

# GUIDED COLLABORATION

## *Vulnerability in Science*

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It is 2019 in New Zealand, and something scary is on the rise. You may have heard of it in your workplace, your news or your daily podcast. A simple term has emerged and is terrifying even our bravest...***The interface.***



This unmapped territory is gaining space in many disciplines, and one that it is becoming rather noticeable within is science. Science is often rigid and Western, but thanks to *the interface*, it is now encouraged to shake loose its colonial chains, and integrate cultural and indigenous approaches.

In particular, Aotearoa New Zealand's science scene is embracing and welcoming Mātauranga Māori through the interface of Indigenous knowledge and Western science. This previously shadowed area is being illuminated through collaborative funding initiatives, but it isn't without its hiccups. Many past negative collaborations have left Tangata Whenua scorned and fearful of such exercises, so when the interface is utilised, scientists need to ensure that appropriate conditions are being adhered to in the pursuit of science.

Interactions between the [Cawthron Institute](#) - New Zealand's largest independent science organisation and Māori owned and operated [Waikawa Fishing Company](#) (WFC) are almost an anomaly in this area. With an equilibrium of power and knowledge sharing being the foundation for [collaborative efforts](#) between the two, Cawthron & WFC offer an archetypical history of genuine collaboration between Māori and Science groups. Yet this collaboration was forming prior to the modern day interface frameworks, and there were no guidelines followed to ensure the relationship was a success.

So it can seem fairly redundant to ask researchers to follow this example, we can't literally go back in time and form relationships with one another prior to the nativity of funding initiatives to ensure they're 'genuine', if that were the case i'm sure there would be other historical agreements within Aotearoa New Zealand that would take priority. So, we have to widen our view when looking at how to learn from past collaborations in this area, with an open outlook - and intake into how we collaborate.

Frameworks are quite literal; a series of guidelines that you can 'frame' your 'work' in. Because no Western academic group knows how to work within Te Ao Māori, there are frameworks to assist. But herein lies the issue, researchers can often be so unsure in this area that the framework is treated as the holy grail, but much like how you wouldn't put every person with a sore wrist into a cast, frameworks don't fit perfectly over every collaboration.

When the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) [Vision Mātauranga policy](#) calls for the fostering of connections between Māori, government, the science system and industry science, researchers can both intentionally and unintentionally stick so close to the guidelines that they omit the actual connections it asked for, in hopes of 'ticking the box'. Yet as mentioned earlier, these frameworks are not rigid, they are there simply to guide. The relationships and knowledge that evolve from them are through genuine interactions, and it is the vulnerability and courage to open up to new ideas, to relinquish power and to listen that ensures this.



"Vision Mātauranga" Booklet.

Image source: [MBIE](#)

Although the structures and policies are getting better, I fear the individual action within them is staying the same. Too often do I hear "[The Treaty has no place in scientific endeavour](#)" and "You're wrong if you do this and you're wrong if you do that, it's not worth even trying".

And it isn't helped when the even definitions of Mātauranga Māori within the Vision Mātauranga framework vary hugely from those proposed by Māori researchers. An urgent need to unpack the underlying structures that dictate science work in this area is becoming more commonly [recognised](#).

Rather than treating science / Māori collaborations like a forced descent into Dante's inferno there is an opportunity to flip those outdated fears on their head. And I believe that is through vulnerability, which generally isn't considered in western science. Hoards of articles across the web preach the benefits of [How Embracing Vulnerability Strengthens Our Relationships](#), and so I ask, why is this not encouraged in science research - let alone in this particular interface.

Being open to learning and growing together through collaboration in hopes of producing 'good science' is a core requirement especially between Tangata Whenua and science groups. And it is an individual action and obligation that needs and means more than ticking off components of cultural engagement.

In short, to ensure collaborations between Māori and science groups are genuine, frameworks, guidelines and token Te Reo can only offer so much. It is through the acts of listening, participating, power sharing, learning, acknowledging, and allowing oneself to be vulnerable in this interface that good science can evolve.

