

A Wairua Approach to Research

Workshop: participants are invited to bring a short piece of text (e.g. interview material) that includes discussions of memories, experiences, feelings, emotions, spirituality, wairua or similar that could be used in an interactive group session.

Wairua is understood as an important part of experience and how we understand the world; although there is discomfort in giving voice to wairua in practice and within the academy. Unease at this silence sits alongside a sense of caution in what we decide to share and where. While spirit is recognised as an important human dimension, the academy struggles with questions about inclusion and exclusion, with defining or leaving unspecified, resulting in mentioning but not placing spirit at the centre of research. In the face of the denigration of non-western spirituality as primitive, shamanistic and heathen, we often choose to remain silent. Transferring these concerns to research approaches, we edit our voices with a view to what we think outsiders will count as knowledge and what we choose to articulate; whether this amounts to suppression of already marginalised values, an act of protection or both is a central concern.

This workshop will present some of the challenges faced in the development of a wairua approach to research as part of our National Days, Wairua and Affect project. We suggest this as a beginning and ongoing conversation, exploring how we might include wairua more explicitly in our research. We invite discussion and propose ways to look at 'data' that has the potential to explicate feelings, emotions and spirit, exploring this further through interactive group work.

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