



Te Tomokanga (entrance) - A place of preparation

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Abstract

Te Tomokanga as a framework supports the development of reflective practice prior to engagement. Pre-engagement preparation invites participants to normalise themselves in an aspect of te ao Māori and prompts 'pre-reflection' on individual and collective practice. Te Tomokanga framework supported me in my journey towards registration as an educational psychologist through understanding the preparatory work required and undertaken as 'manuhiri' (a visitor) to support genuine engagement and relationships with the 'haukāinga' (home people). As a theoretical framework, Te Tomokanga is supported by shared tikanga practice, values and mātauranga provided by te ao Māori. Initially used as a pre-engagement tool, Te Tomokanga can also be used as a framework for the preparation of any hui, research, planning or practice and supervision.

Keywords: Psychology, Māori, Preflective practice, cultural capability

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Introduction

During my 3-year postgraduate training towards registration as a psychologist I was introduced to many western frameworks, models and approaches. What this also meant was I had little institutional exposure to mātauranga (knowledge) Māori, Māori worldviews of psychology or other indigenous psychologies. As a Māori student, there was often nothing familiar to scaffold my learning, life experiences or culture on. An experience at the beginning of my internship highlighted the prioritising and impacts of western knowledge and the absence of te ao Māori (Māori worldviews) knowledge in my training. I began looking for a way to make sure I was better prepared to be more present for those I worked with. My experience made me think about the weighting western training puts on engagement, assessment and analysis versus the preparation to engage needed before working with whānau. I needed something that made sense to me, that was familiar and easily accessible. I looked to te ao Māori for cultural practices that supported Māori worldviews of relationships and engagement to me. Te ao Māori, mātauranga Māori and taonga tuku iho (ancestral knowledge passed down) provides ways of thinking, being and doing that help us make sense of the world and our place in it, and can also inform and guide our practice. This knowledge is handed down through generations in cultural practices and events, such as waiata (songs), pūrakau (cultural narratives), pōwhiri (welcome protocols) and whakapapa (lineage) and stored in te reo Māori (Pohatu, 2013).

Te Ahukaramū Royal (2011) explains the ‘creative potential’ derived from mātauranga Māori of times past can seed inspiration relevant for modern times and brings with it liberation and freedom that comes from ‘within’ rather than ‘without’. He continues to unpack the transformative power of mātauranga Māori in our time as a way to ‘look beyond our colonial history and contemporary struggles’.

Kaupapa Māori frameworks and models bring Māori knowledge and methodologies out from obscurity, affirming its existence to a predominantly and methodically empirical, western framed world. Aboriginal researcher Carolyn Kenny (2000) shares her Indigenous understanding of cultural practices and rituals as place and space holders for Indigenous knowledge, narratives and knowing of self. In this way, cultural rituals or practices provide Māori a sense of knowing, being and doing that becomes an anchor for identity and ability to explore conflict and cultural dissonance they encounter safely. Despite the generational diversities of Māori experiences of

colonialism and racism through loss of language, cultural connection and identity, Māori cultural events and practices have continued to safeguard collective purpose and process. Accessing Indigenous knowledge or practices as a means of making sense of self and a worldview, also challenges the dominant discourse and distribution of western theory, training, and practice (Mullane et al., 2022). This is especially important in places such as psychology within Aotearoa where an outcome of colonisation is that those who are the recipients of western psychological services are often of another culture (NSCBI, NZPsS & NZCCP, 2018). Decolonisation and deconstruction are important for understanding what, how and why the current state of psychology is the way it is, in order to change and improve outcomes for those disadvantaged by its effects. Our individual and collective relatedness to the current state changes through the process of decolonisation as we shift into a state of transformation alongside it (Martin, 2008).

Re-conceptualising current psychological training and practice by accessing cultural practices such as those observed at the tomokanga, challenges the ‘ongoing processes of colonialism’ found in western training institutions and programmes and contributes to achieving individual and collective mana motuhake (self-determination) and tino-rangatiratanga (autonomy) (Rua et al., 2023; Heke, 2023, Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Māori frameworks such as Te Tomokanga become a tool of decolonisation as well as transformation through a process that prioritises the cultural purpose of the framework and provides a cultural response to a given situation (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

Te ao Māori provides collective knowledge and guidance of how to be and what to do through traditional knowledge anchored, protected and yet accessible through proverbs, stories, narratives, whakapapa *etc* (Mead, 2022). Narratives are often used in Indigenous research due to its validity of lived experience and reality. Personal narratives can be used to reconceptualise things from the position of self as a native model of inquiry. Though public narratives may position or educate, personal narratives provide guidance and deepens change in practice. An impactful lived experience creates a stronger desire and commitment to implement the ‘what’ or ‘how’ I should or could work differently (Deverick & Mooney, 2023).

When I reflected on my personal experiences and engagement in te ao Māori, I thought about the times I had gathered with others at the tomokanga of a marae to engage in whatever the reason was that



took me there. Regardless of the reason for gathering or the number of people attending, preparations are always made by the visiting ope (group) before they enter the space of engagement. Ngā whakaritenga (preparations) that specifically occurs at the tomokanga provide a living example and reminder of things I needed to attend to prior to engaging with people, place or purpose. It is the mahi before the mahi (the work before the work). The re-living of this familiar cultural event guided and prompted a pre-reflective approach to future engagement. Preflection is a term used to describe a way in which prospective thinking assists planning or preparation prior to future actions being taken (Lehmann & Ifenthaler, 2011). Rather than a prescribed checklist of prompts, mentally re-experiencing this event allowed a natural flow that was always accessible and very helpful to me. In doing so, preflection can support greater meaningfulness in an anticipated activity as attention is given to the review of personal beliefs, values, bias, intention and a way forward, beforehand (Brand et al., 2016, Ellis et al., 2022). Knowledge from experience and observations of the processes and protocols observed at the tomokanga provided an anchor for my shift from scientist to practitioner and from theory to practice. Mentally arriving at the tomokanga allowed me to then ‘walk through’ the event of preparing to engage, before actually engaging, with whānau or kaupapa.

Taina Pohatu is a creator of several kaupapa Māori frameworks used in educational, health and social work contexts. He spoke at a wānanga I attended in 2018 and discussed the importance of accessing mātauranga Māori as a tool for thinking and reflecting, making it fluid as opposed to fixed, stating – “we are the first theorists of our practice” (Kare-aro, 2018). In doing so we are better positioned to utilise the wisdom that is found in mātauranga Māori for its value and its contribution to our understanding and ability to make sense of the world we live in. In the process of ‘conscientiously reconstructing’ the situation or space we occupy, we can ‘frame it’ with mātauranga Māori. He continued to explain the use of these ‘hoa haere’ (travelling companions) or cultural images, concepts, process, practices or experiences that help us socialise ourselves as individuals as well as whānau, hapū and iwi. Returning to these “new or old friends in a new place” (Te Rangihiroa, as quoted by Pohatu, Kare-aro, 2018) allows the ongoing benefits of wisdom informed by mātauranga Māori to guide thoughts and behaviour to help us get from where we are to where we want to be.

Te Tomokanga has become a familiar ‘hoa haere’, accompanying me and guiding my learning and practice. Te Tomokanga prompted the pre-flection and preparatory work required on my part to support the eventual engagement with those whose tomokanga I stand at waiting to be invited in.

Te Tomokanga – Mātauranga Māori

Physically, the marae space is easily distinguished, and often boundaries such as pou or fencing is used to identify specific space. Spiritually, the marae is “marked by its’ rituals” (Salmond, 2004, p. 34). The tomokanga is a physical and spiritual transition marker that identifies the significance and seriousness of moving from one space into another, reinforcing the connectedness and opposing forces of life and death, mai i te pō, pō ki te ao (from the darkness to light) Bearing this in mind, the need and process of being prepared to enter that realm is re-enacted every time a pōwhiri is held. As well as being prepared physically, mentally and emotionally, preparation and protection spiritually is crucial (Bennett, 2007). A waere, or protective karakia usually performed by kaumatua (respected Elder) may also be given for manuhiri (visitors) before or upon entry into the ātea for added protection into the spiritual realm depending on the situation, reason, and event, or as practiced by different hapū and iwi (Mead, 2003; T. Ngatoko, personal communication, 12 September, 2018).

The pōwhiri (ritual of encounter) ceremony provides frameworks and models to assist understanding particularly when engaging with Māori (McClintock et al., 2012; Rata et al., 2014; Britt et al., 2014). The pōwhiri, is a sequence of events that brings manuhiri from one realm into another, the spiritual to the physical. A relational encounter of two parties, two opposites on multiple levels, that concludes with an equalising of status, lifting all from the restrictions of tapu (sacred) to noa (unrestricted). Within literature, the pōwhiri ritual is perhaps the most written about and possibly the ritual event most experienced by the wider population in Aotearoa. Whilst the pōwhiri itself precedes the hui, or purpose of the gathering, preparation outside the tomokanga precedes the interaction inside the marae.

Many models and frameworks used in engagement, collaboration and assessment with Māori have come from mātauranga Māori, some of which have focused on the dual relationships of practitioner and client/whānau (Herd 2006; Lacey et al., 2011; Tipene-Matua, et al., 2009; Glynn et al., 2001) and have been developed to increase understanding of Māori, primarily by non-Māori. Mead (2003)



discusses the preparation needed for pōwhiri in order to maintain its tapu elements, although he considers this solely from the perspective of the hau kainga (home people of the marae)/tangata whenua (Indigenous people). Preparation at the tomokanga prior to the pōwhiri from the perspective of manuhiri or waewae tapu (newcomer) is not widely written about. Pouwhare (2017) identifies the way in which pōwhiri 'constructs and contains relationships between different groups of people.'... providing a 'platform for constructive engagement' (p.234). Britt et.al. (2014), refer briefly to general considerations made 'outside the gate', before 'standing at the gate' (p. 3).

The elements, attitudes and knowledge held within the protocol of gathering and preparing 'outside the gate' before being called onto the marae, provide what Drury (2007) refers to as 'shaping thinking and behaviour'. Manuhiri organise themselves into roles and responsibilities such as kaikaranga (ceremonial caller), kaikōrero (speaker), who will speak and when, the waiata (song) to be sung to support the whaikōrero (speech), and the collection and delivery of koha (offering) (Harawira, 1997). This process provides an opportunity for whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships or connections) amongst the visiting group where kinship or kaupapa connections are made (Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006). Identifying whakapapa connection occurs under the cultural value and practice of whakawhanaungatanga creating kotahitanga (unity) in purpose and action.

Knowledge stored in encounters and experiences on marae and in te ao Māori provide a way of engaging with and making sense of Māori experiences that are familiar, appropriate and empowering to Māori. Frameworks and models that use mātauranga Māori in a kaupapa Māori approach can be used across multiple settings and contexts. Te Tomokanga can be both a framework of preparation and a model of practice, also contributing to the need for indigenous knowledge to support practice in multiple places and spaces.

Māori frameworks and models generally provide guidance that for Māori are a connection or reconnection and reminder of how to be and what to do. Kaupapa Māori values and principles that underpin Māori models and frameworks guide sense making, decision making, inform practice and the course of actions needed, in a Māori way. To be considered a kaupapa Māori approach, a framework must include being of value to Māori, useful and transformational (Heke, 2023). For non-Māori the

use of Māori models and frameworks that are grounded in te ao Māori provide exposure and insight to another way of knowing and working. Thus Te Tomokanga is not a bi-cultural framework, it is a kaupapa Māori framework and model useable by Māori and non-Māori independently that produces benefits for Māori and those with whom a practitioner engages with (Waitoki & McLachlan, 2022).

Te Tomokanga - Framework and Model

As indicated earlier, metaphorically and symbolically te tomokanga has huge cultural significance to Māori (Bennett, 2007). The intentional pause before engagement is important as it allows preparation to enter both the physical and spiritual realm of the marae and the purpose of the gathering (Pohatu, 2007). Once the correct preparations have been made, manuhiri present themselves at te tomokanga indicating their readiness enter and engage with those who will call and invite them in. Preparation at te tomokanga is an exemplar to guide thinking and shape practice for engagement from a Māori worldview.

As a framework (see Figure 1), Te Tomokanga explores and engages with the cultural practices of preparation making the implicit and intrinsic, explicit. Te Tomokanga helps contextualise the importance of preparation and then how to prepare for engagement with whānau. One transformational aspect of Te Tomokanga as a framework that benefits Māori, is the essential aspect of relational connection and companionship that is met. In this instance, it is the access to and companionship of a cultural practice that can guide everyday decision making and actions (Heke, 2023). The influence of the interconnected relationship of standing at the tomokanga of a marae, and the influence of that environment on my preparation at the tomokanga deepens commitment expectations of relationships with whānau, whenua (land) and kaupapa. A self-sustaining reflective practice is gained by linking learning through lived experiences or realities.

Te Tomokanga as a preparatory tool, can mentally walk practitioners through the same process as if waiting at the tomokanga to be called on to the marae. As a practice framework seven main elements are drawn from the roles and responsibilities of those standing at te tomokanga preparing to 'go on' the marae. These elements are grounded in key Māori values of whanaungatanga (relationships), aroha (love), tika (right), pono (truth), rangatiratanga (autonomy) and manaakitanga (hospitality and care). Te Tomokanga as a preparatory framework



follows a process of rituals that align to pōwhiri with several distinct stages. While these stages can be flexible in their order, they are generally followed to tend to the needs and responsibility of tikanga (principles) and kawa (customs). Each of the stages are present in ritual preparation and reflect the interaction of relationships between people, time, place and culture. As stages within a process or event, they provide prompts that invite reflective questions that structure pre-engagement preparations and guide practice. These are:

- Whānau (familial group)
- Kaupapa (purpose)
- Wā (time)
- Take (reason)
- Kawa (customs)
- Wāhi (location)
- Koha (offering)

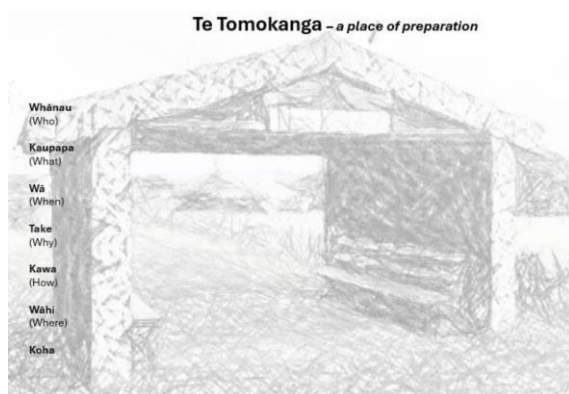


Figure 1. *Te Tomokanga* (photo was personally taken at a marae of significance and subsequently edited).

First, *Whānau*. As I stand at the tomokanga, I think of those that might gather with me, from the past, present and future. Connected to people collectively through te ao wairua, spiritually preparing to enter as tapu (under restrictions). Those who need to be there and who would already be there, to support the whānau, the kaupapa and me. I think of tūpuna (ancestors) who have passed on, and the knowledge and wisdom that is passed down that supports the flourishing of whānau. I think of whanaunga (relations) around me, and the relationships between me and them based on tapu (sacredness) and mana (authority), knowing that my interactions with them and my engagement with others can contribute to the building up or diminishing of both our mana (Tate, 2010). Whanaungatanga is about whakapapa (lineage). Whakapapa is about connections and relationships:

- It can be about a person – and their physical or spiritual connection to people, to the environment, across time and place
- It can be about a kaupapa
- It can be about a process of thinking

As I come to the tomokanga, I may not be a member of the whakapapa (lineage) whānau, but I can be part of the kaupapa (purpose) whānau (Durie, 2003).

Whanaungatanga across realms and whakapapa connections, in this sense, enriches the access to support for those about to meet. In considering the reply to the karanga (ceremonial call), am I the best first responder, am I the right person or is there someone else that has the right to respond, or needs to be asked to return the call? Am I the best point of contact for the whānau? The question is not what works or is most convenient for me, rather what is most helpful, respectful and appropriate for the whānau and the kaupapa? What response ensures there is equity for whānau Māori, the edifying of whānau mana and upholds Te Tiriti provisions promised to them? These are the types of questions I ask myself.

Secondly, the *Kaupapa*. Time spent gathering at the tomokanga includes the sharing of information for unity of kaupapa and the ope (group). This includes establishing connections through whakapapa to whānau or knowledge of what the kaupapa connections are. It also includes agreement on the kaupapa, why we have gathered, who would represent and speak on behalf of the ope, consideration of that agreement and any possible repercussions of that agreement. Traditionally there was a huge responsibility attached to the decisions that were made at the tomokanga that included considering who would be held accountable if things did not go well (S. Wikaira, personal communications, 12 Sept 2018).

Thirdly, the *Wā*. In cultural settings such as the formalities of the marae, time reflects the importance of getting things right, about prioritising concerns and responding and respecting the issues and people concerned (Pohatu, 2013). The phrase 'Māori time' is sometimes used negatively to describe why people are running late (Durie, 2007). Time as a western construct values quickness rather than correctness of doing what is right the right way regardless of how long it takes. Māori favour deliberation and carefulness in order to ascertain intention, build connection and relationships which all takes time and moves at the speed of trust. Trust in this instance suggests I reflect on the importance of time to the relationships and the kaupapa. I consider the

whānau in its entirety and the impacts on them across time, especially when considering the historical and intergenerational effects of colonization that have occurred across their whakapapa, whenua and cultural connections.

Time or readiness is also indicated by transition markers of action, such as manuhiri gathering at the tomokanga. When ready, women and children are usually positioned in the front with men flanking the group and stand silently in view of tangata whenua awaiting the call to enter (Harawira, 1997; Tauroa 1989). The time of entry through the tomokanga is ultimately determined by haukāinga (people of the marae) with the kaikaranga (ceremonial caller) taking her place to call. We enter on their timing and in doing so are committed to a course of action that purposively builds a relationship.

Fourthly, the *Take*. The take is usually the reason for people on both sides of the tomokanga to come together. The marae and pōwhiri also have processes that have specific and varied roles for each person participating. Standing at the tomokanga allows for introspection about why I am here, what is my purpose, my role and relationship to the kaupapa and what do I bring to the tomokanga and why? What do I need to leave at the tomokanga before I enter?

Fifthly, the *Kawa*. Kawa determines how things are done and differs from marae to marae, and whānau to whānau. As manuhiri, following the kawa of the marae acknowledges and respects the mana of those past and present, and the wairua of the marae (Tauroa, 1989, Mead, 2003). Nowadays it's quite common to see different hapū have kaiāwhina (helper) present at the tomokanga to guide, care for, direct or inform manuhiri what the kawa is for their marae. There are many protocols and nuances that occur at the marae, some are explained explicitly and some not so much but may be picked up through observation and regular attendance and participation at marae. Consideration of what to wear to a marae depends on what the purpose for going to the marae is and whether the event is formal or informal. The same considerations apply in practice as I seek knowledge and understanding of the kawa of the whānau and their community I work and prepare to present myself accordingly.

Sixth, the *Wāhi*. At the tomokanga our physical location is a key indicator of our role, intention and readiness to engage. Our waiting location also indicates that while we are still on the 'outside', we are provided with space and place for manuhiri preparations to be made before entering. What do I know about the place, marae, school, office or home?

I consider the power attached to locations we might meet whānau at through the lens of the history of the whenua, the whakapapa linked to the whenua and the associations that may hold for whānau. For example, school settings for Māori are historically sites of violence and continue to be sites of struggle today (Pihama, 2019). The colonising and assimilating systems of western education in Aotearoa meant many Māori were punished for being Māori and using their native tongue in those settings. Schools and educational settings are often the location default that educational psychologists and schools use to meet with whānau. The spaces and places that whānau might be expected to meet in must be explored so as to address and acknowledge any harm that has or could be done in those settings. This can be avoided by working with whānau who lead as active decision makers in a choice of space and place that supports them

Seventh, *Koha*. There is a more modern saying, "be the koha not the hoha". In contemporary times koha is usually a monetary collection gathered from within the group of visitors or those gathered at the tomokanga, prior to entering the marae. Koha could also be the contribution people made according to their ability whether that was in food, money or time. Traditionally, koha was a ritual that bound two groups of people (manuhiri and haukāinga) in an ongoing relationship of reciprocity, acknowledging past support and the anticipation or promise of future support also (Mead, 2003). Koha is more than just a transaction. It can be a deep expression of aroha (love) and respect. Koha is a way to express appreciation to the hosts, support for the kaupapa or reflect kinship bonds. Koha is not a payment for hospitality, it is not a user pays collection or system (Mamaku, 2014).

Koha is also the final element and a transitional marker of the conclusion of the pōwhiri process. It precedes the formal coming together, before any physical contact and connection is made between the two parties (McIntock, Moeke-Maxwell & Mellsoy, 2012). Yet it begins its journey through the collective hands and hearts of those who gather at the tomokanga.

Conclusion

What occurs at the tomokanga provides a transferrable and transportable 'hoa haere' that can accompany and guide work and practice preparations. Te Tomokanga can provide meaningful ethical and cultural direction and reassurance through a process that supports practitioners to be better prepared to engage with



Māori. Te Tomokanga contributes to being a better reflective practitioner through self-awareness, self-monitoring and critical analysis of all aspects of practice, before it takes place. Te Tomokanga explores the multi-layers of simplicity and depth that te ao Māori holds to guide everyday living as well as inform practice for those who work in complex spaces. Māori in all their diversity, will see the word Te Tomokanga and connect quickly based on their experience and engagement with the cultural practice. They will get it – at many different levels. Pākehā will understand it as they come to the tomokanga and pause, listen, watch and learn. In sharing my hoa haere Te Tomokanga with other psychologists, practitioners and students, Māori and Pākehā, I have seen the saying, “if it’s good for Māori it’s good for everyone” come to pass. What I love is the different entry levels and depth of engagement with te ao Māori that can occur in relation to wherever a person is at. Within psychology Te Tomokanga as a framework indigenises colonial strongholds of western knowledge. It becomes transformational through the practice of psychologists who use it, and the outcomes of those that will benefit from our use of it.

The following questions found in Appendix A, are some of the questions I ask myself. They are some of my thoughts and reflections – or more accurately my ‘preflections’. They are the tomokanga I mentally walk through prior to engaging with those I work with. The invitation is extended to all to ask yourselves the questions that will help you stand better prepared at the tomokanga of your mahi, ready to enter when invited.

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Appendix A - My Preflections

Whānau

What can I do to strengthen my connection to whānau? Who is part of my kaupapa whānau? What are some of the relationships I belong to and am/am not aware of when I stand at the tomokanga? What power relationships are present? Just as some Kaumātua may not speak on the pae, but may lend their support by their presence and mana – who might I take along with me? Who from those who have passed on might support either a-wairua, or in word, thoughts? What strengths and learnings from whakapapa could be drawn upon? Who within the whānau, hapū, iwi, or community could be called upon to attend or support if needed? What connections do I have to those who also arrive at the tomokanga that bind us together and supports a quicker and stronger foundation of a relationship to work within?

Kaupapa

What brings me to the tomokanga? What do I know about the kaupapa? What do I need to know or have ready that will enable me to be fully present? What are the concerns of the whānau? What are the external factors of this kaupapa that must be considered?

Wā

When is the best time for gathering for the whānau? Is the time right? Have I given consideration for the whānau, and also for those that might go with me? Who benefits from



the timing of the hui? Have I allowed enough time for; the preparation work to be done, to gather the right people, for whakawhanaungatanga?

Kawa

What is the kawa of this whānau, and their marae, their home? How do I find that out beforehand? What is the best way to maintain contact with and feedback for the whānau? What do I wear, how do I present myself, – what is appropriate for the situation, context, culture, setting?

Tāke

What are the reasons I will do what I do? Why will I choose certain tools, frameworks or assessments from my kete? Am I aware of my cultural bias, or other environmental factors and how that may influence the way I do things? What can I do to constantly check my bias so that I am balanced in all aspects of my preparation, engagement, interaction and support?

Wāhi

Where is the best place for this kaupapa whānau to hui that provides a neutral, positive and supportive environment and who determines that? Have I supported whānau voice and choice in the decision making of the hui location? What historical events, relationships, and environments do I need to consider, or know about beforehand? Have I considered the costs and distances involved? Have I considered the needs of tamariki or mokopuna who may also need to attend?

Koha

What does being a koha look like? What might a koha look like in different situations? What koha do I take with me to those I meet with? What do I take that will help bind us together in a genuine, reciprocal relationship? How do I participate in this act reciprocity?

