Deaf-led Deaf Studies: Using Kaupapa Maori principles to guide development of Deaf-led research practices

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Deaf Studies

• Deaf Studies has been around for over 30 years. But it has always been hearing led.
• Many Deaf people now question whether there is a real connection between the field and the community.
• Does this mean that Deaf Studies does not have true roots in the Deaf community?
• Does this mean Deaf Studies truly reflects the priorities of the Deaf community?
• How can we make sure that we have a truly Deaf-led Deaf Studies?
Academia

• The academic world has its own language, rules, behaviours, methods and beliefs.
• These are based on the values of the majority society, and often are based on objective ‘scientific’ values.
• There is often very little motivation to engage with communities being researched, or to contribute knowledge back to the community.

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Minority groups in academia

• Many minority studies began from similar roots as Deaf Studies – the academic disciplines were set up by people who are not members of that group.
• But many of these groups are now self-led. Black Studies and Women’s studies are the usual examples.
• However, these groups share a language (if not a culture) with those in the academic world.
• Deaf academics and communities do not.

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How can we approach this problem?

• Should we try and match the expectations of the academy? Should we try and work by their rules?

• Should we try and find an alternative? A Deaf-centred way?

• Are there any examples we can use for inspiration and guidance?
Kaupapa Maori

- This is an approach developed in New Zealand in the late 1990s.
- The Maori community were the victims of oppressive cultural and academic practices before Dr Graham Smith developed this approach.
- It moved away from a critique of the establishment way of doing things towards a focus on the Maori way of doing things.
- This put the Maori people and community at the centre.
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Principles of Kaupapa Maori research

• Self-determination
• The research must follow the Maori world-view
• Te reo – the Maori language
• Social justice
• Whanau – a collective approach

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Our workshop

• 8 Deaf academics, from early to later career.
• Discussion focused on the 5 Kaupapa Maori principles and what similar Deaf principles could look like.
• A whole day of discussion and debate came up with 4 Deaf led research principles.
Principles of Deaf-led research

- Sign language.
- Self-determination.
- Identity preservation.
- Community development.
The future

• This was the first workshop, we hope to hold more.
• Not everyone in the workshop agreed with each other, there are issues we need to discuss.
• But Kaupapa Maori research is a good model to follow. It has made an impact in New Zealand and First Nations research. Could it be useful for Deaf Studies?

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What do you think?

• Is this something that could be useful?
• Could we develop this as a framework for Deaf Studies?
• Could we encourage others to use this as a framework for research with Deaf people in other fields and disciplines?
Resources

• http://www.rangahau.co.nz/
• http://www.kaupapamaori.com/