

Paper I: The cultural meaning of Kaiawhina

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INTRODUCTION

In an earlier paper (TeApatu, et al., 2014) we argued that researching indigenous issues in commonly known and referred to as “new” countries with a young history requires a good understanding of the cultural issues in order to inform study design and methodology. We also argued that this approach must be followed for researching any minority groups. Clearly, methodologies which are adopted for the general population have been based on the theories and assumptions under the dominant culture. Without ascertaining correct cultural assumptions these methodologies will fail when they are applied to minority groups, indigenous population or a different population.

One of the biggest problems within indigenous research is the assumption that the cultural assumptions can be met if the research is carried out by a member of an indigenous population. In order to make our methodologies and policies more appropriate to the indigenous and minority groups, the current thinking is to train these groups to deliver research or care policies. The assumption is that a methodology/policy becomes indigenous-friendly and more acceptable if it is delivered by an indigenous person. Unfortunately, if a methodology or policy is developed by others with a different set of assumptions it will always be inappropriate regardless of who delivers it.

In this paper we report results from the first phase of a non-restrictive application of methodology, as reported earlier (TeApatu, et al., 2014), to research the Maori word “Kaiawhina”. We illustrate how the need for data is suitably met, uncovering valuable and informative information through the collection of Maori lived histories, by immersing into the Maori culture.

BACKGROUND

Kaiawhina is a Maori word commonly used in New Zealand as a title for a formal role in an organisation, e.g. a job title. It is often written as one word. The online Maori Dictionary spells it as kaiāwhina and defines it as assistant or helper. In modern days kaiawhina has been used interchangeably to mean anything from assisting (e.g. as in the sentence: “the teacher aides/**kaiāwhina** workshops **did** result in an increase in their knowledge and skills,...”, *source*: <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/5103>) to assistant (e.g. as in sentence: “Health Workforce New Zealand (HWNZ) and Careerforce are working together to develop a workforce action plan that will focus on the development of the health and disability Kaiāwhina/non-regulated workforce.”, *source*: <http://www.careerforce.org.nz/kaiawhina/>).

The widespread usage together with various definitions suggests that there are two main dimensions to “kaiawhina”: first, **kaiāwhina** the word, and second, **kaiāwhina**, the person or the role(s) expected of a person-designate. Kaiawhina posts can be found in almost every public organisation (e.g. educational establishments, government departments, libraries). These posts are often described as support and provide assistance (for Maori).

However, there is anecdotal evidence which suggests that the word kaiawhina has its origin in the Tuhoe tribe. It is not clear what circumstances led to its adoption in Maoridom. Moreover, the expectations of a Kaiawhina appear to vary between iwis (tribes) as well as between sectors (e.g. education, health).

Anecdotal evidence and a quick comparison of kaiawhinas within and between institutions suggests variations in perception of what a Kaiawhina does and the nature of help they could and should provide. Furthermore, some Kaiawhinas are proactive and engage in developing support services while others may provide assistance when they are called upon. These differentials in the delivery of help have raised some questions about the kaiawhina. For example, is the nature of help individual specific, i.e. does the type and level of help depend on the personality of the kaiawhina, or, on their perception and understanding of the role? What should a kaiawhina job description look like? And should there be standard/universal job description? To answer such questions it was felt necessary to explore the word “kaiawhina”, its history and roots and how it ended up in modern diction to describe a position in a working environment.

In Maori circles, however, there are different perceptions and beliefs about the origins of the word “kaiawhina” and its usage. For example, some stories suggest that the term “Kai” Awhina was originated from Tuhoe. On the other hand, it is possible that kaiawhina came to prominence as a means of surviving a recent history of a system of apartheid that withheld health and social care from them. In this context, our research question can be defined as what is the real history of kaiawhina?

METHODOLOGY

Alternatively, we can consider our aim to be in terms of separating facts from fiction or more appropriately separating legends from lived history. An archaeological “dig” of historical sources (recorded histories and archives) did not yield a direction or clue to follow. However, as Maori history is embedded in Maori stories our methodology would have to be robust enough to collect information from lived histories.

Our main task was, therefore, securing access to Maori lived histories. To achieve this we adopted an open and non-restrictive methodology to allow for cultural protocol in order to ensure Maori participation and quality data. With this philosophy, the first author was provided with full academic support to identify the parameters associated with this research and design the study within the Maori cultural framework.

Maori recorded history is relatively rare. Although, Maori have spent decades archiving Maori history, researchers must often collect data from the source, i.e. Maori stories.

Storytelling and stories play an important role in Maoridom and have many dimensions. They tend to capture and record historical events, they can be used as a justification for a ruling or

protocol, or they are used for educational purposes, and so on. As such it is anticipated that the stories the researchers gather will yield embedded information about Kaiawhina.

In this context, within a retrospective study design, stories using the keyword 'kaiawhina' were collected from participating Maori, beginning with Tainui elders. The stories were then either corroborated using printed/recorded histories, or, oral history archives. It is also proposed to look for independent repetition of same stories by other participants in cases where there are no records held.

The methodology has been described elsewhere (TeApatu, et al., 2014). There are two major elements of the methodology that need to be highlighted again. First, this project involves collecting Maori stories from Maori. Second, the korero sessions cannot proceed without following correct Maori protocol. For these reasons the project was split into three stages.

In stage one, the lead researchers would approach relevant elders and make contact with at least one elder who would be willing to take part in a korero about "kaiawhina". The results from stage one will guide how to precede with the next stage. In stage two the researchers will follow Maori protocol to make contact and set up korero sessions with appropriate elders and scholars belonging to iwi identified in stage one. Stage three will involve triangulation of results from stages one and two, using available Maori oral archives, printed materials, and recorded histories.

In stage one, the lead researchers approached Mutual Hekeiterangi Broadhurst (Whaea Heke), a renowned Tainui Kuia, who is an experienced and well regarded authority on Maori affairs and history for guidance when approaching Maori iwi and organising sessions. This approach was successful in engaging Whaea Heke in initial koreros about kaiawhina and to guide and assist with the design of stage two.

The stories provided by Whaea Heke are currently being analysed with a view to develop stage two which will be reported in a separate manuscript. In this paper we report on a relationship between the word kaiawhina and lived history and historical events supplied by Whaea Heke. In other words, oral histories or koreros can be broadly divided into two periods: pre colonisation, and post colonisation.

RESULTS

The korero sessions with Whaea Heke provided over 9 hours of recorded conversation and stories. In this paper, as mentioned above, we will only report on issues that were raised from the stories. Detailed analysis of and reporting of the stories will be discussed in subsequent papers. In early discussions with Whaea Heke it was suggested that kaiawhina is a word or a name from Tuhoe. In the opening korero with Whaea Heke the terms of reference for recalling stories was described as follows:

- a- What is a kaiawhina?
- b- Where did the name or title come from?
- c- How is it embraced by other iwis and tribes?
- d- Is it a word with multiple definition and context?
- e- Is there an age limit? (e.g. there are a number of kaiawhinas in the same organisation some at Whaea age whilst others are much younger)
- f- What are the roles?
- g- What is the history behind the role?

An initial search of Maori archives provided no link to the term “kaiawhina” other than a dictionary definition of the word and its contemporary usage. A Google search using the search-term “Kai Awhina” resulted in 84,900 records. The first few pages of results provided contemporary definition of the word without any reference or link to its roots.

Whaea Heke’s initial reaction to the question “what does kaiawhina mean?” was her experience of usage of the word:-

“I am not an expert on Maori language but in my ears I have always heard that word “Kai” “Awhina” therefore two words... “Kai Awhina””

Awhina meaning help is a simple word:

“I have heard the word awhina e.g. “Haere ki te awhina i to teina” (go and help your young sister)... the kaiawhina came in when the Maori language made a comeback - it is then I noticed that all these kai words coming in...”

It is possible that Tuhoe prefixed it with ‘Kai’:

“The word kai Tuhoe always put kai in front of most words ... it is a word that is simple... it means the same thing ‘help’; kaiawhina is the same nothing more nothing else... very simple terminology but with a great responsibility...”

The linkage of ‘great responsibility’ with kaiawhina inevitably introduced the notion of kaiawhina as much more than helping around the house, e.g. washing up, but anyone can be a kaiawhina:

“... you can go back to Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost they were kaiawhina too, or you can go back to your common ancestry, you know there was always one who was very powerful in his role but he also had kaiawhina helpers, there is always a sense of responsibility for leader, would it be a king or leader or person of high status he always had those people beside him. Why...? To help him because he wouldn’t know what is required...”

It is therefore interesting to hear stories of Maori taking responsibility for Maori in the face of adverse circumstance. Inevitably, the korero provided stories about kaiawhinas through Maori history both pre- and post-colonisation.

Although, Whaea Heke linked kaiawhina or the notion of a helper or helpers to the beginning of Maori history, but the most interesting aspect of the koreros was the recalling of lived history. She recalled, with fondness, princess Te Puea and others, both well-known Maori figures and members of iwis, who selflessly helped those affected by the epidemics, as examples of kaiawina.

Whaea Heke retold stories about Princess Te Puea Herangi and her work to help orphans as a result of the 1918 influenza epidemic, and providing Maori with appropriate care during the 1914-18 smallpox epidemic.

Her memories of Maori suffering from ill-health, in particular during the epidemics (e.g. tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza) were not easy and comforting on the ear. She explained

that Maori's lack of immunity to western diseases which were introduced by the settlers led to a high incidence and mortality rate in Maori, which is also supported by the literature, e.g. (Rice, 2013). Lack of access to Pakeha medicine exacerbated the mortality rate. Whaea Heke attributed the lack of access to medicine to the apartheid system that was operating at the time. A system that separated and classified the population based on the colour of their skin and distributed resources and citizenship's rights accordingly. Under the apartheid system, disparities between Maori and Pakeha health outcomes increased and inevitably were followed by inequalities in education, social, and economic outcomes which still continue to this day (e.g. see (Shahtahmasebi, 2013; Shahtahmasebi & Cassidy, 2014)).

Clearly such circumstances give rise to many examples of kaiawhina in many shapes and forms. People like Princess Te Puea and other Maori who took responsibility and proactively stepped in and intervened to help and save Maori are all examples of kaiawhina.

CONCLUSION

Initial results confirm that "awhina" means help or helper with responsibility; and that it was prefixed with 'kai' at some stage, probably by Tuhoe, when the Maori language had a resurgence. Nevertheless Kaiawhina retained its original meaning. These issues will be addressed and reported in the second stage of the project which is already underway.

During the korero sessions in stage one the an issue which arose was the suffering of the Maori post colonisation at several levels: first, post-colonisation culture attenuation (once a proud culture became subsumed into the dominant Pakeha culture); second, the erosion of traditions and customs; third, the adverse impact on the environment, e.g. introduction of predators and spread of viruses/diseases to which Maori had no immunity (e.g. see (Rice, 2013)).

However, Whaea Heke recalled with fond memories the rise of the archetypal Maori legends and heroes out of the sufferings of Maori post-colonisation. For example, Whaea Heke recalled with admiration Princess Te Puea, and many others as kaiawhinas who proactively helped and saved Maori and instilled hope in them where there was none.

In the next manuscript we will discuss the content of the korero sessions in more detail paying particular attention to the stories as they relate to kaiawhina.

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