

# **An ocean in a drop – a holographic view of *mātauranga***

**Lidu Gong**  
**Te Wānanga o Aotearoa**  
**lidu.gong@twoa.ac.nz**

## **Abstract**

*A word is a world as in the case of mātauranga, which is multi-layered, experience-based, time-tested, content-rich, valued-packed, spiritually-imbued, passion-driven, and action-oriented as identified in my four-phase searching experiences. Phase 1 involves referential searches from dictionaries and other tool books resulting in the findings that mātauranga as Māori knowledge is all-inclusive: past and present, visible and invisible, informational and educational, philosophical and practical, ways of being and doing as well as a way of knowing. Phase 2 is contextual searches from three Wānanga vision statements, karakia, whakataukī, Māori role models, and interviewing my Māori colleagues, all identifying mātauranga as meaningful to and accountable for all good things in Māori world, both individual and collective, cultural and social, developmental and professional, cognitive and affective, and spiritual and corporal. Phase 3.1 is analytical searches comparing mātauranga with ‘knowledge’ as used in western paradigm with 14 findings of the differences between them leading to the conclusion that ‘knowledge is one-dimensional unfinished mātauranga while mātauranga is multi-dimensional finished knowledge.’ Phase 3.2 is metaphorical searches using 8 metaphors landing at the claim that ‘knowledge informs while mātauranga transforms.’ Phase 4 is phenomenological action searches producing these enlightenments: Mātauranga is more to be experienced than searched, more to be felt and embraced than analysed and conceptualised, and more to be weaved into life than observed. Mātauranga is more about what to do with it rather than what it is. It is not so much something to be studied as something to be oriented towards, drawn into, and identified with. Pursuing mātauranga is a spiritual journey. The transformative mechanism of mātauranga lies in three spiritual words—wairau, aroha, and mana—that form the ‘Holy Trinity.’*

**Keywords:** *aroha, mana, mātauranga, transformation, wairua*

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is giving a panoramic view of mātauranga based on my personal research experiences. Mātauranga is one of the key concepts in understanding Māori theory and applying it to our work in modern world. I choose ‘an ocean in a drop’ as the first part of the title. This choice is based on the assumption that one cannot know a word completely without knowing the whole language. “You cannot know the meaning of any sentence (a word in this case) without knowing the whole language” (Bouwsma, 1986, p. 24). It is true from my Te Reo learning experience. I started learning it since 2011, but I am still struggling with the meaning and use of ‘i’ – the smallest but the most frequently used word in Māori language. It is a structural word without content meaning of its own but functions to connect other words to make sentences. How about the multi-layered word mātauranga - a word that is experience-based, time-tested, content-rich, valued-packed, spiritually-imbued, passion-driven, and action-oriented? We cannot know mātauranga well enough without knowing Māori world as a whole, and by understanding mātauranga whole-heartedly we can stand taller in the world and deal with it more constructively.

## About the Researcher

“Mātauranga Maori responds to the three great questions of life, namely: Who am I? What is the world that I exist in? What am I to do?” (Royal, 2012, p. 35). I am not Māori, so Linda Smith’s words —“Kaupapa Māori Research is research by Māori, for Māori and with Māori”—serve as a constant reminder to ‘regulate’ or re-orient myself as a researcher. Working in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, learning Te Reo, participating in kapa haka competition, getting involved in rangahau (research) activities, and attending world indigenous conferences in the last few years do not automatically qualify me as being capable of undertaking this project, but they do allow me to experience mātauranga from a phenomenological way, and give me a vantage point to re-define myself, re-orient myself with the world I am living in, and re-frame my research paradigm. I am motivated by my own transformational experience in the Māori work environment and my belief that “what is good for Māori is good for the world” (Ohia, 2013).

## Significance of the study

“Māori communities are slowly moving across a historical threshold” to meet the world with its “creative potential” which “is coming to conscious articulation as a culture-wide theme and principle for action” (Royal, 2009, pp. 6-7). Exploration of mātauranga is to bring the Māori subconscious world into the conscious domain that may help trigger off ‘creative potential’ that is from Māori but not limited to Māori. Two significant claims were made during the Seventh Biennial International Indigenous Research Conference. The first was made by Justice Joe Williams: “21<sup>st</sup> century will be indigenous century” (Williams, 2016); and the second by Sir Peter Sharples: “Māori will lead New Zealand into the future” (Sharples, 2016). Exploring mātauranga in its panoramic dimensions and applying it with its full force will serve as a pathway to bringing these two claims from potentiality to reality.

## Methodologies

Multiple perspectives—referential, contextual, analytical, metaphorical, and phenomenological action searches—are employed, and each has its limitations as well as its advantages. They together creates an overall picture of mātauranga, and reveals its transformative power in education, environment protection, and social work. These methodologies were not consciously chosen for research purpose, rather they unfolded themselves naturally to me as inner calls to answer my life questions evolving into a four-phase transformation journey and leading to my findings, which I believe, hold universal ‘creative potential.’ These perspectives are framed chronologically in 4 phases, and each phase is a milestone indicating my transformative progress. Phase 1 is referential searches, which mainly rely on literature review or paper work. We can call this a linguistic approach. Phase 2 is contextual searches, which are based on the actual uses of mātauranga drawing from the proverbs, prayers, chants, and Māori role models representing the Māori world and the Māori working environment. We can call this a pragmatic or social approach. Phase 3 is comparative and symbolic searches, which can be called analytical and metaphorical approaches respectively. Comparative searches aim for the differences between mātauranga as a corner stone of Māori theory and ‘knowledge’ as used in western paradigm. Symbolic searches focus on a series of metaphors to illustrate the differences between mātauranga and ‘knowledge.’ Phase 4 is a type of phenomenological searches drawing from the researcher’s personal experiments in work place and everyday life. This can be called self-reflective action approach. These 4-phase searches serve as staircases uplifting me from one level of understanding to another and finally leading to transformation.

## Phase 1: Referential searches

This search is activated by my initial question when I first joined Te Wānanga o Aotearoa in July 2010: Why do we do karakia and mihi (prayer and greetings) every day? The answer given to me by my Māori colleague was: 'It's based on mātauranga, and aimed for mātauranga.' What is mātauranga?' This set me on the first part of my rangahau journey looking for the meaning of mātauranga.

The root word of mātauranga is 'mātau' as a verb meaning 'to know, acquainted with, study, understand,' and as an adjective meaning 'be clever, knowledgeable.' 'Ranga' is a noun suffix. 'Ranga' is also a verb meaning 'weave', and we may infer from the word combination - 'mātau' + 'ranga' - that indicates knowing, understanding or getting informed. We can also trace the meaning from a whakataukī (proverb): Mā te mātau ka mōhio; mā te mōhio ka mārama; mā te mārama, ka maumahara, ā, whakamahia (Through experience we know; through knowing we understand; through understanding we remember; and by the end, we act upon it). It resonates with the English proverb: There is no substitute for experience.

Reference books explain mātauranga as "information, knowledge, education" (Ryan, 1997); and "wisdom, understanding, skill" (Moorfield, 2005). Mātauranga is sometimes used interchangeably with 'mātauranga Māori', and they are identical as the word 'Māori' was added to mātauranga since colonization started in New Zealand to distinguish it from 'knowledge'. So mātauranga rather than mātauranga Māori is used in the remaining parts of this paper except in direct quotations. Mātauranga Māori "encompasses all branches of Māori knowledge, past, present and still developing" (Mead, 2003, p. 305). "Mātauranga Māori refers to Māori knowledge in its widest and broadest terms" (Mead, 2012, p. 11). "Knowledge, comprehension, or understanding of everything visible and invisible existing in the universe and is used synonymously with wisdom" (Landcare Research, 2015). "Mātauranga Māori is ... a term that places importance on Māori histories, knowledge, and language; it refers to the Māori way of thinking, doing, and acting" (Mead, 1997). "Mātauranga Māori bridges both traditional and contemporary Māori knowledge, curriculum, pedagogy, and philosophy" (Doherty, 2012, p. 19). "Mātauranga was codified knowledge, and the explicit usage of mātauranga has come through its literacy background" (Royal, 2007). Mōhiotanga is explained as embedded knowledge that is tacit and embodied in activity, while māramatanga is "wisdom, understanding, and illumination" (Edwards, 2012, p. 39). "It includes not only knowing, but also how it is known – including how Māori explain, understand, and develop phenomena and reality" (Edwards, 2012, p. 42). "Mātauranga Māori is an epistemology that incorporates the spiritual dimension which makes room for transformative learning" (Browne, 2005, p. 15). Royal has developed a working definition of the term with its origin:

Mātauranga Maori is a modern term for a body of knowledge that was brought to these islands by the Polynesian ancestors of present-day Maori. Here this body of knowledge grew according to life in Aotearoa and Te Wai Pounamu. After an initial period of change and growth, the arrival of European populations in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a major impact on the life of this knowledge, endangering it in many substantial ways. Yet new knowledge was also created through the encounter with Europeans and the experience of the creation of a new nation called New Zealand. Important fragments and portions of earlier knowledge – notably the Māori language – remain today.

These fragments and portions are catalyzing a new creative period in Maori history and culture and in the life of the New Zealand nation (Royal, 2009, p. 31).

In defining mātauranga, Royal stresses that “mātauranga Māori expresses itself in various ways and in many settings”, and “stands for something essential, distinctive and important about the Māori world” (Royal, 2009, pp. 6 & 11).

### Summary

The exploration in Phase 1 results in the following findings: Mātauranga as Māori knowledge is all-inclusive - past and present, visible and invisible, informative and educative, philosophical and practical, ways of being and doing as well as a way of knowing. However, this all-inclusive concept is too general and abstract for me as an ‘out-sider’, and I need to understand it in context. What do people actually mean when they use the word mātauranga? This question drove me onto the second phase of my mātauranga journey.

## Phase 2: Contextual searches

According to Use Theory, “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Wittgenstein, as cited in Biletzki, 2014). Due to the arbitrary nature of the connections between the form of words and their references, the real meaning of words can only be found in the context where they are used involving the user’s intent conditioned by the social and cultural situations and other environmental factors. This search focuses on five sources: Wānanga vision statements, karakia, whakataukī, Māori models, and interviews. The following are how ‘mātauranga’ has been used in contexts:

### Three wānanga

The word ‘mātauranga’ is widely used in educational environment in New Zealand. The vision of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is: “*Ko te whakarite mātauranga e hāngai ana ki ngā wawata o tēnei whakatupuranga ...*” (Mātauranga is arranged and adapted to meet the expectations and aspirations of the present generation). The vision of Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa is stated as “*Kia rangatira te tū a Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa hei whare ako, whakatupu hoki i te mātauranga*”. (Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa stands tall in the world as a learning centre through its cultural heritage.) The vision of Te Whare Wānanga-o-Awanuiārangi is expressed in this way: “*Rukuhia te mātauranga ki tōna hōhonutanga me tōna whānuitanga*.” (Exploring and absorbing our traditional knowledge in its full scale by immersing ourselves into it.)

### Karakia

“*Nau mai e te Wairua Taketake o Tānenuiārangi ... Nāu te Whiwhinga Tahitanga o te mātauranga mai Te Toi o ngā Rangi*.” (Welcome to the Great Spirit of Tāne who singularly brought knowledge from the highest of the 12 Heavens.) Mātauranga used in this opening karakia refers to the sacred nature of knowledge derived from the three baskets according to Māori legends. In Māori culture, the word ‘legend’ is essentially different from its concept in western worldview, which is regarded as something purely imaginary. The worldview of Māori is reflected in their legends. “*Tukua atu the Hirihiringa o te Mātauranga; whakahokia ki Te Hononga o ngā wairua of ngā mea katoa*.” (Submit the Educational Guide; return to the Spirituality of everything.) Mātauranga used in this closing karakia can also be understood as derived from the three baskets with its spiritual power.

### Whakataukī

*Whaowhia te kete mātauranga* (Increase the content the educational basket). *Whai ake i te*

*mātauranga* (Grow beyond education). *Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro nōna te ngahere, ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga nōna te ao* (The bird that partakes of the miro berry reigns in the forest, and the bird that partakes in the power of knowledge owns the world). The basic connotative meaning of *mātauranga* as used in the above three proverbs is consistent with the two *karakia* cited in the previous paragraph, i.e. *Mātauranga* is *taonga* - God-given gift, and therefore, serves as the source of *rangatiratanga* (sovereignty) enabling people to take full control of their life fortunes.

### **Māori models and interviewees**

Bentham Ohia, when asked to give some advices to the new generation, says: *“Me ngākaunui ki te tangata, me ngākau pono ki te mātauranga”* (Have genuine passion for the people and a deep respect for education) (Harrington, 2010, p. 29). The editor of the book translated *mātauranga* as ‘education’ while it can also be understood as ‘core values’ in Ohia’s advice. Darcy Nicholas, in answering the question *“he mea nui te mātauranga ki a koe?”* (Is education important to you?) says: *“Ko te mātauranga o nāianeī, he whanonga waiwai noa ... He pērā hoki te mātauranga me mau i a koe hei oranga mōu”* (Education as we know it today is merely the schooling of basic knowledge ... knowledge in its true sense helps you see further and with greater clarity) (Harrington, 2010, p. 11). He mentioned *mātauranga* twice. In the first instance, it refers to “mainstream education”, while in the second it is used as “knowledge in light of *mātauranga*” that leads to one’s well-being. Wynton Rufer answers the same question about the importance of *mātauranga* this way: *“He akoranga nui tēnei hanga te ora”* (Life is one continuous educational experience) (Harrington, 2010, p. 19). Here he regards *mātauranga* as a life goal worth pursuing continually. Farah Palmer, in a similar context, takes *mātauranga* as education in Māori context in making important decisions in life when she says: *“Nā te mātauranga i āhei au te whiriwhiri i te huarahi hei whāinga māku”* (To me education provided me with some self determination. I was in charge of my own destiny) (Harrington, 2010, p. 23). Julian Wilcox uses *mātauranga* in a similar way *“He taonga me āta poi poi tēnei mea te mātauranga ... Ko te mātauranga te huarahi tika, e eke tūturu ai te katoa ki te tomata”* (Knowledge attained must be treasured and nurtured ... education remains the only true pathway to that happening in any real way) (Harrington, 2010, p. 43). Theresa Reihana sees *mātauranga* as something to identify who we are and navigate where we go: *“Arā anō tēnei momo mātauranga, ko ngā tikanga, ko ngā uara ka whakatōkia e ō mātua ki roto i a koe. Ko te otinga atu, ko tō tuakiri, ko tō momo”* (A school education is important because it gives you tools for a successful career and this definitely helps as we all need bread and butter to survive. This defines who we are) (Harrington, 2012, p. 23). Although each of the above Māori models expresses his or her understanding of *mātauranga* in his or her own way, there is a common thread running through their understanding: *Mātauranga* is value based and responsible for their successes. They have woven *mātauranga* into their life fabrics and made a big difference to the world as well as to themselves.

The findings from the above Māori models are consistent with those from the 25 interviewees who are Māori tutors and managers working in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and who were selected for their significant contributions to the organisation. The first question is ‘What is your understanding of *mātauranga* Māori?’ Here are a few responses: “*Mātauranga* Māori is a synonym for the idea of ‘Māori knowledge’. It is a facet of Māori epistemology that focuses on the ideas, *tikanga* and values that have shaped te ao Māori (Māori world)”. ‘*Mātauranga* Māori is like water. You have to swim in it to know it’. ‘You have to do *mātauranga* before you know it’. ‘*Mātauranga* is me. I’m *mātauranga*’. What impresses me most throughout the interviews is that almost all of the interviewees identify *mātauranga* as something deeply embedded inside them, something inseparable from their daily lives, and a thing of the heart rather than of the mind.

### **Summary**

During phase two exploration: Mātauranga is identified as meaningful to and accountable for all good things related to all aspects of life in Māori world, both individual and collective, cultural and social, developmental and professional, cognitive and affective, and most prominently, both spiritual and corporal. However, the meanings are so inclusive that they seem to become elusive. Linda Smith said, “If we cannot control the definition, we cannot control meanings and the theories which lie behind those meanings” (Smith, 2015, p. 50). How is mātauranga as Māori knowledge system related to other knowledge systems outside the Māori domain, or how is it different from ‘knowledge’ in the western paradigm? This newly evolved question drove me to the next phase of research.

## **Phase 3: Comparative and symbolic searches**

### **Phase 3.1: Comparative searches**

Worldviews are different; words representing different worldviews are also different. Here are some observations on the differences between mātauranga as used in Māori world and knowledge as used in the western world:

- Knowledge is an individual property and an independent ‘object’ while mātauranga is a collective asset and subjectively tuned. It is forever related to, depends on, and oriented toward who we are.
- Knowledge is externally acquired mind products transmitted from outside in while mātauranga is internally brewed “heart knowledge” and “blood memory” (Holmes, 2000, p. 41) activated from inside out.
- Knowledge occurs at cognitive level, and therefore analytical, logical and rational while mātauranga involves affective aspect of knowing, and therefore vibrational, soul stirring and permeates the whole person.
- Knowledge results in skills and capacities while mātauranga surfaces prominently as passion and confidence with “fire in your belly” (Diamond, 2003, p. title).
- Knowledge is noun-based and concept-centred, and therefore informative while mātauranga is verb-based, action-gearred, relationship-directed, and therefore performative and transformative.
- Knowledge is statically-accumulated, and extends horizontally while mātauranga is organically-processed and spirit-driven, and therefore motivates and enlightens.
- Knowledge is consciously learned products, and concerns with what things *are*, while mātauranga is subconsciously acquired knowing and integrated with one’s personality, and concerns more with what things *do*.
- Knowledge is descriptive and inanimate, and therefore experiment-tested, achievement-measured and certificate-rewarded while mātauranga is metaphorical, vibrational, personalized, and therefore experience-tempered, self-realization-oriented and character-building.
- Knowledge is objective, people-independent and value-free, and therefore develops IQ and EQ to help us compete in the divided society while mātauranga is relational, socially-constructed, contextualized, and value-laden, and therefore develops SQ (Spiritual Quotient) to help us cooperate and “live undivided life in the midst of a divided worl” (Palmer, 2008, p. 245).
- Knowledge acquisition is a brain-racking and painstaking work while mātauranga is a joyful “peak experience” (Maslow), and therefore “animates and educates” (Meyer, 2014, p. 392).
- Knowledge aims to differentiate and divide us, and ends up with class division and social inequality while mātauranga is oriented towards synchronising and uniting us. That is why kotahitanga (unity) is taken as one of the core organisational values of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

- “Knowledge is power” (Francis Bacon) while mātauranga empowers. Knowledge trains professionals while mātauranga shapes better persons.
- Knowledge enables us to know the world and conquer it while mātauranga enables us to know ourselves and relate ourselves to the world in the best possible way.

### Summary

From the pragmatic meanings as used in the above contexts, we can see mātauranga is used in a much broader and deeper sense than ‘knowledge.’ It is not only power, but also the source of power. It is holistic and spirit-driven. Knowledge is one-dimensional unfinished mātauranga while mātauranga is multi-dimensional finished knowledge. That is why Māori people always start speeches with prayers, chants and songs to apply mātauranga in its full force engaging the whole person, cognitive and affective, intellectual and behavioural, rational and emotional, corporal and spiritual, and knowing and being. However, as Māori Marsden points out, “the route to Māoritanga through abstract interpretation is a dead end” (Marsden, 2003, p. 2). To animate the above analysis, a metaphorical search was used to visualise the differences, as indigenous methodology often resorts to metaphors to describe the world and the perception of the world.

### Phase 3.2: Metaphorical searches

- Knowledge is a stone making one-point impact while mātauranga are far-reaching ripples with lifelong influences.
- Knowledge appears as visible waves while mātauranga is the invisible powerful wind.
- Knowledge functions as wings that lift us up while mātauranga is the bird that supplies the power and gives directions.
- Knowledge is a cloud accompanied with lightning and thunder while mātauranga is the rain that nourishes lives gently and quietly.
- Knowledge is the cold moon reflecting sunshine while mātauranga is the sun that sheds light, radiates warmth, and produces life.
- Knowledge reads like play scripts that tell stories while mātauranga is performed by the actors who animate the stories and entertain.
- Knowledge is smoke as a by-product while mātauranga is the fire that does all the work.
- Knowledge is Titanic with the largest part showing above water while mātauranga is the iceberg with the largest part below water that anchors us from being blown away.

### Summary

Mātauranga is bigger than knowledge. The epistemological features of mātauranga are rooted in its indigenous ontology. “There is a divine spark in everything” (Patterson, 1992, p. 77). All the analysis boils down to one critical difference having great impact on education: knowledge informs while mātauranga transforms.

Reflections on the above three search approaches come to a disappointing conclusion using Buddha’s words: “The finger pointing to the moon is not the moo”, or Korzybski’s, “A map is not the territory” (Korzybski, 2012). The questions that keep me going further on along my mātauranga journey are: ‘What does mātauranga mean to me, and how does it inform my work and life?’ The questions constantly connect me with the words as the products of the interviews I conducted as a part of my mātauranga project: ‘Mātauranga Māori is like water. You have to swim in it to know it’. ‘You have to do mātauranga before you know it’. These words have driven me to take a phenomenological approach to mātauranga by going “back to the things themselves” (Husserl as cited in Smith, n.d.).

## Phase 4: Phenomenological action search

“A phenomenological researcher questions the thing being questioned by the question which is ‘lived’ by researcher” (Manen, 1990, p. 44). Mātauranga pursuit is a non-returnable journey. “*Kua tawhiti ke to haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu. He tino nui rawa ou mahi, kia kore e mahi nui tonu*” (You have come too far, not to go further. You have done too much, not to do more) (Henare, 1989). Yes, I have come too far not to go further, and I have done too much not to do more. I started learning Te Reo from 2011 at the age of 57, participated in the kapa haka competition in 2013, undertook mātauranga research projects from 2013 onwards, got involved in leading morning karakia, and start all my library inductions with Te Reo to new classes. As a result, I have been transformed, and my transformation experiences were presented and published in the organisational journal (Gong, 2012b), and at national and international conferences (Gong, 2012a).

### Phenomenological search findings

Mātauranga is not merely a word, but a world that must be lived in to be known, and the outstanding feature of this world is captured in the most frequently quoted whakataukī: *He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata, he tangata, he tangata* (What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, and it is people). Mātauranga is not abstract, but embodied by people performing it; it is more to be experienced than searched; it is more to be felt than thought of; and it is more to be weaved into life than observed at distance. It is “a thing of the heart” (Marsden, 2003, p. 2).

Pursuing mātauranga is a spiritual journey. “The Maori are a spiritual people” (Patterson, 1992, p. 76). This accounts for the most distinctive feature of mātauranga: being transformative through its spiritual dimension. Here I can only explain what transformation means based on my own experience. Unexpectedly and miraculously, I end up becoming the target of the search. Through embracing mātauranga I find myself a stranger in a new world in which many things that I had taken for granted for the last half a century have to be redefined and reclaimed. In answering the initial question—who am I?—I am no longer worried about my Chinese identity doing Māori-related research as I am firmly convinced that I am a spiritual being first, human being second, a man third, and ethnicity is further down along the list.

How we see things depends on how high we stand. Once we lift ourselves to a higher level of being, our view changes to the effect that “nothing has changed, but everything is different” (Lin, 2010, p. Introduction). I used to think that life is in the making—‘You reap as you sow’—but my spiritual experience teaches me that life is in the taking. The way of living my life makes all the sense of what life means to me. I learned from childhood that what we see and feel are the reflections of the outside world, but viewed from a spiritual dimension, everything I see and feel is the projection of my own vision and feeling. Reality is not what happens; our reactions to what happens are. It is the attitude that makes heaven out of hell and vice versa. My past life taught me that happiness is conditional—I was happy when happy moments came up, but my spiritual self takes happiness as the default feeling no matter what happens. Bad encounters can be turned into good lessons, and difficulties become self-empowering opportunities. The focus is always on the silver lining rather than the cloud. I always thought that love is reciprocal. *Aroha atu, aroha mai* (Give love, and love will come back); or *aroha whakatō, aroha puta mai* (Love sowed, love harvested); but the newly obtained feeling of love is nothing more than an inner expression of my being. I love not so much because the object of my love is lovable as because the only thing I can project inside out is love. Love is the only thing I react to the world with. This is becoming my reality, and this is the way I am learning to relate myself to the world. Working to make a living is now replaced by working to make a life, to practice my spiritual values, and to live a fuller life. Learning was believed as a preparation

for life, but from spiritual perspective, learning itself is an ideal life. What else is better than seeing myself growing every day? It is learning Te Reo that has uplifted me to this level of being. Rangihau claims that learning the language (Te Reo) “must be a spiritual exercise, not just an intellectual exercise” (Browne, 2005, p. 14). My experience has proved it as true. For me, languages have different functions: Mandarin is my home language getting me constantly connected to my native culture; English is my work language doing everyday transactions; and Te Reo is my spiritual language enabling me to discover my new self. Mandarin comes out of my mouth in an intuitive way; English comes out of my mind in a professional way; and Te Reo comes out of my heart in an enlightening way. *Tōku reo tōku ohooho* (My language is my awakening). That is why every time I speak Te Reo I lose my voice even though my Te Reo is still at elementary level. I have no intention to raise my voice, the voice raises itself. “Even if you just know and understand the spiritual words, they alone will transform your mind” (Vallyon, 2007, p. xviii). Only the person having the same experience understand what this means.

The spiritualising mechanism of mātauranga lies in three spiritual words: *wairau* (spirituality), *aroha* (love), and *mana* (prestige). “It is *wairua*, *aroha* and *mana* that comprise the Holy Trinity of the Christian nature of man” (Ra, 2002, p. 52). *Wairua* enables me to see things in non-dichotomous way: to be great is to be little; to be noble is to be humble; to be powerful is to be gentle; and to be wise is to be simple. With *aroha*, negative things become positive: everybody is a good person I can learn something from and feel grateful to; everything is a good thing in providing me a learning occasion and I can draw pleasure from; every ordinary moment is a perfect time to get something done extraordinarily; and every problem is an opportunity in disguise. With *mana*, I am able to comprehend the incomprehensible, tolerate the intolerable, forgive the unforgivable, accept the unacceptable, surmount the insurmountable, and make the impossible possible. The ‘Holy Trinity’ are interconnected: “When the *wairua* fills the heart *mana* fills the head” (Ra, 2002, p. 10). “*Mana* means spiritual authority and power” (Marsden, 2003, p. 3).

An indigenous researcher has pointed out that “If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (Wilson, 2008, p. 135). I do not know whether I have done it right, but I do know that this rangahau journey has changed me. It has re-oriented the way I perceive myself:

- I am Lidu Gong, but who I am no longer matters, who I am with does.
- I am from China, but where I am from no longer matters, where I am going does.
- I am 63, but physical age no longer matters, spiritual maturity does.
- I am a librarian, but profession no longer matters, passion-driven professionalism does.
- I provide information to my patrons, but providing information no longer matters, having my patrons well informed does.
- I have three degrees, but qualification no longer matters, love-based quality does.
- I am working in a wānanga, but working in a wānanga no longer matters, having wānanga working inside me does.
- “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (Loyola, 2015). “I belong, therefore I am” (Williams, 2016).

## Summary

The world is what we see ... the world itself gives itself to us, even if only with pretensions of completeness, and that we open onto the things or matters themselves with a basic perceptual faith that amounts to our immediate acceptance of the being of things. This point of departure for phenomenology is, in short, experience (Steinbock, 1997, p. 127)

There is no substitute for experience. In describing experiences, I deliberately avoid the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity. In expressing myself, I prefer truthfulness to 'truth', inner experience to 'fact', and interpretation of reality to 'reality'.

## Conclusion

What we gain in literature reviews is only information; what we gain from the information reflected upon and internalised is knowledge; and what we gain from the knowledge applied in effectively solving life issues is wisdom.

The real point in pursuing mātauranga is more about what to do with it rather than conceptualising what it is; it is not so much as something I am to define as something I am defined by; it is not so much as something I study on as something I am being oriented towards, drawn into, and identified with; it is not so much as something to be observed objectively as what engages me as a participant and co-creator; it makes more sense to act with it than to talk about it; and it is more relevant to ask who I am than to enquire what it can be. "Ideas are only as important as what you can do with them" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Foreword). Mātauranga is a new world to me: not merely the world as I see it, but the world as I am seen through it; and it is not so much as a product I eventually possess as a process that I am being possessed by—being transformed.

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