

Mātauranga Māori

What is it and how is it applied?



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Mātauranga refers to indigenous knowledge. It is a relatively new term, coined in the 1980's to encompass traditions, beliefs, concepts, philosophies, worldviews, and understandings rooted in Māori cultural perspectives. It bridges the gap between traditional and modern knowledge. Mātauranga Māori encompasses various knowledge systems, including whakapapa (genealogy), tikanga Māori (Māori procedure), manaaki (hospitality and consideration), and taonga tuku iho Māori (treasured arts and heritage).

Mātauranga is complex and multi-faceted. It would be politically correct and culturally appropriate to rephrase mātauranga Māori to mātauranga ā hapū, ā iwi. As Māori is a broad term used to describe the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa as a whole; traditionally we would refer to ourselves as our hapū or iwi. For example, if you were from Tūhoe, you wouldn't say 'he Māori ahau' or, 'I am Māori' instead you would say 'he Tūhoe ahau' - I am Tūhoe.

In a practical sense these knowledge systems are a result of long-term observations made by co-existing peacefully with te ao tūroa (the natural, living world), ourselves and all living things. Mātauranga would differ between tribes depending on factors such as location, weather and environment and these knowledge systems would inform our tikanga (customary practices) designed to keep us spiritually, culturally and physically safe.

Examples of Mātauranga

Times are changing and our mātauranga is adapting too. We have both traditional mātauranga, modern mātauranga and western science. All of these things can and must be used in conjunction to rise to meet the challenges of the present day.

In Tame Malcom's kōrero, referenced below, he recognises that the fight to justify mātauranga has already been fought. The mahi ahead of us is to preserve our mātauranga.

Being able to carve, weave, or understand and communicate the stories displayed through these art forms. Practice traditional medicine like mirimiri, make balms or poultices to heal ailments. Read weather patterns, understand the māmataka, speak te reo Māori, recite moteatea and traditional karakia. These are all examples of mātauranga.

It is important to acknowledge the historical context to which mātauranga was subjected. *Tōhunga Suppression Act 1907* made it illegal to engage, utilise or practice mātauranga māori. The *Tōhunga Suppression Act 1907* was an attempt to assimilate Māori into Western Society. This meant that Māori were no longer able to legally practice traditional customs such as rongoā māori (natural māori medicine) Speaking Te Reo Māori (the Māori language) whakairo and raranga (carving and weaving). These practices are an inherent way of being for Māori and are crucial to their social, spiritual and cultural well-being.

How can grantmakers meaningfully uplift the inherent mana and mauri of mātauranga?

Grantmakers are encouraged to recognise the inherent value, mana and mauri of mātauranga Māori and utilise their privileged positions to fund the revitalisation, education and advocacy of tradition practices such as weaving, carving, kapa haka, te reo Māori, wānanga and rongoā Māori. These practices contribute to our rich cultural heritage and make us uniquely Aotearoa.

Grantmakers should be mindful to support initiatives that are authentic and not performative. Kaupapa lead by Māori for Māori are ideal in the revitalisation and preservation of mātauranga māori.

How is indigenous knowledge (Mātauranga Māori) being applied?

- **Participatory Decision-Making:** Collaborative approaches that include indigenous communities in decision-making processes related to land and resource management - usually - lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes.
- **Community-Based Adaptation:** Indigenous communities are often at the frontline of climate impacts. Their adaptation strategies, built on generations of experience, can inspire and inform broader climate adaptation efforts.
- **Sustainable Land Management:** Indigenous communities often possess valuable insights into sustainable land management practices. Their traditional farming, fishing, and hunting methods are often rooted in a deep understanding of local ecosystems and their dynamics, helping to maintain biodiversity and prevent ecosystem degradation.
- **Forest Management:** Many indigenous groups live in or near ngāhere and have been practising sustainable forestry for centuries. Their knowledge of selective logging, agroforestry, and other techniques can help prevent deforestation and promote reforestation efforts.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Indigenous knowledge often includes a profound understanding of local plant and animal species. This knowledge can be crucial for

identifying threatened species, managing wildlife habitats, and implementing conservation strategies.

- **Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Indigenous agricultural practices are often adapted to local climates and environmental conditions, making them more resilient to changes in weather patterns and extreme events caused by climate change.
- **Water Management:** Indigenous communities often have intricate knowledge of water sources, watersheds, and sustainable water use. This knowledge can be crucial for managing water resources in the face of changing precipitation patterns.
- **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK):** TEK encompasses the holistic understanding that indigenous communities have of their environment, including the relationships between species, ecosystems, and natural processes. This knowledge can provide insights into ecosystem functioning that can inform modern conservation and restoration efforts.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Many indigenous cultures are closely intertwined with their environments. By protecting their lands and resources, indigenous communities also preserve their cultural heritage and unique ways of life.
- **Fire Management:** Indigenous communities have traditionally used controlled burning to manage landscapes and prevent larger, uncontrolled wildfires. This practice has gained renewed attention as a valuable tool for preventing devastating wildfires in some regions.

Adapted from <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/a-guide-to-just-transitions-he-puka-arataki-whakawhitinga-tika.pdf>

Extra resources:

[Tame Malcolm - The mātauranga of conservation](#)

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-education-matauranga>

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/document/28223/tohunga-suppression-act>

Kupu	Meaning
Ātua Māori	Māori Deities
Mana	Prestige, authority, influence
Mātauranga	Knowledge
Mauri	Life force
Raranga	Weaving
Rongoā	Māori medicine
Taiao	Environment
Te ao tūroa	Natural / living world
Te reo Māori	Māori language
Tikanga	Cultural customs and practices
Whakairo	Carving