A merging of a Eurocentric Model – Learning Communities with an Indigenous model – Whakawhanaungatanga

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Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa,

Ko Hikurangi te maunga, ko Waiapu te awa, ko Horouta te waka, ko Iritekura te marae, ko Te Whanau o Iritekura te hapu, ko Ngati-Porou te iwi, Ko Huhana Watene toku ingoa. My mountain is Hikurangi, my river Waiapu, my canoe Horouta, my meetinghouse is called Iritekura, my sub-tribe is the Family of Iritekura, my main tribe is Ngati-Porou and my name is Susan Watene. I am of Maori and Pakeha parentage. My father is Ngati-Porou from Waipiro Bay, a small settlement on the East Coast of New Zealand. My mother is originally from Lavender Bay, Sydney, Australia. I am married to Haki Watene, of Ngapuhi/Ngati Whatua lineage. We have five daughters and six grandchildren.

Introduction:
This paper offers an insight into a programme based on sound teaching practices using the learning community’s model while including Maori principles of learning (Smith, 2003) based on “taha hinengaro, the mind, taha tinana, the body and taha wairua, the spiritual” (Durie, 1998, pg. 53), and will address concerns of retention and success of tertiary studies students at Unitec New Zealand. The delivery of the programme is conducive to Maori but, has also been effective to a range of students in our programme, for many of whom English is an additional language. The Certificate in Foundation Studies: Whitinga (CFS: Whitinga) offers a number of courses that are deemed appropriate entry qualifications to diploma and degree programmes. It offers courses at level one to three with the core course, Tertiary Studies establishing the necessary skills to successfully transfer to higher levels of study. It is a six month programme and has two semester enrolments each year.

History:
Theoretically, education in New Zealand offers all the opportunity to academically achieve. However, it would be naïve to assume that because education is guaranteed equally by law and under the Treaty of Waitangi New Zealand’s founding document, signed in 1840 between the Crown and Maori, it is not always the case. Aronowitz & Giroux, confer that in some institutes there is the guise that they acknowledge and implement things pertaining to Other [in this case Maori] and their philosophy (1991). While assimilation is no longer the official government policy, it is true to say that Maori input can follow the scenario of “third prefab past the gym syndrome”, in other words, invisibility (Pacific Rim Bridging Paper Trewartha, Watene & Woolford, 1999, p9). However, Unitec New Zealand believes it has a moral responsibility to ensure enrolled Unitec students have every opportunity to successfully complete their tertiary studies. Its Charter, 2003 made a firm commitment to provide students with the skills needed to succeed in tertiary study, stating that

1 Establishing relationships.
2 New Zealand’s Indigenous People.
“Unitec recognises and celebrates the diverse backgrounds of its students and is committed to providing them with a socially, culturally and spiritually responsive environment. The Charter also states that “Unitec undertakes to provide learners with opportunities to study in and across disciplines and at levels that meet national and regional goals and that contribute to Government tertiary education strategies” (Unitec New Zealand, 2003).

Unitec also places value on the Treaty of Waitangi and Unitec is thus committed to increasing the participation and success of Maori students by offering culturally supportive learning environments and to actively validate Maori language, knowledge and pedagogy.

In 1999, The Unitec Student Retention and Success Working Party formed. Their two primary aims were “to investigate and establish a sustainable means of measuring and recording student retention at Unitec and investigate and recommend ways in which the retention and success of students in Unitec programmes be increased (Retention and Success at Unitec, 2000, p2). A total of 93 099 course result records were analysed in that year. Key findings were a 58.19% pass rate 5.99% failed and 35.82% were No Result3. The high number of records with No Result was a definite concern (ibid, pgs 11-13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity:</th>
<th>All Students %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>52.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ Maori</td>
<td>7.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>12.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>22.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 reports the ethnicity percentages of all students enrolled in Unitec in 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calculated Grade</th>
<th>European%</th>
<th>NZ Maori%</th>
<th>Pasifika%</th>
<th>Asian%</th>
<th>Other%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>62.39</td>
<td>54.86</td>
<td>50.36</td>
<td>53.62</td>
<td>58.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>7.43</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Result</td>
<td>32.62</td>
<td>37.71</td>
<td>41.38</td>
<td>40.13</td>
<td>33.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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Table 2 illustrates the percentages for Pass, Fail and No Result according to ethnicity. The graphs show poor results prompting Unitec to initiate strategies to improve student retention and success across all ethnic groups.

Maori did not appear the most at risk, due to a combination of factors; low enrolments, Maori support services such as Maia, Unitec staff and Schools whose philosophy and teaching practices were inclusive (Unitec Retention and Success Report, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unitec Retention and Success on Maori Students 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Relates to a combination of no show and formal dropout

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Since then, there has been a significant increase in Maori enrolments and the latest results for retention across all disciplines at Unitec were European 82%, Maori 87% and Pasifika 74%, International 72% (Unitec Retention and Success Report, 2005). These results include all enrolments, full-time, part-time and courses traditionally known as short courses. This evidence clearly shows major improvements.

**The Programme:**
The Certificate in Foundation Studies – **Whitinga** (CFS: Whitinga) is a Unitec programme delivered by the School of Foundation Studies, to combine the disciplines of academic study skills with whanaungatanga (the concept of inclusive learning) to address low retention of students. The School of Foundation Studies was committed to Unitec’s stance on addressing the retention and success of Maori students therefore, significant changes were actioned. Key to this was the teaching style, room allocation and use of a whanau room (common room). Tinto identified:

> “learning communities seek to restructure the very classrooms in which students find themselves and alter the way students experience both the curriculum and learning within those classrooms” (1998, ¶3).

Foundation Studies also considered the diversity of the teaching staff and liaison with other schools that students could staircase to. Examples include Nursing, Design, Engineering, Applied Sciences and Computing, while plans are underway for a new stream specifically designed for the Trades.

When initially discussing the guidelines for this programme, staff strongly advocated that the programme be flexible and open to new methods and styles of teaching that will continue to inform the programme. In semester one 2005, two new learning communities; Tertiary Studies Maori and Tertiary Studies Pasifika were officially formed in CFS: Whitinga.

The CFS: Whitinga Maori learning community has a commitment to support Maori educational philosophy as exemplified by a leading Maori statesman Sir Apirana Ngata ⁴, who promulgated the concept of balance.

Ngata firmly believed that for Maori to develop to their full potential incorporating all three; hinengaro, tinana and wairua into the learning curriculum would encompass Maori and Pakeha pedagogy effectively. This was further endorsed more recently by Dr. Kuni Jenkins in a paper delivered at the Hui Taumata Conference, held in Wellington, 2005. True partnerships have the potential to “initiate access to knowledge and skills, effective models and methods” (Jenkins, 2005, ¶12).

The School of Foundation Studies practices student-centred learning, facilitation and learning communities. These learning methods promote an environment that encourages interactive collaboration between students, staff, colleagues, departments and in some cases the community. Links have been initiated with a Private Training Establishment PTE, Waitech in Waitakere City⁵. CFS: Whitinga endorses Tinto’s belief that learning communities encourage

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⁴ Sir Apirana Ngata (1874 – 1950 of Ngati Porou descent. The first Maori to complete a degree. He made an immense contribution to improving the educational status of Maori.

⁵ West Auckland, New Zealand.
the collective approach but also allows individual strengths and areas needing development to be identified (1998).

“Interactive collaborative learning encourages new voices to be heard and their ways of knowing and knowledge validated. Collaborative learning is a concept at the heart of learning communities” (McKegg, 2005, p296).

In addition, Tinto (2002) identified the need for strong links with other departments to foster the learning community concept. In September 1998, Unitec New Zealand launched Maia Maori Development Centre – a one stop shop. The centre was modelled on an Australian University’s concept designed to address Aboriginal retention and success. Unitec’s strategy was to increase the rate of Maori retention and success across all disciplines. It was developed as a pro-active response to the academic and cultural needs of Maori students. Initially only for Maori students, the centre now assists all students that come through its doors. What has not changed is that the kaupapa (guiding philosophy) is Maori and the staff are Maori. The five key functions for Maia are academic support, counselling, provision of cultural space for students, support for Maori staff and training services for the whole institution (Hawke, 1998).

A supportive environment is essential when encouraging student confidence in seeking help instead of waiting till near crisis. Maia applies a holistic approach which is termed kaupapa Maori – inclusive of all the elements, mind, body and soul. It is an alternative for many students who were not using existing Unitec support services. Maia’s inclusive practice meets the need for many CFS: Whitinga students. Providing a service that has a caring genuine approach is not a new pedagogical strategy, (Jenkins, 2005) but one CFS: Whitinga and Maia have adopted.

Tertiary studies is compulsory for all CFS: Whitinga students with a range of electives to compliment their study focus, however, the Nursing stream has a predetermined and linked programme while tertiary two students are compulsorily linked to the New Zealand Cultural, History and Politics programme (NZ CHP’s). This is the second semester it has run as a compulsory component. In semester two, June – November, 2005 attendance in the programme was erratic. However, this semester attendance for the class has remained high. In week one 23rd February 2006 there were 70 enrolled students. In week 10 May 11th 2006 the attendance records showed 64 students present. The programme will be monitored until the end of 2006 to assess its effectiveness as a learning community strategy.

Learning Community: Nursing
This stream is course specific with students in the same class for all subjects – modelling a linked learning community philosophy (Tinto, 1998). In the four years that this learning community has been taught, enrolments in Unitec’s Bachelor of Nursing programme indicate students who graduated from CFS: Whitinga’s Nursing stream were doing well and were better able to cope with the academic demands.

The commitment and collegial effort of the Schools of Nursing and Foundation Studies: Whitinga have developed to the point that graduating nursing endorsement students are now preferred applicants by the School of Nursing. This team effort endorses the effectiveness of two separate departments working towards a common goal – student retention and success.

Learning Communities: Maori/Pasifika
As Maori are a Polynesian people, both the Maori and Pasifika streams are culturally based, therefore it is important that the tutors delivering to this stream understand the external factors of whanau (family), tangi (funeral), tautoko (support), financial commitments and a lack of financial assistance that may impede student achievement. Implementing methods which are learner friendly and culturally appropriate is a way of addressing such issues. When a learning community is based on culture, it provides an environment that allows the learners to:

“bring who they are to the learning interactions in complete safety and their knowledge (including languages and language patterns) are acceptable and legitimate” (Bishop & Glynn, 1999, p.163).

Furthermore, the environment allows students to be more adventurous and take risks with their learning that would most likely not happen outside of the learning community (Malnarich, 2003). CFS: Whitinga’s learning communities provide elements of safety for their students through their teaching practice.

Both learning communities have completed their first year and are halfway through the current semester. Results for the first year were not very flattering. However, the teaching staff are heartened by the anecdotal evidence from student interviews as part of an action research project conducted by the School of Foundation Studies. The research concept applied is coined ‘illuminative evaluation’ which employs a flexible methodology (McKegg, 2005).

Cited from A. McKegg’s findings three dominant themes emerged from the interviews. The way the tutor related to the rest of the learning community, the ways the tutor taught and the way the students related to each other (2005).

Student comments:

We’re real whanau orientated this class; we work real tight this class you know compared to all our other subjects.

I’m not really liking my other classes cause it’s not so whanau orientated – like you’re just an individual; but in here you’re all one, you know with everyone else and in my other classes I don’t ...I just don’t like being with people that I don’t know.

The students in the Maori learning community clearly felt linked to their tutor comments were the tutor was ‘more on a one to lone level’ and ‘easy to get along with’ and that she had ‘time’ and that she’ makes us laugh’ and ‘makes it fun’ (ibid, 2005, p298).

McKegg concluded that “it is apparent that the sense of community or whakawhanaungatanga enhanced the learning experience for the students who participated in the classes” (2005, p299).

| Certificate Foundation Studies: Whitinga Tertiary Studies Maori 2005 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                                              | Enrolled | Merit | Pass | DNC | NC | W |
| Semester One                                               |          |      |      |     |    |   |
| 21                                                          |          |      |      |     |    |   |
| Semester Two                                               |          |      |      |     |    |   |
| 22                                                          |          |      |      |     |    |   |
| Total                                                       |          |      |      |     |    |   |
| 43                                                          |          |      |      |     |    |   |
Merit: Achieved 90% or above  
Pass: Achieved 80% or above  
DNC: Did not complete all assessments  
NC: Attempted all assessments but did not pass the course  
W: Withdrawn from the programme.

Only the statistics for the Maori stream are included in this paper. The Nursing and Pasifika tutors will report on their own streams in the future.

New practices to the CFS: Whitinga Maori stream incorporated a designated teaching session delivered in Maia. This was to familiarise students with Maia’s kaupapa, staff and encourage active use of Maia’s services while maintaining Foundation Studies teaching requirements. In a recent newspaper interview Centre administrator, Kylie Poihipi confirmed, “We try to break down barriers for the students – Maia helps build confidence and empowers the students to strive for success” (Helping break down, 2006, pE2). The aim was to implement another teaching strategy based on the learning community ethos of forming strong links with other departments while incorporating Maori tikanga. 

Another practice of learning and teaching is ako7 based on the dual principle of a reciprocal relationship between teacher and learner, to allow the opportunity to awhi (embrace) and tautoko (support) both students and teacher. This learning style has been most effective when dealing with CFS: Whitinga students. Tinto (2002) advocates:

“Students will get more involved in learning, spend more time learning, and in turn learn more when they are placed in supportive educational settings that hold high expectations for their learning, provide frequent feedback about their learning, and require them to actively share learning with others”

This diagram reflects the reciprocal paradigm of ako.

CFS: Whitinga practices the premise that two cultures can effectively complement each other. Bishop determined that, the learning community concepts sit comfortably alongside the notion of whakawhanaungatanga, a term meaning ‘establishing relationships’ (1996). For Maori, establishing connecting relationships is key. However, underlying all these practices is the fundamental conviction that all cultures are of equal value.

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6 Maori protocols  
7 word referring to teaching and learning

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In conclusion, this paper has offered a brief look at a programme that has a sound teaching foundation yet is still willing to allow for change. It supports the learning community concept, collaborative learning methodology and endorses the objectives of the 9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference by addressing innovative and effective approaches to teaching and learning, and incorporates the importance of bridging and foundation programmes for first year students.

Finally, a whakatauaki\(^8\) to contemplate:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He aha te mea nui?} & \quad \text{What is most important?} \\
Maaku e ki atu & \quad \text{I tell you} \\
He tangata, he tangata & \quad \text{It is people, it is humankind.}
\end{align*}
\]

No reira tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

Reference List:


\(^8\) A proverb.

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