

Key elements for a Māori e-Learning framework

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Abstract: Culturally appropriate educational frameworks for indigenous people ensure they are afforded every opportunity to succeed and achieve in educational environments. Such frameworks are also needed in the e-Learning and e-Teaching environments. As relatively new concepts at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, e-Learning and e-Teaching have been implemented in many of the programmes. Currently, however, there is no framework that is congruent with the needs of Māori learners or Māori lecturers at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi. Students enrolled in the Iti Rearea Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Early Years programme at the wānanga are from various iwi in Āotearoa. An online support system for students in this programme commenced in 2006. In 2008, Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi applied to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) for mixed mode accreditation for the Iti Rearea programme. This paper outlines some of the key elements for a Māori e-Learning and e-Teaching framework from the personal experiences of a Māori lecturer and e-Educator who has supported students online since 2006. The concepts for discussion include manaakitanga (caring), te taha wairua (spiritual well-being) and the need to establish and maintain online pastoral care of all students.

Keywords: e-Learning; e-Teaching; Indigenous education; Māori education; pastoral care

Introduction

Since the beginning of 2006, pouako (lecturers) from the 'Te Iti Rearea Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Early Years' programme at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi have been implementing an online support component. In 2008 the Iti Rearea programme started delivery of the programme called e-Aorangi Mātauranga Māori Motuhake. Mixed mode delivery in this instance includes a weekend on campus ('noho wānanga') with face-to-face delivery of course content, every 3-4 weeks, video conferencing from the main campus to both Wellington and Auckland at the noho wānanga, and online support. Delivery of the programme is synchronized so that all three sites are delivering the same content at the same time, thus maintaining quality and consistency. The evaluation of delivery and infrastructure is ongoing but necessary in this early stage of development.

Observations and trials have revealed many interesting facts about Māori and e-Learning on the programme. Although e-Aorangi has set 'ture' or rules that students are expected to adhere to, there have been no rules or policies developed for e-Teachers of the programme or for Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi. It is envisaged that further evaluations will enable the development of an e-Learning policy for Te Iti Rearea and the Wānanga as a safeguard for students and pouako. The pastoral care of students remains an important component of the programme for the retention and marketing of Iti Rearea as a culturally appropriate programme for student teachers wanting to work with young children in Māori settings but still wanting flexible learning options. The flexible learning options offered to prospective students include the freedom to remain employed on a full time basis because the face-to-face component of the degree course is delivered on weekends only.

Contributions from Skype technology

Skype is an internet-based communication video and phone service, free to download for all internet users. In 2008, skype was implemented into the teaching and learning programme for the pastoral care of both local and distance students. To date this has proven to be an effective mode of communication but it should be noted that there are certain issues with skype that can dissuade students and pouako from using this technology. One of the difficulties is the delay, both audio and visual, that sometimes occur with online video conferencing. It can be difficult to address some problems that students are experiencing as students are spread geographically throughout the North Island of New Zealand. The e-Learning environment is an essential tool to maintain contact with students residing outside of the region and away from the main campus. Despite these minor problems, video skype using webcam has been utilised by pouako and students as a mode of communicating ideas about assignments and for generally keeping in touch. Many students prefer the 'kanohi ki te kanohi' (face-to-face) approach. Using video skype with webcam means that the student can see and hear the pouako. Pastoral care via skype technology for those residing outside of the area has been beneficial and it is envisaged that a new, more advanced video conferencing will be trialed for the e-Learning environment.

Other key elements

Retention of students is an important element to the success of any tertiary programme. Previous studies have revealed that a combination of factors are related directly to students withdrawing from e-Learning courses. These factors include boring discussions, technical problems, feelings of isolation and learner differences (Bishop, 2002; Clark & Mayer, 2003; Cummings, Bonk, & Jacobs, 2002; Lorenzo & Moore, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2002; Stephenson, 2001). The e-Learner, unlike the conventional face-to-face learner, may find the e-Learning environment very isolating and will have to try harder at interacting with classmates and the lecturer. Coomey and Stephenson (2001) suggest that successful e-Learning is dependent on certain aspects, including, "learner control, dialogue, learner support and opportunities for direct learner involvement" (p.37). International research suggests there are key elements for e-Education success and retention of students in the e-Learning environment. These include online visibility, modelling, frequent and consistent feedback, diplomatic feedback and evaluative feedback (Bischoff, 2000; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Ivanic, Clark & Rimmershaw, 2000).

The same key elements are noticeable in a Māori e-Learning and e-Teaching environment where cultural values and beliefs can enhance the elements outlined above. For example, kanohi kitea, meaning to be 'seen' or visibility, is considered an important issue in Māori society. According to Mead (2003) visibility within the hapū or iwi can determine acceptability as 'ahi kaa' (Mead, 2003). Ahi kaa is an analogy for the local people of an area; literally translated it means 'home fires'. When referring to someone as 'ahi kaa' one would be saying that they are the ones at home who keep the home fires burning. This element is just as important in the e-Learning context, not only for Māori but for all learners. Personal observations of students and pouako adhering to Māori tikanga or customs in the e-Learning environment encourage a sense of belonging, especially for Māori students who are not familiar with the workings of the technology and are apprehensive about this mode of teaching and learning.

All of the above elements for successful e-Learning are congruent with the Māori preferred pedagogical practice known as Ako. Ako is a reciprocal teaching and learning process where shared teaching and learning transpire. Previous research suggests that face-to-face traditional teaching and learning is the preferred method for Māori teachers and students (Pere, 1992; Pihama, Smith, Taki & Lee 2004). For example, learner control could be interpreted to align

with the Ako concept and will involve the learner becoming the teacher and the teacher also learning from the student. Dialogue, or 'whakaputa whakaaro' or 'whakawhiti kōrero', is also an important aspect of the Ako concept as a way in which to establish relationships. Learner support and opportunities for direct learner involvement are also evident in the Ako method of teaching and learning in the form of 'tautoko' (support) and 'taupatupatu' (debate) with the group. There are numerous advantages for the Māori e-Learner that are clearly identified by previous research (Ministry of Education, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2007). One advantage identified by Ministry of Education research is the joy some students feel at being heard online in a way that might not have been possible if they were in a conventional teaching and learning environment (Ministry of Education, 2002). This is particularly relevant for the shy student who may not be as vocal in the face-to-face classroom.

As mentioned previously, Ako is the preferred method of teaching and learning. This holistic method for the dissemination of knowledge in te ao Māori (the Māori world) is not a new concept. Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr and Kates (2005) suggest there are three basic principles of holistic education. These are "connectedness, inclusion and balance" (p. 2). These three principles are constants within Māori educational organisations and should simply be 'transferred' into the e-Learning and e-Teaching environment. Therefore, if all of the key elements align with Māori pedagogical practices, then the transfer of the practices need not be a mammoth task. Cyberspace or the e-Learning and e-Teaching environment is no different from any other educational environment. For example, in traditional Māori society, the ngahere (bush) was one of the learning environments for young Māori male students of the traditional whare wānanga (Smith, 1978). However, the pedagogical practices by tōhunga or traditional teachers or specialists, remained the same. Today, Māori learners are provided with the comfort of warmth, shelter and technological tools in classrooms. Again, the pedagogical practices remain the same, although it must be noted that many traditional practices are not implemented in the learning programmes in whare wānanga today. For example, traditionally students would have to be silent when the tōhunga was teaching. Today, lecturers on the Iti Rearea programme encourage debate amongst students and staff as a way to build confidence and to ensure all students have a voice. Manaakitanga and the personal or pastoral care of students in the Māori e-Learning and e-Teaching environment remain as fundamental requirements for the successful retention of students.

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga or caring for students remains an important component in the Iti Rearea programme. Ako or the preferred reciprocal Māori teaching and learning pedagogy underpins all aspects of the degree. The question remains, though: How do we care or provide students with the same level of manaakitanga in the e-Learning environment as we would in a conventional face-to-face teaching and learning context?

Pouako visibility in the e-Learning environment is paramount for several reasons. Firstly, students need to know that their pouako are with them; they need to know that what they contribute in the e-Kōrero (discussion forum) is being read but more importantly is read with interest by the pouako. Acknowledging students for their contributions, albeit very minimal contributions at times, is crucial to the retention of students in this environment (Campbell, 2003). There is nothing worse than being ignored by your teacher both in the e-Learning environment and the conventional teaching and learning environment. Personal observations in the e-Learning environment have been ongoing since the implementation of the online support component in 2006. If the pouako does not acknowledge the student after three or four contributions, the student will slowly disappear from the forum. It is difficult to get the student back on track; it often takes many phone calls and one-on-one face-to-face dialogue to persuade the student to re-enter the forum. Secondly, if the pouako is invisible for more than a week, students will often not go into the forum. The pouako is the facilitator in the online

discussion forum; without their presence the course of the discussion can easily turn. Weller (2002) insists that a pedagogical approach to e-Learning can be influenced by the lecturer, depending on the lecturer's own values and beliefs. Furthermore, previous research on teacher effectiveness in the e-Learning and e-Teaching environment continues to reiterate the fact that it is the teacher that is responsible for easing the transition from conventional to computer assisted learning and teaching (Reynolds, 1999; Stephenson, 2001).

Karakia or prayer is another form of manaakitanga in the e-Learning environment as is te reo Māori. The majority of the students enrolled in Te Iti Rearea Bachelor of Teaching and Learning programme are fluent Māori speakers. Therefore, establishing a te reo Māori only e-Learning environment is a way to provide a culturally safe environment for these students. The provision of cultural safety is a form of manaakitanga and the responsibility of providing this for Māori students should be the responsibility of all tertiary institutes, both mainstream and whare wānanga. Nepe suggests that te reo Māori is a "vital strand" for the transmission of Māori knowledge and that "no other language will be able to convey the intricacies of this knowledge" (Nepe, 1991, p.55). This statement suggests that there is a need to maintain te reo Māori as the medium of instruction, dialogue and debate in the e-Learning environment.

The fact that te ao Māori (the Māori world) and the natural world is indivisible and all elements are seen as one (Hemara, 2000; Mead, 2003; Nepe, 1991) is justification for the practice of āhuatanga Māori (Māori ways of doing things) in the e-Learning environment. Karakia, mihihihi (formal greetings), te reo Māori, manaakitanga, aroha (love), tohatoha (sharing) and wairuatanga are all āhuatanga Māori. Therefore, these elements are all part of the pastoral care process and cannot be separated. In order to care for students in an e-Learning and conventional teaching and learning environment the whole person must be cared for. Wholistic well-being includes taking care of all sides of the person, for example, te taha hinengaro (mental well-being), te taha tinana (physical well-being), te taha wairua (spiritual well-being) and te taha whanau (the well being of the family) (Ministry of Education, 1992).

Atuatiratanga/Wairuatanga: Spiritual synergy and spirituality

As mentioned in the previous section, te taha wairua (spiritual well-being) is important for the wholistic health of the person. According to Marie Parehuia Stewart (personal communication, 2008) atuatiratanga is similar to wairuatanga but with a slight difference; it is the spiritual synergy that forms when a group of people are collectively guided by and believe in a spiritual essence. Wairuatanga is the outcome of atuatiratanga and is the cause of what she suggests is the 'rippling effect' of atuatiratanga. If one imagined atuatiratanga as being the stone or the core and that stone was thrown into the water, the outcome would be a series of ripples. Therefore, atuatiratanga is needed in order for wairuatanga to have essence.

Spirituality in education is not a new concept, nor is it practised by Māori or other indigenous people alone. Palmer (1993) suggests that there is a lack of spirituality in education and that teachers will seek out the spiritual traditions in order to add the elements of "hope, optimism and social commitment" into the formal educational system (p.4). This inclusion of the spiritual dimension within educational organisations or institutes facilitates a wholistic approach to teaching and learning. An Australian Aboriginal writer, Mudrooroo (1995), suggests that spirituality is a "oneness and an interconnectedness with all that lives and breathes, even with all that does not live or breathe" (p.33). The spiritual synergy amongst Te Iti Reaea students and staff is an important part of the programme. Regardless of religious denomination, students and staff are collectively involved on the spiritual level while attending on-campus classes. The inclusion of atuatiratanga into our teaching and learning environment is well justified, not only from a Māori world view but also from the view of our partners, the New Zealand Government. It is notable, too, that the fourth article of the Treaty of Waitangi promises protection to all religious denominations in Aotearoa New Zealand,

thus enabling not only Māori but other groups of people to practise and retain their religious beliefs within our teaching and learning contexts.

Conclusion

The Iti Rearea programme is in the developmental stage and there are many challenges for lecturers and students. The e-Learning and e-Teaching component of the programme will further develop as a result of ongoing research by the author and other staff members. This research is intended to guide how Māori students and staff utilise technology to enhance their learning and teaching. Staff on the programme are not trained counsellors but their focus includes pastoral care of students. The provision of Māori methods of wholistic care and reciprocal teaching and learning pedagogy ensure that students are culturally supported in the academic environment. Such provisions include manaakitanga (caring), aroha (love), tohatoha (sharing), tauawhi (support), atuatiratanga (spiritual synergy, and prayer), whakarongo (listening) and whakatenatena (encouragement); these need to be integrated throughout the programme. Āhutatanga Māori and its components such as aroha, manaakitanga, tohatoha and atuatiratanga, are key elements the Māori student context. The progress to date in developing this programme has been particularly encouraging and shows considerable promise for future development of the Māori e-Learning framework and methodologies.

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