



## Simpā – A Very Useful Toolkit

### Authors

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The toolkit developed from a cooperative engagement between two distinct areas and was undertaken to produce a new pathway to learning that enhanced, but never replaced, the traditional ways of learning. As a tool, it is also a fun way to share our history with groups who come to experience noho marae.

### Introduction

As we collide in our efforts to produce new ways of and means to engage with a cultures other than our own, we do so with respect for both their knowledge and our own in an effort to engage in a new learning. The aim of this connection is to cooperate in the creation of a blending of traditional Kāi Tahu knowledge with modern technology and information systems which will complement these traditional knowledge systems. (Russell 2007, p. 3)



This paper outlines the process that has led to the use of the Simpā Toolkit as a complementary teaching tool during student and community visits to the marae. As part of a marae visit and stay, visiting groups are told the history of the area, and this is where the Simpā Toolkit is used. To highlight what is unique and creative about this teaching tool this paper will explore the development of the practice and, more specifically, the development of the Simpā toolkit<sup>1</sup>. Following this is an outline of the use of the Simpā toolkit during hui<sup>2</sup> and noho marae<sup>3</sup>. Finally, there will be a discussion on how the use of Simpā contributes to the learning experience of students and community groups who attend hui and noho Marae.

## The History of Simpā

In 2004 Dr Khyla Russell and Associate Professor Samuel Mann, employees of Otago Polytechnic, studied a collaborative project between Kā Rūnaka o Araiteuru<sup>4</sup>. The collaboration examined the use of local Māori history and computer gaming and how these two could be combined to provide a modern way of recording and passing on history that complemented the oral tradition of storytelling. This cooperative engagement



between two distinct areas was undertaken to produce a new pathway to learning that enhanced, but never replaced, the traditional ways of learning. Rather, it explored how it could add further depth to the whakapapa<sup>5</sup> of knowledge and create a richer and differently informed means of engaging in learning (Russell & Mann 2007: 3). This engagement has been an ongoing process, in that at each stage of development and use both partners have had ongoing conversations and input into the overall development. The Rūnaka have major input into the contents of the toolkit in terms of the story to be conveyed; and they also have access to the landscape and the stories on which the researcher and programmer base their game<sup>6</sup>. This process was undertaken face-to-face at the marae at each stage of the process. As the Rūnaka members become more familiar and confident with using the gamepā, even after completion of the toolkit, we still discuss how the gamepā could be improved by adding features to the landscape. “What we are working hard to ensure is that rather than have cross-cultural collision as the end point, we will create a process through creating a ‘how to’ process for establishing such partnering” (Russell & Mann 2007: 6).

## Context to Simpā as a Teaching Tool

This ongoing engagement is a clear example of how a true Treaty partnership is *evidence itself* of best practice in terms of providing outcome for both partners; and in the context of using this tool as a teaching tool it demonstrates that partnership is invaluable. The use of the Simpā toolkit as a teaching practice was the result of developing an engaging experience for students who are required to go to the marae as part of their Treaty and cultural competency requirements<sup>7</sup>. As part of their learning at the marae they are given the local history and the whakapapa of the area. This is where the use of the gamepā has become useful as it provides a visual context to the stories.

Before the use of the toolkit students had to rely on the skill of the orator and their own imagination to capture the essence of the stories. While there is still a requirement for the story teller to make the history exciting and the students still need to use their imaginations, the visual aid has allowed more insight. The toolkit has all the landscape features that make it familiar to the story teller and the students but it also has an avatar that walks around the pā; however, the scenes from the stories are not acted out.

The organisational factors that have supported the development and use of Simpā as a teaching tool have been mandated by the relationship between the Rūnaka and the Polytechnic. The content and subsequent toolkit have been decided on by the Rūnaka through face-to-face discussions between the researcher, the gaming programmer, and the Rūnaka where the whole process was overseen by the Kaitohutohu<sup>8</sup>. This process itself demonstrates best practice in terms of partnership, which is one of the themes that we want our students to understand in terms of their learning and own practice with Māori. There was an acknowledgement by the organisation that the content was decided on and, in terms of

intellectual property<sup>9</sup>, is owned by the Rūnaka or the whānau who share their stories to create the gamepā. This was a very important part of maintaining the trust between the two parties and has ensured the whole process and partnership had equal power sharing. That too is a major part of the students' learning when it comes to working with Māori and as part of our Treaty training.

## Feedback on the use of Simpā

Several members of different Rūnaka throughout the Ngāi Tahu rohe<sup>10</sup> watched the use of Simpā as part of their own Tangata Tiaki South Island Fisheries hui and followed this with a walk around the actual pā. Most of these hui participants also host different groups of people who stay overnight at the marae and, as part of that stay, share the whakapapa and history of the place and people. We asked for feedback on how useful they thought Simpā was in complementing the storytelling and they were unanimous that it was not a replacement but a complementary aspect to their storytelling. One participant stated, “so many of our stories are connected to physical land masses. This is an excellent way of reproducing our environments to complement our stories and arouse curiosity in our young people” (Anon.: kōrero-a-waha, Puketeraki, 2009)<sup>11</sup>.

Another said: “This is a complement but not a replacement for our stories. I can see how it might be used to help teach about our ecology, our sea and bird life, how things were and are now” (Anon.: kōrero-a-waha, Puketeraki, 2009).

As well as looking at how this tool is useful for outside groups, participants also looked at it in terms of passing on the whakapapa and history to future generations in a way that is familiar to them: this was one of the original ideas behind the creation of Simpā. In addition to targeting future generations, we have several thousand iwi members who live around the world and for them this is one way of connecting them to their iwi and the landscape, even if it is a virtual connection. “This is a great tool; it provides a record for future generations. I can see how we can add to it and send it around the world to our whānau” (Anon.: kōrero-a-waha, Puketeraki, 2009). Members who live outside the rohe and outside the country and who receive the different communications Ngāi Tahu put out often write to say how much they appreciate receiving news and stories and how they rely on members at home to come up with new ways of getting information out.

History and whakapapa have always been passed orally from generation to generation and through Simpā whānau can record and keep their stories within the whānau in a way that ensures they are recorded. Many whānau have members with stories and knowledge that need to be passed on before they are lost: “Some of our old people are passing away, this is a way of involving them and recording their stories” (Anon.: kōrero-a-waha, Puketeraki, 2009).

Simpā is a *teaching and learning* tool that whānau can use and actively work together using it to record those stories that are important to them. They can also embed these stories in the toolkits for teaching future generations<sup>12</sup>.

Similarly, schools from across the region have 2-day, overnight hui with children of all ages. Because of how Simpā has been made and how we are able to adapt the contents, the toolkit is used to teach these children those aspects of our history that we choose to share.

The process itself can be a fun learning experience for the whānau. Ngāi Tahu as an iwi have been looking at ways to start recording their oral histories and have bought video cameras and have provided training for Rūnaka members to start recording stories. However, most whānau preferred to keep the information within the whānau. Simpā can provide a basic landscape on which whānau can base their

teaching and learning using the landscape tool to complement their stories, while the Simpā landscape is also broad enough for general use by the Rūnaka.

## Conclusion

The Simpā toolkit has been a successful collaboration in many ways; it is evidence of a successful Treaty relationship and provides benefits to both partners. This relationship, which has arisen out of a formal agreement between the Rūnaka and Otago polytechnic itself, is a model that could be useful for other government departments. The development of treaty-based Māori intellectual property as a process has added to the learning of Otago Polytechnics' researchers and staff.

The use of Simpā as both a complement to and a way of telling and recording history and whakapapa is innovative and a platform that can send that history to people who are based anywhere around the globe, creating and strengthening their connection with the Ngāi Tahu and New Zealand. As well as the connection, Simpā is a way of passing on whakapapa to future generations in an interactive and interesting way, ensuring the retention of important aspects of our history. It is also a fun way to share our history with groups who come to experience noho marae. "It starts your imagination working. I want to know more and to revisit these places" (Anon.: kōrero-a-waha, Puketeraki, 2009). Simpā is a very useful tool.

## Footnotes

1. The Simpā toolkit will be referred to as Simpā
2. In this article hui refers to as an overnight gathering at the marae
3. Noho marae is also used here to mean a marae stay
4. These are the four local Rūnaka with whom Otago Polytechnic has a formal relationship
5. Whakapapa is commonly known as genealogy and is also used to denote DNA. In this paper whakapapa was used to look at the evolution of knowledge; everything has a whakapapa that explains the purpose of existence. Whakapapa records the journey of emergence, describes the construction of foundations, and provides the basis for gathering and organising knowledge. Within the context of decision-making about ethics, whakapapa refers to quality of relationships and the structures or processes that have been established to support these relationships (unpublished work: Stephanie Palmer et al. 2009: 9).
6. See the pictures of the wanaka and the landscape on the DVD presentation.
7. In order to meet occupational therapy practice competencies students have to complete a Treaty of Waitangi workshop, which is done in their first and third years. Their first year workshop consists of an introduction to the Treaty; their third year workshop examines application and cultural competency.
8. The kaitohutohu is a senior management position established by the MOU between the Rūnaka and the polytechnic; the role is responsible for actualising the MOU and ensuring the accountability of the organisation to the Rūnaka.
9. When we were looking at Simpā and stories we made a legal agreement that although the gamepā were created by the polytechnic, the intellectual property remained with the story tellers.
10. Ngāi Tahu rohe is the entire tribal area of the iwi and encompasses the area from Te Parinui a Whiti in the north-east southwards to Karamea in the north-west, and south to the Tītī islands off the southern coast of Awarua (the Bluff) in the far south of te Waipounamu.
11. To maintain anonymity we are using the term Anon with kōrero-a-waha. In this document it means oral source by an unnamed participant. The Tāngata Tiaki did not want to any conversations

attributed to them directly because of the presence of the Ministry of Fisheries; and/or received notes as minuted during the entirety of their hui.

12. Kai Tahu ki Otago have a relationship with all schools in Otago that focuses on Learning outside the Classroom, LEOTC.

## References

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