



TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA  
NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

## **Te Tohu Pae Tawhiti Award 2014 Dr. Tangiwai Mere Appleton Kēpa**



The recipient of the Te Tohu Pae Tawhiti Award 2014 is Dr. Tangiwai Mere Appleton Kēpa, also known as Mere Kēpa.

Dr. Tangiwai Mere Appleton Kēpa Ngāti Whātua, Te Whakatōhea, Te Whānau ā Rūtaia, Ngāpuhi, & Ngāi Tūhoe

For Dr. Mere Kēpa, the kaupapa of her life in research was set before she entered university education. The kaupapa is one of commitment to transforming the oppressed lives of the indigenous Māori peoples of Aotearoa. Her humble beginning as a primary school teacher has been enriched and advanced to a point that Dr Kēpa has become a reference of quality to Māori researchers in education and health, particularly gerontology. Her politics, honesty, staunch values, courageous spirit coupled with aroha make her life, work, and research exciting and inspiring to younger generations, up-coming researchers, new migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand such as people from the Pacific Islands, and international researchers from Sweden, Finland, Alaska, Israel, and Japan to exemplify a few.

Dr. Kēpa's current research is around the population health aspects of ageing advanced (80 plus years old) and in changing services to enhance future generations' knowledge of ageing successfully. As an Educationalist in Health, her research interest is in how ethical research is conducted in collaborative projects. In the broad field of Education, her particular interest is in language, culture, politics, and conduct in education and research. In the international scene, she is renowned in the field of Indigenous and Migrant Education. Based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Dr. Kēpa has conducted years of teaching and learning together with community building in both her mother and father's tribal settlements in Takahiwai in Te Tai Tokerau and Waimana in Te Urewera. Her own doctoral research and postdoctoral fellowship with Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga in the University of Auckland has opened up new spirits and energies to challenge out-moded and colonised ways of living in favour of

rethinking wisdoms of excellence and qualities of research by recruiting people with ideas and depth.

Dr Kēpa has been a principal investigator with Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga / New Zealand's Indigenous Centre of Research Excellence hosted by the University of Auckland and she is an experienced researcher in the areas of Education, Health and Ageing. An example of the outstanding academic work by Mere is her research as principal investigator of the qualitative study: *“Bring ‘me’ beyond vulnerability. Elderly care of Māori by Māori.”* (*“Kei hinga au e, Kei mate au e. Te tiaki ā te Māori i te hunga kaumātua Māori”*) funded by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, 2004 to 2006, and then a named investigator of the *“Kaumātua taonga aroha”* research project, located in the Department of General Practice and Primary, the University of Auckland, Tāmaki Campus.

Mere was sought by Professor Ngaire Kerse to prepare the Māori cohort of *“Te puāwaitanga o ngā tapuwae kia ora tonu, Life and living in advanced age: A cohort study in New Zealand (LiLACS NZ)”* funded by the New Zealand Health Council, Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, and the Ministry of Health. Mere became one of the two senior Māori academics on the world's first longitudinal study of an indigenous population aged 80 plus years old.

A feature of Dr Mere Kēpa's research practice has been to create Te RōpūKaitiaki /a group of guardians for the provision of support to Māori participants, researchers, and the wider team. From the early study of older Māori and care services she recognised the necessity of a Te RōpūKaitiaki group composed of expert Kaumātua/Elders. In LiLACS NZ, Te RōpūKaitiaki o ngā tikanga Māori has provided research support for all components including research and design, translations, ethics, and mātauranga Māori. Mere has travelled internationally with the Te RōpūKaitiaki to present findings from LiLACS NZ. Importantly, together they contributed to the development of the Indigenous Peoples and Ageing Special Interest Group (SIG) for the Gerontological Society of America at the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Meeting of the Gerontological Society of America in New Orleans USA Gerontology Conference in 2013. In 2014, Mere traveled to Washington DC to launch this SIG on 6 November.

Dr Mere Kēpa is a prolific academic writer and has published articles in national and international journals in a variety of areas from educational philosophy and theory; multilingualism and multi-culturalism, pedagogy to culture and gerontology. She supports her team to publish and continues to support other researchers to publish. Mere is a founding member of the editorial board of *AlterNative* an International Journal of Indigenous Peoples and the Guest Editor of three editions. She has also written a book, *“Language Matters. A Richer and Curious Approach to Teaching English”* that was published in 2008. She is an editor of one of the Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Special Editions. The edited volume entitled *“Home: Here to stay”* will be published by Huia publishers in December 2014. Mere has been awarded funding by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga and Te Whare Kura, located in the University of Auckland, New Zealand's Health Research Council, Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Sir John Logan Campbell Medical Trust to develop research and present at national and international indigenous conferences and scientific meetings.

A unique feature of Dr. Mere Kēpa's career in research is her contribution to developing Pasifika education throughout her many years of teaching and research beginning from secondary schooling and later with affiliations in the University of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology, Massey University, Canterbury University, Victoria University of Wellington, University of the South Pacific and the University of Samoa. With her political knowledge and perspective of Te Tangata Whenua o Aotearoa, Mere works in collaboration with Pasifika academics and postgraduate students to lead the *Critiquing Pasifika Education@the University Biennial Conference* first held in 2007. There have been four consecutive Conferences since 2007, two Journal publications, a Conference Proceedings and a Book of Poems that will be published in November 2014.

In the Te Kura Mātauranga School of Education, Auckland University of Technology, Dr. Mere Kēpa has been the Tangata Whenua representative in the Pasifika Consultative Group to guide the preparation of the National Diploma in Teaching [ECE Pasifika] qualification at the Auckland University of Technology since its inception in 2003. She was also an advisor to the new cutting edge Bachelor of Pasifika Education (Early Childhood Teaching), BPed(ECT) that was launched in the university in 2013. Mere is unique in her theorising of indigenous Māori and migrant Pasifika's education in Aotearoa, an excellent resource person in the advocacy of Indigenous and Migrant education, and her work and research have enriched Pasifika education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In more than two decades of research and work, Dr. Mere Kēpa has enriched many groups of people with her experiences, excellent skills in writing and analysis, in-depth insights into Māori and New Zealand European Pākehā ways of thinking and acting. Mere has depth and strengths to think and speak critically about practices and ways of working that are unethical and not morally sound. She is not afraid to identify and to point out areas to improve work expected of research groups and team members. A key strength in the success of her research and work at the interface of cultures, politics and power lies in her capacity to create and build good relationships by way of on-going *talanoa*, critical dialogues with people around her.

In closing, Dr Mere Kēpa has been an important member of the International Writing Retreat Team organised by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga. She has provided academic leadership, writing support for emerging researchers, leadership for editorial matters, and collegial support on numerous occasions for the team. An important contribution of hers to the retreat is to enable community researchers to participate in the retreats. She has attended all fifteen retreats since 2006.

Mere is a respected academic and researcher and her contribution and service to indigenous Māori and Pasifika peoples in Education and Health is acknowledged by the award to her of Te Tohu Te Pae Tawhiti 2014.

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