Delivery of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the Ethics and Professionalism Paper (ET200) in the Certificate in Business Computing

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ABSTRACT

In our institute as part of the Certificate in Business Computing, the compulsory paper Ethics and Professionalism Paper (ET200) has been taught for many years. This paper will discuss some of the issues that have been raised regarding the delivery of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi).

The prescription requires us to "Recognise the Significance of the Treaty of Waitangi to an information technology professional by being able to identify and discuss current treaty based issues". The content section further clarifies what this means, including looking at translation and interpretation of the original treaty documents.

Due to the pre-conceived perceptions brought to the class, the delivery of this part of ET200 can be difficult. Students can have strong opinions prior to the content being delivered and this causes difficulties in providing a suitable learning environment. In dealing with this a variety of approaches are taken, such as the use guest speakers.

Our research will look at two areas, how it is delivered and assessed by our Institute and a variety of polytechnics and student reaction prior to and after delivery.

The paper will present the results of a survey of how the Treaty and related issues are delivered and assessed, with a case study of how our Institute incorporates it into ET200.

Keywords: Treaty of Waitangi, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Maori, ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

In our institute ET200 has been taught for many years. This paper will discuss some of the issues that have been raised regarding the delivery of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi).

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2.   THE EXPERIENCE AT EIT

As the material for each new class is compiled, it is always with some trepidation that the Te Tiriti o Waitangi content is prepared. As an issue it has the effect of polarising students particularly as they have many pre-conceived attitudes. These attitudes have been clouded over recent years by the negative publicity surrounding the delivery of the Treaty in courses at tertiary level. Indeed, the Head of Maori Studies at EIT indicates that it is difficult to provide staff as it may place them in a potentially confrontational position. Fortunately, there have been staff available in the Faculty of Maori Studies suitable to deliver this module. In one extreme case a parent rang EIT demanding to know why we were delivering the Treaty in ET200. Over the years the authors have always carried out a debriefing session with the students after the treaty was delivered to ensure that students have the opportunity to discuss any issues they feel important. From the authors view point it has always been felt that the lecturer responsible for the actual delivery of ET200 remain detached from the actual delivery of the Treaty component.

Delivery of the treaty component at EIT is done as a two hour lecture, based on a 'Cultural Journey' course delivered to the staff. The first hour is spent looking at the Treaty itself, discussing the various versions and reasons for the variations; the second part looks at the cultural backgrounds of the students and then the application of the Treaty to Information Technology. A debriefing session is carried out in the next available class time. Originally the only assessment requirement was to attend the lecture. This has been subsequently modified to either attend the lecture or provide a written report on the treaty and a discussion on how the Treaty can relate to IT. Many students felt that "they could fail their CBC", particularly after ET200 was made into a compulsory subject, if they missed the lecture.

Many of these issues were described by Alison Hunter (2001), when developing Treaty Awareness into an Information Systems Degree.

2.1   A STUDENT SURVEY

In order to gauge the student reaction to the Treaty component, a short survey was conducted with the students of a Semester 1, 2002 ET200 class. Thirty-three students responded.

The first question asked for their initial reaction when they found out that there would be a treaty component. Approximately one half questioned its relevance to IT, with a few expressing some strong anti-treaty feeling. Others were surprised, and about a third were interested and expressed a positive expectation.

The second question looked at whether the reaction changed after the reasons were explained by the lecturer. Approximately a quarter (8) indicated that their reactions had changed perceptions changed while about two thirds (19) indicated they felt the same.

Thirdly, the issue of assessment was addressed, to determine if understanding that the assessment was based on attendance changed how they viewed the Treaty component. Responses produced a similar range (a quarter for yes to two thirds no) to the second question.

To see how strongly the students felt about the inclusion of the treaty, the fourth question looked at whether they discussed it with peers or family. This produced a ratio of 13-yes to 19-no, with some indicating that the response from their discussion was "What has it got to do with IT?"

The fifth question looked at whether the students understanding of the treaty and its significance had changed. A ratio of 22-yes to 7-no indicated that their understanding had changed

The sixth question asked if the student felt that there was a relationship to IT. 11-yes /16 -no indicated that a majority of students still felt the relationship to it was tenuous. One comment indicated they felt the lecturer "hinted" at a relationship! Another indicated that "Is was a matter of interpretation".

The final question asked if the student felt that the treaty component was relevant to understanding of IT and IT issues in New Zealand. The results produced a ratio of 13-yes/15 no.

While the results of the "straw" survey were carried out on one class with one lecturer, it does indicate that the delivery of the treaty will not be a straightforward matter. Reviewing the surveys did show that some students continued to be negative throughout the whole survey while for others it was a learning experience.

3. RESULTS OF INSTITUTES SURVEYED

In order to gain an overview of how the Treaty was being taught and assessed an email questionnaire was distributed to a number of institutes with a focus on the delivery, the assessment associated, significant issues encountered by both teaching staff and students and responses on how the delivery of the Treaty could be improved.

3.1 DELIVERY

From the responses gained, a key area identified to the successful delivery of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi was the format chosen for the sessions. Allowing students to have input into the way the sessions would run and the content covered also meant a more favourable response to covering the key issues.

Commonly two sessions of around 2 hours in duration were delivered, although this did differ depending on the significance placed on teaching the Treaty. There was also a link between the assessment activities for this part and the time spent on the topic.

As with EIT many of the institutes found it easier to bring in guest lecturers or speakers who have a wider knowledge of the subject area. This helped in a number of ways. It helped to put the significance of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi into perspective and the relevance it had to Information Technology courses as well as allowing questions relating to broader areas of the Treaty to be answered in more depth.

Many of the guest speakers were from within the Institutes own resources, although one Institute indicated that they used outside resources because of the wealth of local experience and knowledge. Further to this some institutes use online and printed resources to deliver the sessions.

Many of the respondents felt it was important to offer workshop / discussion and response time regarding the issues raised. EIT also integrates this with the second half of the Treaty sessions being set aside for group discussion around one key issue and then for that group to provide feedback to the whole group.

A key point to note about the delivery of these sessions was that the content and discussion was aimed at being non confrontational and non judgemental. This allowed participants to contribute rather than feeling as though issues could not be raised, because of the possible ramifications. It also meant comments were encouraged from those who traditionally refrained from contributing to any topic areas. Some institutes achieved this non confrontational situation by carefully selecting the issues to be discussed and ensuring that the relevance of these strongly related back to the underlining issues faced by IT professionals.

Of the institutes that responded one indicated that the Treaty played a small part in ET200 because of the lack of resources in order to cover the areas. Emphasis was instead put on issues such as economic models.

3.2 ASSESSMENT

Institutes tackled the assessment in a number of different ways. One of the more common assessment methods was to make the Treaty sessions compulsory to all students, although active participation was also required. Some institutes also required other assessment items to be completed. These varied from practical worksheets summarising key points to short answer test questions.

3.3 TEACHING AND STUDENT ISSUES

A common issue identified that affects the delivery and the understanding of the students is the relevance/significance of the Treaty and Information Technology. One of the problems linked to this issue is finding practical and relevant examples to expand on. Having a good resource of examples may be useful to emphasise significant points.

A key issue across many of the institutes was not having enough time to expand on key areas if discussion pointed this way. End of course evaluations indicated that more time may have been useful to get a better grasp of the key points. As there is a finite time frame many institutes also commented it was hard to spend more time than they had allocated. It was identified that for many students there would be no further opportunity or requirement to take the Treaty.

Another key issue that can create problems is the preconceived ideas about the Treaty and its significance. Many of the younger students had limited exposure and this tended to be based on the media.

The problem of not having enough resources and expertise in some areas, was identified by a number of institutes. This further emphasised the need of a shared resource.

4. CONCLUSION

The survey carried out on the students did not produce any unexpected results. A small number of students demonstrated their personal prejudices, which were not really altered through the delivery of the Treaty component. On a positive note, a middle group did indicate that the component did stimulate a positive interest and made them aware of the Treaty in relation to interpretation, workplace and IT issues. Many still questioned the relevance the Treaty had to IT.

From the Institute survey there is a general consensus that the component is best taught by a person with specialist knowledge in the area. Further that many of the institutes are reasonably confident with the way the Te Tiriti o Waitangi is delivered in ET200. Careful selection of the IT related issues was essential to avoid confrontational scenarios. An issue as to the availability of resources particularly in some parts of the country was raised.

One area that we believe will be of assistance to all Institutes in the area is a place where a collection of Treaty and IT related issues can be stored. The authors believe the NACCQ forums could be used in this way. It is hoped that this will be set up prior to Conference.

Finally a need was also identified for the Te Tiriti o Waitangi content to be carried on into other levels of Information Technology studies.

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