

# Cultural Knowledge and OER

## Navigating the relationship between Cultural Knowledge and OER

Theresa P. Holmes

As a Pasifika woman of Tongan and Samoan ancestry, I frame my life, work, and research with indigenous ways of knowing. To honor this I will use a Samoan analogy to guide my piece. In the Samoan culture, we often discuss relationships using *the vā* which refers to the space between. Through this framework, I hope to discuss the relationship between OER and cultural knowledge and how we can navigate it in a way that privileges and empowers indigenous knowledge, voices, and peoples.

Navigating *the vā* between cultural knowledge and OER is easier when indigenous peoples are telling their own stories. In my past job, there is a phrase we used to explain how we worked with students that perfectly encompasses this,

**"Nothing about us without us."**

Nothing about a culture should be written, remixed, or distributed without the people of which culture the knowledge originates. This is key if we want to see diversity and inclusion represented in authorship and to ensure culturally appropriate and correct materials are being distributed. It takes time but it is worth it. Many underrepresented, marginalized and minority groups have been robbed of telling their own stories and sharing their knowledge due to oppressive systems. As OER champions we can make certain that the voices of the underrepresented are heard taking advantage of the flexibility to create, adapt and distribute resources without the barriers that traditional texts provide.

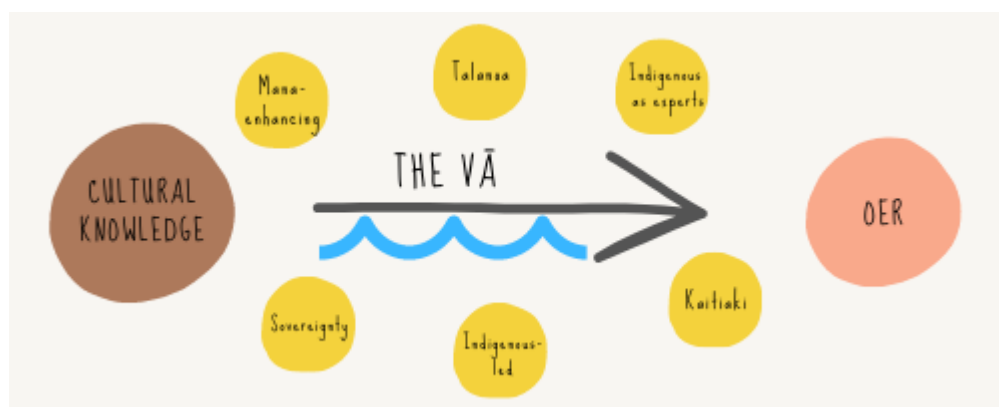


Figure 1. Navigating *the vā* of Cultural Knowledge and OER

Figure 1 illustrates the concepts that help us to navigate the ocean between cultural knowledge and OER. I will explain these concepts through a project that I am currently working on where cultural knowledge is at the forefront.

### **Case: Aotearoa Kai Journey Platform**

The Aotearoa Kai Journey is a project I have been working on. We are designing a platform for sharing knowledge around food to support the redesigning of our food system to meet the needs of all. This is a collective, co-designed project that has been informed by over 350+ workers, researchers, and volunteers across the food system. This informal OER platform centers indigenous ways of knowing.

#### *Mana-enhancing*

For something to be mana-enhancing it protects, supports, strengthens, and empowers. As part of the co-design process, people shared what they wanted to see from this project. The collective wanted to ensure that the process and design of the platform is mana-enhancing (empowering), informed by indigenous wisdom, looks to our elders, and is a collective approach.

- We respected the cultural protocols of Māori and Pasifika
- Used a strengths-based approach and removed deficit narratives
- Acknowledge the skills and expertise that indigenous peoples bring
- Privileged Indigenous voices and ways of knowing
- Mutuality and trust by honoring peoples contribution from grass-roots to government
- We took the village approach where we design as a collective

#### *Talanoa*

We created space for talanoa, a Samoan word for discussion, to talk to the people. First, we started with the problem. We used this collective space to ignite the journey of change. We worked to find a solution together. The people who hope to be using the platform decided that an OER platform was a potential solution over the three days. Then we collectively gathered the insights and created a theory of change together on the last day of the summit to map a way to move forward. This resulted in collective ownership of the journey ahead. The theory of change acted as the foundation of the design process, an anchor for the work moving ahead. Once we decided on the way forward we engaged with the community three more times before we started the design sprint. We launched the solution and validated the idea and allowed space to talanoa and scope out initial thoughts on what the platform could become. Once we finalized the design process with tech experts we facilitated talanoa at two events with Maori, Pasifika, food system practitioners, and researchers. We scoped out the platform's content and design.

- We engaged with communities on a regular basis
- These discussions were led by Māori and Pasifika peoples
- The learnings from the talanoa were collated using a Māori and Pasifika lens
- We framed the theory of change and the journey using a Māori and Pasifika analogy

#### *Indigenous as experts*

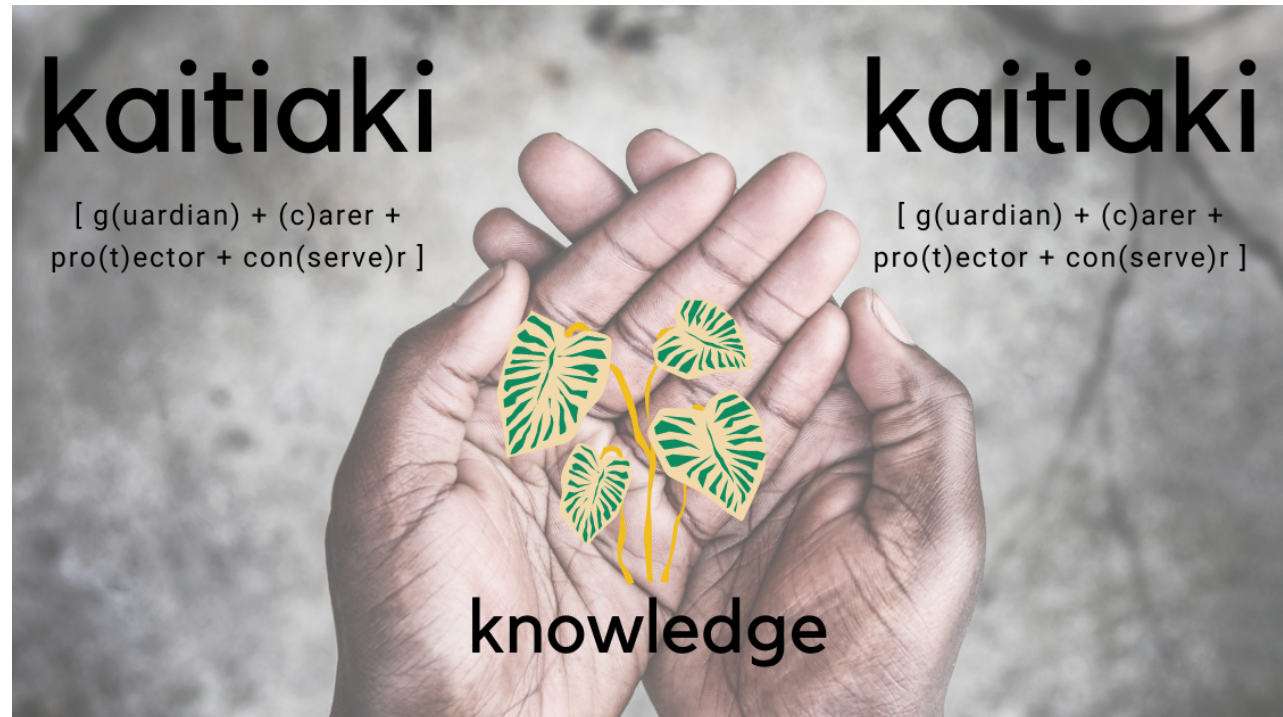
Growing up in Aotearoa (New Zealand) I have experienced people talking at me about my culture and community. I was invited to research advisory groups on a local and national level. In these spaces it was evident that the government in various sectors had trusted non-indigenous peoples as experts to research our communities. Non-indigenous researchers more often than not wrote in a deficit narrative which made our communities look hopeless and awful. This is a common occurrence around the world and still occurs today. There must be a paradigm shift in order for this to occur

One idea that was mentioned was a radical sharing of knowledge.

This radical sharing of free resources, removing the IP barrier, copyright barrier, and licensing barrier was an idea that was quite well supported by the majority of academics and practitioners we engaged with. People spoke about sharing

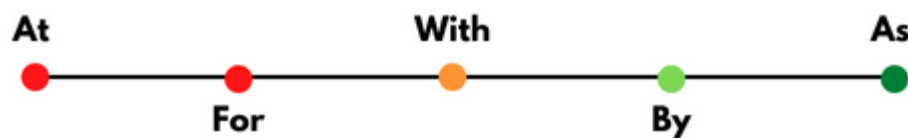
educational resources with whanau/aiga (family) and the opportunities this would create for widespread knowledge sharing. As we discussed this idea further we talked about how we can ensure this process is mana-enhancing (empowering) for indigenous and Pasifika peoples, is informed by indigenous wisdom, and looks to our elders. And a word was mentioned, kaitiaki.

### *Kaitiaki*



Kaitiaki is a word in Te Reo Māori for a person, group, or being that acts as a carer, guardian, protector, and conserver (Te Ara, n.d). When the precious and sacred knowledge of the whenua (land) is passed down from our kaumatua or kuia (elders) with it is passed the guardianship of that knowledge; we become the kaitiaki. To be a good kaitiaki of the indigenous knowledge gifted to you, you must protect that knowledge to ensure that it is not used or abused in a way that can harm others or our own communities.

### *Indigenous Led*



As a Pasifika woman who lives in Aotearoa (New Zealand), I ask, what can I/we do to be a good kaitiaki of the knowledge that has been passed down? One of those things that were mentioned in our meetings was that indigenous cultural knowledge should only be reused, retained, revised, remixed, and redistributed by those of that particular indigenous culture. I fully support that is the mana-enhancing way to keep knowledge and ownership with the people, but can it still be OER, can it still be a public good? How do we honor the guardians, the people, and the communities from which this knowledge comes? Freeriders, will people benefit from this information i.e government organizations,

without paying for it as many like to take advantage of the volunteer contributions of indigenous communities or expect it.



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Theresa Holmes is a Pasifika woman from Aotearoa. She is an interdisciplinary social impact designer, social entrepreneur, and graduate student of Instructional Psychology & Technology at Brigham Young University. Her research is focused on indigenous frameworks to guide the creation of online learning materials and designing OER to share cultural knowledge. Theresa co-founded The Good Fale, a social enterprise working on redesigning the food system in Aotearoa. Her work and research are contributing to the development of an informal OER platform aiming to increase food security and food sovereignty in Aotearoa.

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