

Telling the story of telling the story

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In Mann *et al.* (2006) we described the development of an approach for participatory development of Maori digital games.

In Phase 1 of this initiative we have developed a prototype GamePa to evaluate whether the combination of game and papatipu story and wanaka approach would work. While formal evaluation is yet to be completed, the results are very positive. In this poster we describe the experience from the point of view of the academics facilitating the workshop – central yet on the sideline.

A weekend workshop was run at Puketaraki Marae (Karitane) and Otago Polytechnic in March 2006. The 22 participants worked towards developing virtual landscapes of the Huriawa Pa site. The participants included 13 young adults; 3 papatipu kaumatua; and tikika and ICT specialists.

An invitation was sent out via email to all students enrolled at the polytechnic who had registered as Māori. Responses were from people ranging in age from 15 to mid 30s. Participants met on the Saturday morning and we drove out to Karitane Marae, arriving mid morning. The participants were greeted onto the marae with a powhiri, followed by mihi and waiata. After the welcome, each participant introduced themselves to the rest of the group, before breaking for lunch. After lunch the participants travelled from the marae to Karitane Peninsula, once the site of Huriawa Pa. Residential housing has encroached upon the lower part of the hill leading up to the historical site, and to reach the entrance gate a sealed road follows what was once the main path. As tikaka specialist, Doug led the participants to the highest point of the peninsula, where historical records suggest the main structures once stood. Former landscaping is evident, as the track passes levelled areas, pits and walls. The top gives 360 degree view of the landscape – it's obvious from this vantage point that the site is an excellent choice for defence. The participants gathered to listen and Doug began to tell the stories of the past: of the great warrior Te Wera and his people, who lived at the pa, and Taoka, Te Wera's uncle, who laid siege against him. His stories were closely related to the landscape and Doug made the connection, pointing as he spoke. He explained that some natural features had changed, for example, the path of the river below now divided the large sandbar where Taoka and his warriors camped.

In his mihi earlier in the day, Doug made it clear that the stories he would tell would be the stories as he knew them. He acknowledged the privacy of the local takata whenua in relation to their stories and gave assurance that he would respect it.

The participants were given several digital cameras to share and a video camera, and took photos of the area and filmed Doug as he spoke. The stills, audio and video were to be used in the computer lab the next day.

The participants walked around the peninsula for several hours, then returned to the marae. At night the group played charades and Pictionary in Māori before sleeping in the marae. In the morning after cleaning up we returned to polytechnic for the computer lab.

In the lab we used the 'Torque Game Engine', a commercially available software programme that can be used to first model a virtual environment and then interact with it in first person perspective. This software is extended with the 'SimPa Toolkit', a resource collection of models, code and images designed to represent features of historical Māori environments.

Most participants had limited experience with computers, with the exception of an undergraduate student studying computing. None of the participants had prior experience with the Torque software.

In 6 hours each participant progressed from a blank slate of a flat empty world to start with, to an environment that represented the Huriawa Pa site. Although this was closely guided with step by step instructions – creating a landscape, changing the sky, adding objects, adding people – each participant developed their own world, 'painting' with the stories they had heard and images they had taken the previous day.

The feedback from these participants confirms the approach:

- The actual experience is what we decided to capture in the virtual world, a sense of being there.
- Way of learning in hui form
- Stories of food and layers of occupation put in context
- Informed about experience, can now go on and make the game
- Being there and seeing it, experiencing the site (both marae and pa site itself) helped make sense of virtual reality
- Enjoyed the trip to Huriawa, recreating part of it and trying to include features of the stories into the computer images
- From my point of view as a University lecturer in Maori culture, history and oral traditions, I can see the potential for transferring oral traditions and other aspects of Maori/New Zealand history to the computer generated landscapes and using this as a teaching/learning tool.
- Using the actual sites is great, it's a fun way of learning
- I think (this) development will be valuable to participants and enable the expression of tikanga Maori in a medium that is both exciting and relevant in today's technology driven world. Allowing maori to be involved in developing gaming interfaces with cultural relevance provides a vehicle for less reliance on mainstream American cultural dominance and further development of our identity. Provision of further education in this area will quickly lead to a rapid expansion in the creative use of the gaming medium for a range of purposes.
- I think it's awesome. Thank you for the opportunity.
- This was about working Maoritanga in with modern technology.
- I'm currently doing IT and being a Maori myself I'm very interested in learning more Maoritanga and working them together.
- Awesome experience.

This pilot study has confirmed that the combination of game and papatipu story and wanaka will work. It will be used in the ongoing initiative. Thank you to the Puketaraki runaka who supported this pilot.

Mann, S., Russell, K., Camp, J., Crook, M., Wikaira, J. (2006) Maori Games (this volume).