

A large, stylized Māori decorative pattern, possibly a koru or a similar motif, is rendered in a dark grey color against a black background. It is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the cover, partially obscured by a diagonal white line that separates the black and red sections.

Atua Matua Health Framework

Using Māori Environmental Knowledge
to Improve Indigenous Well-being

Ihirangi Heke

ATUA MATUA

A support document for exploring, gaining approval and initiating safe discovery of Taiao Māori
using Ngā Tohutaka Taiao and the Atua Matua Well-being Framework.



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KUPU WHAKATAKI



DR IHIRANGI HEKE

WAIKATO // TAINUI

Kia Ora rangatahi mā,

Nei rā te mihi maioha ki a koutou ngā kai rangahau hou ki tēnei mohiotanga ara te hokinga mai o ngā mātauranga tawhito atua. Kei roto i tenei pukamahi etahi tauira kaitiaki ma koutou hei whakaharatau.

Otira, nau mai, piki mai, kake mai, i te mea ki te kore ko koutou, ka kore he ara hou mo tēnei kaupapa. Nā reira, kei roto i tēnei panui tautoko, ngā tauira, ngā mohiotanga, ngā tatai hononga o ngā ATUA ki a koutou ngā MATUA.

Mauri Ora!

Ihi Heke

Integrated Hauora Initiatives

HE TIMATANGA



INTRODUCTION

The Atua Matua Health Framework (AMHF) is a health system that uses traditional Māori environmental knowledge to understand health from an indigenous perspective and therefore provides an alternative to the current mainstream model for indigenous and non-indigenous recipients alike. The AMHF is also a conceptual structure from which teachers, health promoters, academics and other indigenous populations can obtain working examples of culturally based models.

Previous Māori health models such as e.g., Whare Tapa Wha, (Durie, 1988) Te Wheke (Pere, 1988) and Ngā Pou Mana, broadly informed the AMHF. Essentially, the production of the AMHF framework is aimed at providing a platform to assist greater local connections underpinned by a Māori view of health that offers an alternative to Western individually centered approaches. In large part the reason for iwi-centric initiatives is to reinstate pre-European concepts of tribal nations with characteristics that mirror the specific environments that they come from.

In many ways the work conducted by Graham & Linda Smith (1989; 1990), and Russell Bishop (1996) challenged mainstream education hegemony for indigenous students, researchers and teachers, while also laying a foundation for research methodologies that gave Māori some control over their knowledge dissemination. As with tribal groups wanting to connect to their own environments in health, similar processes are happening in research approaches too with many tribes wanting to know what 'their tribal' research approach is. The AMHF provides provenance of examples of tribally centered approaches that can be applied to not only health but also to research that values subjectivity with local voices being heard and interventions being built that reflect local needs.

In this capacity, while the AMHF was first produced in 2014 it is not a process that is set in stone but one that is malleable in terms of users seeking a deeper understanding and consequent utilisation of some of the AMHF concepts.

Lastly, and by way of introduction, the AMHF uses a parallel construct to a systems approach, i.e., whakapapa, recently introduced through an article on the topic (Heke, Rees, Waititi, Swinburn & Stewart, 2019). This approach, in Māori terms, is known as a Whakapapa-based approach. Whakapapa has for the last several decades been used as a process that documents family connections. However whakapapa not only allows a list of family connections but it can also show causal links between the origin of a thought and the implementation of that process into a community.

Whakapapa can and should also be used as a verb as well as a noun so that it allows Māori to engage with connecting to environmental change as part of a 'bigger' family connection that connects people to the environment e.g., a coastal people with the ocean. Therefore, the AMHF is laid out in a whakapapa-based orientation that begins with an explanation of the twelve philosophies or metaphors for action that are obtained from the environment (Atua) and a consequent twelve that are the action engaged through humans in the communities (Matua). This structure is common in Māori discussions of educational attainment especially in regard to the pursuit of Nga kete wananga or baskets of knowledge.



I believe with regards to Atua Matua, it reminds us that we live in an intrinsic Māori world, underpinned by Māori paradigms of thinking. Therefore any teaching and learning must be imbued with equal spaces of Māori knowledge, as well as their non-Māori counterparts/ Western ways of thinking. The Atua Matua Health Framework refocuses Māoritanga (Māori concepts) at the core, does not ignore other views or values, but indeed invites holistic approaches within the applied practices and protocols of this space, both Tākaro (Māori games) and Sport, Fitness, Recreation.

Tamiaho Serancke (Māori Academic)





Furthermore, the Atua Matua Maori Health Framework encourages metacognition i.e., thinking about where the origin of a particular way of engaging with a problem and how solutions are produced, comes from. This process not only values the role of the whakapapa of ideas but also improves the likelihood of transferring ideas from one space to another, also known as dynamic capability. Importantly, the ability to decide what information is relevant to a community as informed by the environment that surrounds them should be a highly sought after prospect if recruitment and sustainability are to be improved. In this capacity it should be noted that to date health and physical activity have not been drivers for sustained effort from Māori communities.

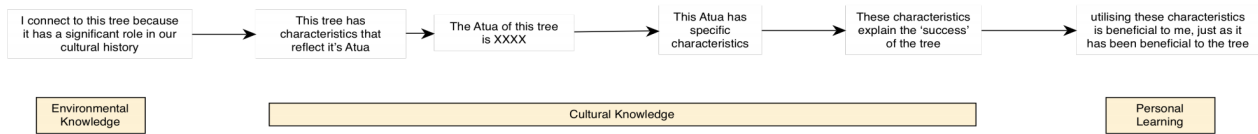


Diagram developed by David Rees

The AMHF has ensured that the practitioner can enter the AMHF at any point and work either upward or downward (and laterally) depending on their current level of understanding of Māori knowledge i.e., the philosophy of (atua) or applied practice (matua). See an example of the application of AMHF using a lateral approach above.

A further purpose of the AMHF is to foster innovation in health education through culturally relevant interpretations of Māori information. As a contentious topic to some, there has also been a privileging of male environmental information due to the records often being male, both as Māori historians or early European ethnographers and therefore including a dominance of male stories. In this capacity the Atua Matua Maori Health Framework is an attempt to refocus Māori on those aspects, both male and female, that have ensured successful outcomes as models for how to conduct themselves in contemporary situations. A further issue for some, has been the acceptance of the concept of 'Atua' as a non-religious concept.

As is the situation with Māori and non-Māori historians, religious inclinations were also influenced by male dominated views regarding what information was given priority. However, a significant difference exists between Te Atua and Ngā Atua where Te Atua may be connected to God and other religious content whereas Ngā Atua in the AMHF is connected to Māori environmental science only.



According to the well-known Māori master carver, cultural expert and ordained minister, the late Tukaki Waititi:

Ki ngā mihinare, he "God" te Atua, he "Lord" te Ariki i mua o te taenga mai o nga mihinare me enei whakamarama mo aua kupu, he kaitiaki whai mana motuhake te atua, he rangatira matua mo te iwi te ariki. I enei wa, e tuki ana nga whakaaro te nuinga o tatou i te kua ko tehea, ko tehea.

To the missionaries, 'atua' meant god and 'ariki' meant lord. However, before the arrival of missionaries the definition for these words was that atua were guardians of environmental knowledge and ariki was a word to describe supreme tribal leaders. These days most people are ignorant of which is which.



WHAKAHĀNGAI

USING THE ATUA MATUA HEALTH FRAMEWORK

While a number of video examples can be obtained from the Mobile Wānanga with Dr Ihirangi Heke on Facebook or from the many videos on the Atua Matua You Tube channel, a self-assessment of one's 'Environmental literacy' as a starting point is ideal. In essence, this process determines the entry point into the AMHF. Often, the starting point is the desire to develop some secondary skill development e.g., free diving. However, the AMHF can also engage with more higher level mātauranga Māori e.g., providing a rationale for how long an individual might dive for based on a measurement of time that is learnt through some other type of environmental process e.g., the number of wave peaks that pass between beginning the dive and surfacing.

Another important aspect is the hierarchical structure of AMHF which places humans as the benefactors of understanding traditional environmental knowledge with knowledge being the primary driver i.e., humans are benefactors and not the core concern of the framework. Atua Matua asks people to consider various environments in terms of our connection to them i.e., tatai whakapapa and to consider that a hierarchy may exist in terms of environment first and people last.

Bronfenbrenners Socio-Ecological model (1985) which places learners at the centre provides a well known structure for an AMHF approach but with the important difference being that the environment is at the centre. From this perspective AMHF places **Mātauranga** (Māori knowledge) first, **Whakapapa** (lineage) as a means to obtain tribal relevance, recruitment and sustained effort. **Huahuatau** (metaphor) as an opportunity to develop dynamic capability i.e., the ability to learn from environmental processes regardless of the content and reapply in other contexts and **Whakatinanatanga** (physical activity). Whakatinanatanga can also be exchanged with whakahinengarotanga (psychological action) or whakawairuatanga (spiritual action). And finally, **Ngā Tohutaka** which is about timing and the signs obtained from the trees, fish, birds, insects and weather patterns

Mātauranga Māori is interpreted through the first twelve atua connected concepts while the whakapapa, huahuatau, whakatinanatanga and tohutaka are linked to various expressions and interpretations within the Matua arm of AMHF. I expand on the Atua Matua Health Framework dimensions on the page following.

KAUPAPA ARO



Mātauranga Māori is the key, over arching principle that allows access to knowledge from different environments e.g., high alpine, sub-alpine, mountain ranges, rivers, forests, plains, coastal shores, oceans, even urban environment.



Whakapapa allows a contextual relevance between a specific environment and the people from that location. More specifically whakapapa is not just a list of names but a methodology for interpreting connections between environment to environment, environment to people and people to people. For example – if we are paddling a waka in waitai (salt water) and move into waimāori (fresh water), we paddle differently because of a change in water characteristics i.e., a change in 'atua' connected to that water.



Huahuatau is about what we learn because of Taiao, what experiences we gain in applying knowledge of whakapapa or kōrero in a particular environment. This is referred to as dynamic capability. Dynamic capability is achieved when capacity building is converted into applied outcomes in a wide range of areas e.g., what I learn in the ocean can teach humility in a person as the ocean is the dominant feature, hydrodynamics in terms of universal physics and time management in terms of wave speed being used to measure sprinting in preparation for sport.

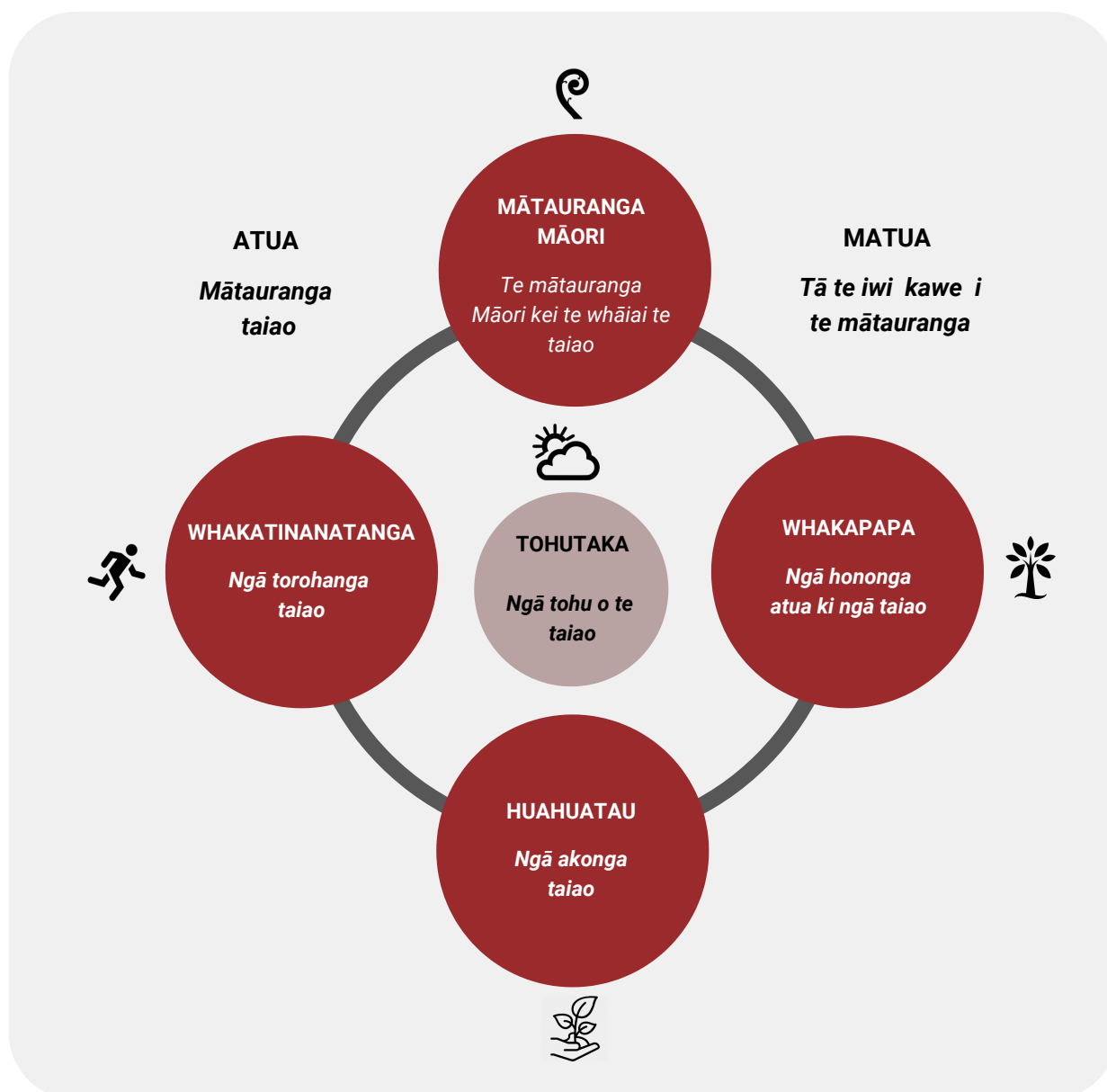


Whakatīnanatanga is the action phase. The intensity, the volume, and the medium through which an activity is carried out. In terms of mitigation of risk or more preferably, emphasis of potential, this domain is where the majority of action/interventions take place. Contrary to current well-being processes that start with interventions at a person-centered level, in an Atua Matua approach, person related interventions come much later.



Ngā Tohutaka is concerned with the timing of when the activities are conducted i.e., signs obtained from trees, fish, birds, insects and weather patterns. Out of interest this approach is being used to take groups of 8-10 individuals into different taiao over a 3-4 day period utilising waka, mountain bikes, trail running, swimming and alpine experiences to help them understand how best to engage with taiao whakapapa safely and with maximum intended outcomes.

ATUA MATUA CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM



This conceptual diagram above provides an overview of the dimensions mentioned previously.

It should also be noted that there is not a move from general to specific and that the linear nature of the AMHF table is not indicative of the lateral capacity of a whakapapa approach as seen in the conceptual diagram above.

AMHF TAUMATA

The framework outlines 12 Atua - environmental philosophies and metaphors for action as well as 12 Matua - human expressions of knowledge obtained from the environment. Below outlines the hierarchical structure and various levels:

ATUA

1. Atua celestial, oceanographic & terrestrial connections
2. Atua as personifications
3. Atua as guardians
4. Atua male forms
5. Atua female forms
6. Atua multiple forms of Tāne
7. Atua disputes as social commentaries - Ngā Pakanga Atua
8. Atua as tribal variations
9. Atua to tipua
10. Atua to kaitiaki
11. Atua form in Māui, Tāwhaki, Rata, Tiki
12. Atua expressions through a cultural lens

MATUA

1. Matua interpretations of maramataka
2. Matua interpretations of whakatauki, haka, waiata, karakia etc
3. Matua connections to an environment
4. Matua interpretations of timeframes
5. Matua interpretations of process
6. Matua connections to tinana, wairua, hinengaro
7. Matua specialist training for a specific domain
8. Matua environmental skill acquisition
9. Matua regional specialist
10. Matua variation at a family level
11. Matua differences at a gender level
12. Matua as an individual

AMHF TABLE

The table below expresses the AMHF in two columns. **Atua** or environmental knowledge in the first left sided column and **Matua** or human expressions of knowledge obtained from the environment in the second column. The atua are only loosely related in terms of ranking based on birth hierarchy, whereas the second right handed column is concerned with applied actions that move from complex, large group numbers to single individuals.

ATUA

1. **Atua environments.** Naming and grouping Atua (environmental representatives) that are connected to land, water and stars.
2. **Atua personifications.** Atua that represent a specific location e.g., Tangaroa, god of the sea.
3. **Atua as guardians** of a place e.g., Tāne te hokahoka, guardian of birds.
4. **Atua male forms.**
5. **Atua female forms.**
6. **Atua multiple forms of Tāne.** The many names of Tāne including his connection to his parents' separation, knowledge, and forest lore.
7. **Ngā Pakanga Atua.** The three atua battles over the separation of their parents, the pursuit of knowledge and the revenge of Tū.
8. **Atua as tribal variations.**
9. **Atua to tipua.**
10. **Atua to Kaitiaki.**
11. **Atua form in Māui.** Half atua half human demigods of Maui, Tāwhaki, Rata, Waihiroa and Tiki e.g., the transition from god to human
12. **Atua expressions through a cultural lens.** Using atua concepts in evaluation and practice.

MATUA

1. **Matua interpretations of Maramataka** (moon phases).
2. **Matua interpretations of whakatauki, haka, waiata, mōteatea and pūrakau** (performing arts).
3. **Matua connections to an environment** e.g., ocean, mountain, river or plains.
4. **Matua interpretations of timeframes.** The measurement of seasons, months and daily rotations of time using environment signs.
5. **Matua interpretations of process.** Process selection based on environmental signs e.g., training at night versus during the day.
6. **Matua connections to tinana** (physical), **hinengaro** (psychological) and **wairua** (spiritual) improvements.
7. **Matua specialist training in a specific domain** e.g., tribally centred knowledge of alpine, ocean, river or plains environments.
8. **Matua environmental skill acquisition.** Development of secondary skill for a domain e.g., free diving in an ocean domain.
9. **Matua regional specialist** e.g., Rakiura (Stewart Island) free diving expertise.
10. **Matua specific family level skills** e.g., a family that is renowned for handling big seas in a particular bay on the West Coast.
11. **Matua differences at a gender level** e.g., female free divers from the East Coast between Ruatoria and Gisborne.
12. **Matua individual skills** e.g., physical, psychological, and spiritual environmental knowledge.



For more information

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Kōkiriha te kori
Let's get moving!