in which to think about the ‘creative potential’ paradigm. These ways are expressed in mātauranga Māori in the following themes:

- moving through *tangata Māori* to *tangata whenua*
- moving through *Te Ao Māori* to *Te Ao Mārama*
- moving through *mātauranga* to *wānanga*

The move to creative potential facilitates the emergence of a consciousness about our citizenship in the world at large. As a consequence of colonisation, it has been natural for Māori to turn ‘inward and away’ from those we feel responsible for colonisation. This turning inward and away has led to a preoccupation with ‘being Māori’ and this continues today. Many Māori are still very attached to the idea and experience of ‘being Māori’, however, I argue that this is a ‘stepping stone’ only toward a deeper opportunity and challenge relating to being *tangata whenua*, a worldview which places an emphasis upon the relationship between people and the natural world. I use the following illustration to describe these themes:



As in the previous discussion relating to the positioning of the quest for social justice and cultural restoration within a larger paradigm of creative potential, this discussion positions the former categories within the larger themes relating to the world as a whole. For example, the movement from Te Ao Māori to Te Ao Mārama entails a movement *through* Te Ao Māori into Te Ao Mārama. One achieves the latter by moving through the former. Similarly with tangata Māori to tangata whenua and mātauranga to wānanga. Just as creative potential does not entail an abandonment of social justice and cultural revitalisation, so the movement into Te Ao Mārama, wānanga and tangata whenua entails a movement through Te Ao Māori, tangata Māori and mātauranga.

The move through tangata Māori to tangata whenua is challenging for it asks to us to understand what was meant by ‘tangata whenua’ in the past. Are we truly ‘people of the land’ now?

A key aspect of the difference between tangata Māori and tangata whenua is that the first (tangata Māori) draws a boundary between one group of people

(Māori) and humanity overall through the use of an ethnic prescriptor. The second boundary is drawn along philosophical and worldview lines. That is, *tangata whenua* is a way of thinking and being in the world. Importantly, this movement does not propose an abandonment of ‘tangata Māori’ in favour of ‘tangata whenua’. Rather it prescribes a *movement through* tangata Māori to tangata whenua.

A second way of thinking about the transition I am referring to is through the use of the terms Te Ao Māori and Te Ao Mārama. As with the terms ‘tangata Māori’, ‘Te Ao Māori’ points to a ‘world’ prescribed primarily with an ethnic prescriptor called ‘Māori’. Here what is important is knowledge, experience and action designed to uphold, and sometimes, defend a ‘world’ called Te Ao Māori, however, vaguely defined that may be. On the whole, Te Ao Māori is both a real and an imagined world (one we see in our mind’s eye) which is bounded by the term ‘Māori’.

Te Ao Mārama, on the other hand, is a traditional set of terms (found in many iwi creation traditions) concerning the world of our actual experience, one could say the ‘real’ world. The movement through Te Ao Māori to Te Ao Mārama entails moving from consciously upholding or defending a world to embracing the world as it is and utilising mātauranga Māori in our engagement with it. I see this as a creative task – utilising our indigenous knowledge to make sense of our contemporary world. In a way, one can consider this as a move from an ‘artificial’ world called ‘Te Ao Māori’ to the ‘real’ world of Te Ao Mārama.

Indigenuity

Now having considered all these aspects, one can ask the question, what really beats at the heart of mātauranga Māori? There are a number of ways of answering this question but ultimately I like to answer this question through the opportunities and challenges of indigenuity. Deep in the heart of mātauranga Māori is the idea of an intimate, kinship-based relationship to the natural world, to our natural environments, to the planet. It is this

relationship which lies at the heart of mātauranga Māori and indigenous knowledge generally. In addition to this, mātauranga Māori draws us to:

- a creative, passionate and storied participation in the world
- an upholding of human memory
- an encounter with natural world through the apparatus of the physical body
- a balancing of the rational with the non-rational
- exploring the relationship between individual and collective creativity
- ‘In bodied knowledge’, knowledge within the physical dimension of the world such as the human body or the forest

These are ideas and perspectives that one can find in mātauranga Māori, ultimately, however, mātauranga Māori is drawing us to a sensitive and passionate relationship with the natural world environments in which we dwell. This is what is called indigenuity.

Indigenuity and all peoples

The opportunities and challenges of indigenuity greet all peoples not just so called ‘indigenous peoples’. Questions concerning relationships between people and relationships between people and the natural world environments in which they live are meaningful, relevant and urgent in all human communities throughout the world. Indigenuity can be seen as a possible response, among a suite of potential responses and contributions, to worldwide issues such as security, climate change, energy production, over population and more. Whilst indigenuity will not in itself provide the entire solution to these issues, it nonetheless may represent an important thread in a range of responses to these problems – the thread concerning relationships between people and natural world environments in which they live.

The Opportunities and Challenges of Indigenuity

In my view, the international and cross-cultural body of knowledge entitled ‘indigenous knowledge’ contains three major themes which simultaneously inspires it and defines it. I suggest that these themes when woven together

constitute the major features of indigenous knowledge in the world today.

The Search for better relationships between human communities and the natural world

The first theme concerns the search for better relationships between human communities and the natural world environments in which we live. This theme arises from the deep ‘call’ within indigenous knowledge which sees humankind as part of the natural order rather than superior to it. From this idea arises much of the substance of indigenous knowledge such as the notion of the natural world as the embodiment of knowledge, the natural world as a teacher for the human person and that life reaches its fullness when the natural world seems to ‘live in’ and ‘speak into’ the consciousness of the human being and their community. This idea influences the very idea of knowledge itself and presents knowledge as an energy rather than a finite product, and knowledge as equivalent to the world rather than as representation of it. This theme is also deepened by the lived heritage of indigenous communities in particular land and seascapes.

Knowledge weaving: Cross-disciplinary, cross-boundary thought, discussion and knowledge

The second key theme within indigenous knowledge concerns the weaving of knowledge and experience across domains of knowledge and the boundaries articulated for disciplines. This theme arises from the notion that indigenous knowledge is ‘holistic’ in the sense that knowledge is interconnected and relational in the same way that all life is interconnected and relational. We dwell within the web or weave of life – in Māori we use tātai or genealogies for all creation as a metaphor for this aspect of existence – and so our knowledge reflects this reality.

Some see this theme as an attempt to undermine and compromise disciplines. Some might even suggest that this idea is anti-methodological. (One will note how this theme is deeply relevant to notions of power and its expression through knowledge.) However, the idea of weaving across boundaries can not take place without the boundaries themselves existing. Just as the world

contains natural borders – as between the sea and land, as between mountains and flatland, as between knowing and ignorance – so there are natural borders within knowledge and they exist for substantial reasons. A ‘holistic’ view of the world and of knowledge is not blind to parts, boundaries, borders and thresholds but rather sees these parts both as ‘wholes’ in themselves as well as parts of larger wholes (confer ‘holon’). Life is a complex and multidimensional whole and the quest to see the ‘whole’ is to render disciplines as part of a complex set of pathways leading to wholeness rather fragmentation. In this way of viewing the world, understanding relationship is the key to understanding the world.

The Revitalisation and rejuvenation of the traditional knowledge bases of indigenous communities

A third and important theme within indigenous knowledge is the desire to revitalise and rejuvenate the traditional knowledge bases of indigenous peoples, particularly knowledge that has been in decline through colonisation. This theme is deeply aligned to the desire by indigenous peoples to overcome their experience of colonisation and to build futures upon deep and indigenous foundations. That is, in rearranging indigenous communities and preparing them for the future, this task is not merely concerned with acquiring general knowledge and resources which enable them to participate in a national or regional economy – it is also concerned with understanding ourselves as a distinctive people and what we can distinctively contribute to a wide range of activities within the nation’s in which we live. Contrary to what some critics may say about the rejuvenation of traditional knowledge (‘going backwards’), the revitalisation of traditional knowledge is as much about understanding our future as it is about our past.

In my view, these three themes woven together – searching for better relationships with the natural world, cross-boundary styles of thought and knowledge and the revitalisation of traditional indigenous knowledge – are the key ideas within international indigenous knowledge today. There may be other themes – such as the use of traditional knowledge to improve the harvesting of indigenous flora and fauna – however, I would like to present

these three as a starting point for discussion when we think about indigenous knowledge in world terms.

Contiguously all three themes are both indigenous to indigenous knowledge as well as important and substantial contributions to issues and challenges facing humankind throughout the world. For example, theme one provides ample scope to discuss the nature of environmental degradation and stress. The contribution of indigenous knowledge to this issue is to challenge notions of the superiority of humankind to the natural order – humans as consumers. Lying at the heart of indigenous knowledge is kinship between ourselves and the natural world - and this idea asks us, how much of the degradation we see in our world today is actually a projection or product of the disequilibrium we see inside ourselves?

Theme two – weaving of knowledge and experience across boundaries – represents a deep and fundamental critique of power and authority as expressed through knowledge. It suggests that there may be there other ways of thinking about power and knowledge than the top-down, bounded and hierarchical model which dominates the world today. As mentioned, the theme does not undermine the position of boundaries and disciplines – discipline here defined by the presence of methodology, power and authority thus vested in those in possession of methodology – but rather it shows how disciplines and fields of knowledge are regions and locations within a larger multidimensional whole. Further, much can be gained when one field encounters another. A cross-over approach can often lead to unexpected and novel innovations and discoveries.