Shaping Indigenous Spaces in Higher Education: An International Virtual Exchange on Indigenous Knowledge (Alaska and Aotearoa)

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While Indigenous faculty in higher education establish and expand "spaces" for students to engage in discussions around Indigenous knowledge(s) and research, little systematic work has been done on expanding these conversations outside of local institutions, in spite of sometimes extensive interaction between Indigenous scholars in research and governance practices. In this paper, we describe four international virtual exchanges between Alaska and Aotearoa among students enrolled in the University of Alaska's courses Documenting Indigenous Knowledge and Communication in Cross-Cultural Classrooms and Victoria University of Wellington's Science and Indigenous Knowledge course. We describe our design and architecture of the collaborative digital spaces, highlighting aspects that facilitated the engagement and learning of our students, and challenges. We describe the key impacts of the initiative through selected student commentary from students' online forum posts and evaluations. Exchanges produced diverse outcomes for students, but three aspects that motivate us to continue the initiative are that virtual exchanges across international Indigenous spaces convey a critical sense of place, in local and global senses; (re)orient students in terms of Indigenous identities; and cause students to reflect on their current and future roles in shaping spaces that promote Indigenous safety, participation, and emancipation.

Introduction

One of the most important facets of Indigenous academic work is to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike in critical interdisciplinary discussions around Indigenous knowledge[s], science, and local and global issues impacting Indigenous communities. However, one of the key challenges to this imperative is the establishment and expansion of safe Indigenous spaces within the Western institution, that can both support student learning, and facilitate student contributions to insight and progression on issues affecting Indigenous peoples. In promoting safe spaces, we note that a sense of belonging for Indigenous students begins when institutions: (1) acknowledge the rightful, historical places and identities of Indigenous peoples; (2) engage and/or hire Indigenous faculty in

tenured / tenure track positions; (3) promote Indigenous knowledge (IK) as valid scientific systems constructed and tested over millennia; and (4) collaborate in respectful and reciprocal ways with Indigenous communities.

We acknowledge that our respective institutions have supported Indigenous leadership in these areas, giving us a useful foundation from which to build together.

As Indigenous researchers in higher education, our[1] work is informed but not constrained by theories of *safe* (Greene, 1988) and *Indigenized* spaces (Mercier, Asmar, & Page, 2011; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004), as well as by critical and decolonizing methodologies (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2000). We are intrigued by possibilities of social transformation and social justice within the contexts of Indigenous spaces in higher education. In our research in and teaching of Alaska Native, Māori, and Indigenous Studies, we work with students in constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing meanings and understandings in spaces we hesitate to call *hybrid* or *third* (Bhabha, 2004); instead, we choose to privilege Indigenous knowledges as fundamental epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies. We view these spaces as centred yet also fluid, situated, grounded, and rightful (Brayboy, 2005). An emphasis on *relationality* underlies our pedagogy, with an understanding that Alaska Native and Māori axiologies operate as authentic theoretical frameworks within Indigenous processes of science and research. It is our understanding that IK's interface with other systems does not necessarily generate knowledge that is integrated or hybridized in nature (Hikuroa, 2009). In other words, how do we maintain our Indigenous academic identities while maintaining a sense of belonging in the institution?

This article describes the design and architecture of a virtual teaching space that bridges the Pacific Ocean, enables students to maintain their sense of identity and belonging, and is also meant to be an exciting, horizon-stretching, and fun support for our course objectives. The exchange design was influenced by previous models, including the 2006 collaboration of Alice Te Punga Somerville, a Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) faculty member, with a US colleague and the Te Rere Ao: Native Conversations videoconference series from 2006 to 2008. The ability to use a multidirectional approach involving all participants is integral to videoconferencing's usefulness for our class exchange. We describe methodologies and methods used in shaping four international virtual exchanges between and among students enrolled in the University of Alaska Fairbank's (UAF) courses *Documenting Indigenous Knowledge* and *Communication in Cross-Cultural Classrooms* and VUW's *Science and Indigenous Knowledge* course. We facilitated these virtual exchanges in 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2011 using Moodle, Blackboard, videoconference, and Skype.

Providing Indigenous spaces for authentic, respectful dialogue is challenging in academia as Indigenous faculty continue to be largely underrepresented. Collaborative international initiatives provide access to Indigenous faculty and novel opportunities for discourse on a global level. UAF has a significant number of Indigenous/Alaska Native students (21% as of fall 2011); however, Indigenous faculty number less than 4%. In the same period, VUW achieved a 9% Māori enrollment rate (close to the local demographic of 12%) but only has 3% full-time permanent Māori academic staff. Working among institutions with Indigenous faculty diversifies the range of expertise available to students. Because Indigenous staff members are too few and heavily in demand, sharing of virtual classrooms through course collaboration becomes a welcome support for Indigenous staff as well as a learning opportunity for students.

In the following sections, we describe the origins and design of the exchange, presenting commentary within the contexts of the two courses that illustrates student responses to contextualized learning experience in "place." We then present an overview of selected student discussions posted to the Moodle learning platform during the four exchanges. While a diversity of outcomes is evident from the exchange, we have organized these under three key themes: sense of place; identities; and roles and responsibilities.

Seek[ing] Out an Indigenous Perspective from Overseas: A Tale of Two Courses

Mercier developed the special topic course *Science and Indigenous Knowledge* for students majoring in Māori Studies to explore Māori connections with other Indigenous peoples. It flows on from another course, *Māori Science*, exploring similar epistemological issues in a global context. She gathered course curriculum material in 2006 and 2007 during her visit with the UAF and first offered the course in 2007. The course prescription for 2011 has changed only slightly since the course's inception:

This course examines the involvement and engagement of Indigenous peoples in scientific endeavors (whether these be labeled Indigenous science or Western science), historically, in the present day, and in the future. Students will acquire an understanding of the philosophical differences between Western science (WS) and Indigenous knowledge (IK). From this, students will become better equipped to debate contemporary issues, particularly regarding new technologies, at the interface of various cultures' ways of thinking.

While Māori Studies students enroll with an appreciation of Māori knowledge, they often have had limited opportunities to learn about other Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems. In 2011 (at the time of the most recent exchange), three other courses centred on Indigenous

issues at VUW were taught by Indigenous instructors. Although *Science and Indigenous Knowledge* is not required for any particular major, the course attracts students who are interested and invested in Indigenous issues. Most enrollees are Bachelor of Arts students majoring in Māori Studies; however, the course also attracts postgraduate diploma students and science majors who, since 2010, have had the option to cross-credit *Science and Indigenous Knowledge* and *Māori Science* toward their Bachelor of Science degree; this option is a significant advance in validating Māori and IK beyond social science spheres. Class discussions over Māori and Indigenous readings are a critical path to knowledge exchange.

In 2007, Mercier initiated the exchange through the following email to the then-director of the Cross Cultural Studies (CXCS) Program:

I'm in the first month of teaching ... Science and Indigenous Knowledge and it's been fabulous. The students are really keen and committed, and have brought a lot to the table beside their readings ... I was rereading a couple of the syllabi for University of Alaska Fairbanks ... What do you think of setting aside a time, and giving [our] students a chance to meet in cyberspace, talking to each other online ... The main objective would be to allow our students to seek out an indigenous perspective from overseas. (O. Mercier, personal communication, 2007)

The message was forwarded to Beth Leonard, who recently had begun teaching courses for CXCS and was eager to pursue this opportunity. We then began organizing the forum through email and occasional Skype exchanges. The 2007 to 2011 discussion forums and videoconferences engaged a total of 117 students from both sites. For the purposes of course evaluation and development, we kept copies of all forum exchanges. In 2009, we initiated a formal evaluation of the exchange through a mixed-methods questionnaire designed by Mercier and approved by the UAF's Institutional Review Board. The questionnaire included open-ended questions and asked respondents to rank aspects of the course using a Likert scale. We fielded anonymous responses to this questionnaire in 2009 and 2011, and report student responses from the evaluation throughout this paper. Feedback from the questionnaire, forum discussions, and informal verbal feedback help us to shape the exchange space progressively.

The *Documenting Indigenous Knowledge* course was developed originally to serve students in the UAF's Master of Arts in Cross-Cultural Studies program. This program has an emphasis on Indigenous knowledge systems and is "designed to provide graduate students from various fields of interest an opportunity to pursue in-depth study of the role and contributions of indigenous knowledge in the contemporary world" (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2013). As of 2009, the course also serves students enrolled in the Indigenous Studies doctoral program. These students "are encouraged to engage in comparative studies with other

indigenous peoples around the world and to focus their dissertation research on issues of relevance to Alaska and the Arctic" (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2014).

The course is cross-listed to include both the Cross-Cultural Studies and education programs of UAF. In addition to the programs referenced above, master's and doctoral students from a variety of disciplines, including rural development, Northern Studies, anthropology, and the Interdisciplinary Studies programs enroll in the class, often to fulfill a research requirement. Course topics include an introduction to Indigenous knowledge(s), an exploration of the socio-historical contexts around research in Indigenous communities, and research considerations within Indigenous communities. In addition to students onsite (those physically in the classroom), the class has a distance component serving rural students or those outside the state who can connect via audio or videoconference. During the 2010 course, one student connected from Chicago and another from New York—remarkable, bearing in mind the time difference between Alaska and these regions, as the class meets from 5:15 to 8:15 pm AKST (three to four hours later for students participating from Central and Eastern time zones).

Bringing Two Courses Together: Brokering Relationships in an Online Forum

There is a shared body of understanding among many Indigenous people that education is really about helping an individual find his or her face, which means finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character … Indigenous education is, in its truest form, about learning relationships in context. (Cajete, 2000, p. 183)

Learning relationships in context may be part of other pedagogical systems; however, for Indigenous peoples, the processes of finding one's face, and learning relationships and responsibilities to the surrounding world, may differ significantly from those learned within Western systems. Indigenous students are often taught to introduce themselves in a way that connects them to family networks and place (Basso, 1996), where the concept of family extends well beyond the nuclear family (Sarris, 1993, p. 154) and may extend into non-human realms (Cajete, 2000; Kawagley, 1995). Keeping with our emphasis on relationships and relationality in academia and research, the students' first task was to draft a bio and statement of research or study interests based on examples we provided in the Moodle and Blackboard introductory forums. The Moodle platform allowed students to upload a profile photograph, which was then stamped on all subsequent posts. Students also uploaded links and other photographs into their bios. In 2011, a few students uploaded photos to the Blackboard profile although the platform was more limiting in this regard. Alaska stu-

dents, in particular, gave descriptions of their graduate research, as well as more personal information on family, aspirations, and interests. In addition, most students used an Indigenous greeting. The following is an excerpt from an introduction provided by an Alaska Native master's student from UAF that illustrates relational aspects of family and place (also more subtly, language, in her use of the Deg Xinag[2] word *Ade'* for hello) with local control of education in her area:

Ade' everyone ... I am from Shageluk, a village along the Innoko River. My parents are ... and my grandparents are the late ... my maternal grandparents are ... because I believe that education and rural economic development go hand-in-hand, my research focus is making that connection between ownership of education and student success. (UAF master's student, personal communication, 2010)

As students came from diverse backgrounds and study interests, they engaged the relationships and identity requirement differently throughout the introductory forums; the following quote from a Pākehā[3] student also references Indigenous self-determination, noting that Mercier's *Science and Indigenous Knowledge* course fostered an understanding of the potential roles of outsiders in Indigenous communities:

I am very keen to learn all I can about indigenous women's experiences in colonial countries however, am very aware of my Pakeha-ness and understand that work for indigenous women must be done by indigenous women. Courses like MAOR317 enable me to further understand the hows and whys in this area. (Pākehā student, personal communication, 2007)

Students often shared within their groups the challenges and uncertainties of academic processes and research roles; quotes presented in following sections further illustrate these unanticipated phenomena, considering the brief two to three-week time frame for interaction during the exchanges.

Privileging Indigenous Scholarship: Alaska and Aotearoa

Students were asked to read papers we had selected, and to explore ideas and arguments emanating from specific questions on the texts. There was scope for divergent discussion, along with fun, but the activity was first and foremost an assessment, so clear direction and incentive were provided for students to dialogue. In selecting possible readings for the student exchange, our baseline requirement was that we privilege research by local Indigenous authors with specific points of comparison, enabling the students to identify similarities and differences between the Alaska and Aotearoa contexts. We are mindful that Indigenous scholarship is underrepresented in parts of our institutions that often teach *about* (rather than *with* or *for*) Indigenous people. We made sure that the critical theory, readability, and paper length matched the academic skill level of both the undergraduate and graduate students.
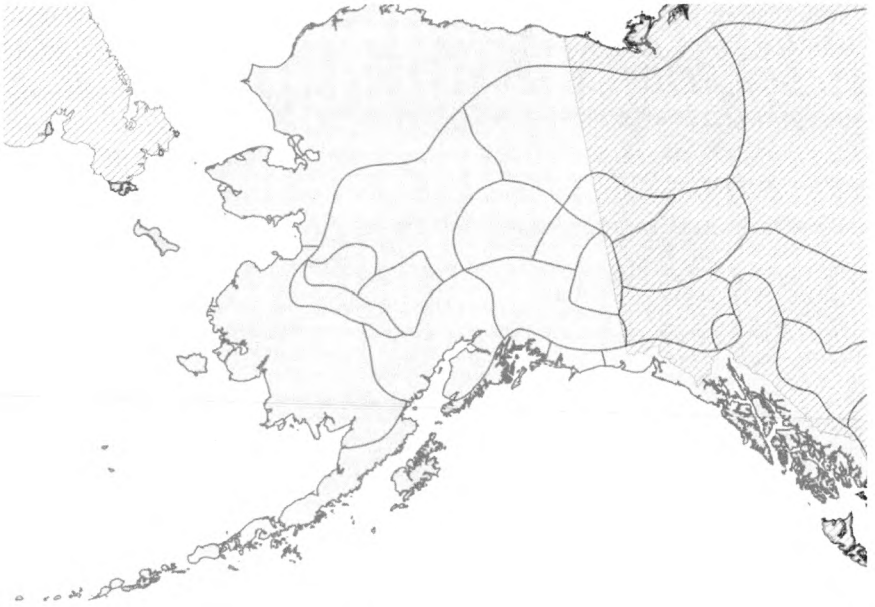
Figure 1. Alaska Languages Map[4]

In preparation for the first exchange in 2007, we chose a section of Koyukon scholar Miranda Wright's thesis, *The Last Great Indian War (Nulato 1851)*. As illustrated in the language map in Figure 1, Koyukon or Denaakk'e is one of 12 Dene language and cultural areas within interior Alaska[5]. The Dene have a lengthy history of occupation in Alaska, according to both oral traditions and archaeological evidence of 10,000 to 12,000 years ago—a significant amount of time during which to build vast, complex knowledge systems. Wright's examination of the Koyukon clan and kinship systems includes a counter-narrative (Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, & Peters, 1996) to previous characterizations of the 1851 Koyukon conflict and inaccurate interpretations of cultural concepts. For example, she corrects the concept of *hutlaanee*, previously translated in religious colonial contexts as superstition, by describing appropriate processes of maintaining balance within the individual and surrounding world as envisioned by the *Tl'eeyegge' Hut'aane* (Koyukon people). Wright also discusses how the concept of *senh* or spirit, common to many Indigenous ontologies, is part of everything, both human and non-human, as well as the animate and inanimate (Cajete 2000; Kawagley, 1995).

Keeping with the ideology, worldview, and counter-narrative themes evident in the Alaska reading, Mercier proposed a chapter illuminating a key expression of Māori knowledge, *Te tā moko me te tohunga tā moko: Tattoo-*

ing Processes and the Tattoo Experts, by Māori scholar Rawinia Higgins (2005).
In her doctoral dissertation in Māori Studies, Higgins contributes a major
piece of research on *moko kauae*, the chin tattoo reserved for female leaders.
Although Higgins' (2005) thesis does not include a separate chapter on
Māori worldview, Mercier's chapter five examines Māori phenomenologi-
cal processes, specifically *moko* (tattooing) as a symbol of *mana* (prestige,
spiritual power, or influence—English definitions also include several other
terms). Both moko and mana function as vital linkages to and within *hapū*
(subtribe(s)). Both readings matched our criteria in terms of critical theory,
readability, and length. After some discussion, we drafted the following
questions for students to address in the written forum:

Compare some of the concepts that emerge from the Koyukon and Māori worldviews.
What do the readings have to say about knowledge transmission and documentation?
Briefly comment on these readings in terms of your own personal and professional re-
search interests.

Although students were free to read all threads and posts, we assigned each
of the 25 students to one of four groups, thereby hoping to focus and deepen
discussion threads for the majority of the two to three-week exchange. Once
students posted an initial response they were free to respond to any of the
posts within their group. We also opened a forum where students could post
on other interests; however, students naturally brought their interests and
personal stories into the academic discussion. Initial posts from this first
exchange clearly illustrated that students were adept at discerning parallel
concepts in the two readings. The following excerpt from a post responding
to Question 1 by an Aotearoa student further develops the discussion
around converging Māori and Koyukon theories:

I found myself drawing comparisons of concepts of the Maori world view.... The first thing
that I was drawn to was the Koyukon concept of psychic harmony, as this is a concept, I be-
lieve, that is intrinsic to all indigenous people ... [regarding] two souls: breath and shadow.
This is similar, if not the same, as the Maori concept of Mauri (life force), and Wairua (spirit)
... Maori have a concept known as Tapu, which very roughly translated means sacred or un-
safe or laws obtained to ways of living. This seems similar to the concept of hutlaanee.
(Aotearoa student, personal communication, 2007)

Our second question generated a number of discussions around documen-
tation of Indigenous knowledge. In the following excerpt from an initial
quote, this Alaska student responded to a thread begun by the Aotearoa
student quoted above:

Thank you for your words. I have thought a lot about knowledge transmission, and the ap-
propriate means to take so that it is preserved ... I am not entirely convinced that rushing to
record this so-called "traditional knowledge" on paper and audio is the best option ... the
focus is taken away from the culture bearer and handed to an object. (Alaska student, personal
communication, 2007)

This post clearly illustrates the student's understanding of the tension between the purposes and outcomes of documentation that may serve to diminish personalized interactive roles of knowledge and culture bearers.

In 2009 and 2010, we used Leonard's book chapter (2009) stemming from her dissertation research on Athabascan oral traditions and a chapter from Georgina Stewart's PhD thesis (2007) on Kaupapa Māori science. Leonard's publication examines a traditional story in both its English and Indigenous languages, illuminating the shortfalls of translating concepts respectfully and authentically from Indigenous languages to English. She offers an-*other* ontology for reanalysis and representation of oral traditions within heritage language learning and educational contexts (Archibald, 2008; Sarris, 1993). Stewart's publication considers issues of science education for Māori students in te reo Māori, grounding the challenges of interfacing knowledge systems in an educational context, which resonated closely with Leonard's publication. Mercier selected an excerpt of chapter five that presented explanations of Māori science, drawing upon traditional concepts. Stewart's reading aligned more closely to the course objectives of *Science and Indigenous Knowledge* than Higgins' (used in the 2007 exchange). This contributed to our decision to reuse this pairing of readings in 2010. In both 2009 and 2010, we presented two opening questions for discussion:

1. Did either reading relate to your current research and study interests?
2. Or, for those of you whose research and study interests are not as well defined, did either reading generate questions or research and study areas you might like to further explore as you define your interests?

Questions drafted by the UAF graduate students (2009) followed:

1. What are some broader implications or impacts of misinterpreting and devaluing Indigenous knowledge[s]?
2. How can we elevate and integrate traditional ecological knowledge into all levels of our educational system?
3. What are the implications of using traditional ecological knowledge as a research paradigm?
4. What happens when researchers describe Indigenous knowledge[s] using Western research methods with a linguistic approach (English) that may not even have the words to describe the concepts?

Māori students, in particular, peppered their discussions with Māori language terms and explanations of them. Alaska students often commented on the widespread use of Māori terms and concepts in the readings, necessitating regular reference to sections where terms were explained or

defined. This was uncomfortable at first; however, most students were open to how the Māori language enriched the text and came to understand that English terms do not often adequately convey depth of meaning. The accepted and expected spaces in academic writing for the Māori language were of particular interest to those students interested in Indigenous language revitalization.

Responses to posts often asked students to explain certain concepts or contexts, and in answering these queries, students became experts before an interested and invested group of their peers overseas. For example, after reading Higgins, one UAF student posted the following question: "There were a few words that I am still unclear as to their meaning and would greatly appreciate if someone could enlighten me" (UAF student, personal communication, 2007); the post was promptly answered by a VUW student: "Kia ora … hapu or sub-tribe is a smaller group than iwi (tribe), and larger than whanau (family)" (VUW student, personal communication, 2007).

Bringing Faces into Spaces: The Architecture of Collaboration in Videoconferences

The time difference between Alaska and Aotearoa varies between 20 and 22 hours over the year, or an effective time displacement of between two and four hours. We arranged videoconferences during part of Leonard's class time, which meant that Aotearoa students had to be available outside of their own class time. For example, the 2009 Aotearoa class met in the campus from 2:15 to 4:00 pm on a Tuesday, which was the 5:15 to 7:00 pm portion of the Alaska students' Monday class. Some Aotearoa students had other classes at the time; however, two students skipped lectures to attend the videoconferences in spite of their other commitments, demonstrating their enthusiasm for the exchange and desire to see their UAF forum group onscreen. As one student stated in a 2009 evaluation, "It was great to have face to face interaction through the video conference. It went a long way in "breaking the ice" between us and made the [Moodle] a more personal connection" (Aotearoa student, personal communication, 2009). Another Aotearoa student added that meeting outside of their regular class time enabled a more relaxed interaction:

The videoconference was definitely one of the highlights of the course for me. It was so fantastic to do this without a frantic 'eurocentric' time schedule of cramming it into one period of class time … it enabled us to see who we were communicating with in the moodle, which made the moodle seem more alive and relevant, and less foreign and unknown. (Aotearoa student, personal communication, 2009)

Both students talk about the Moodle forum in terms of a barrier—for example, as ice and foreign—that the videoconference was effective in bridging.

To maximize the time available to each videoconference activity, we planned and distributed an agenda in advance. The conference began with greetings from both instructors, a round of student introductions from all the different sites (during which maps of Alaska and Aotearoa were shown), instructor presentations, questions, general discussion, announcements, and farewells. The primary purpose of the videoconference was to put faces to names, although students were eager to ask questions of the instructors and other students. In the second videoconference in 2009, we reinforced the group connections by ordering discussions by groups.

We worked the conference cameras to dynamic effect, using the zoom lens to get closer to groups of students without embarrassing them by isolating them on the screen. Where possible, we gave volunteers the remote control to work the camera and to mute and unmute the microphone at appropriate times. VUW's videoconferencing facility was housed in a windowless underground room, a limitation in the Indigenous exchange architecture that was vividly illustrated for us in 2010 when, at the end of our discussions, Leonard turned the camera to the windows of their UAF room at University Park. The snow was gently falling outside in Alaska, a sight that caused Aotearoa students to gasp with wonder: a highly uncommon sight in Wellington and a real contrast to the lengthening days and warm sunshine of our spring time!

The vast majority of students interacted in ways that we modelled by our own interactions. In preparation for course videoconferences, we foreshadowed our relationship by discussing each other's work and research in prior classes and, during the forum then demonstrated this rapport through relaxed and friendly co-facilitation of the videoconference exchanges. Our seminars given during the videoconference exchanges expressed Indigenous aspirations in different ways—Leonard contextualized Indigenous knowledge in Alaska in relation to her Alaska Native ancestors, while Mercier described the ways Māori place-based history inhabits the spaces occupied by Western institutions such as VUW, which exist on *iwi* (tribal) lands (see Figure 2). These areas carry their own history, local knowledge, and ways of knowing, and many Māori feel that the global system of Western science has been imposed upon their landscape, suppressing Indigenous knowledge.

Students referenced our comments and discussions in the videoconference during forum conversations. For example, in 2010, specific to a videoconference discussion on integrating Indigenous and Western knowledges,[7] graduate student groups drafted the following question: "Would it be more beneficial, as Ocean suggested in the opening videoconference, for Indigenous people to create safe, removed spaces to recover and strengthen grounding in their own culture?" This posting suggests that
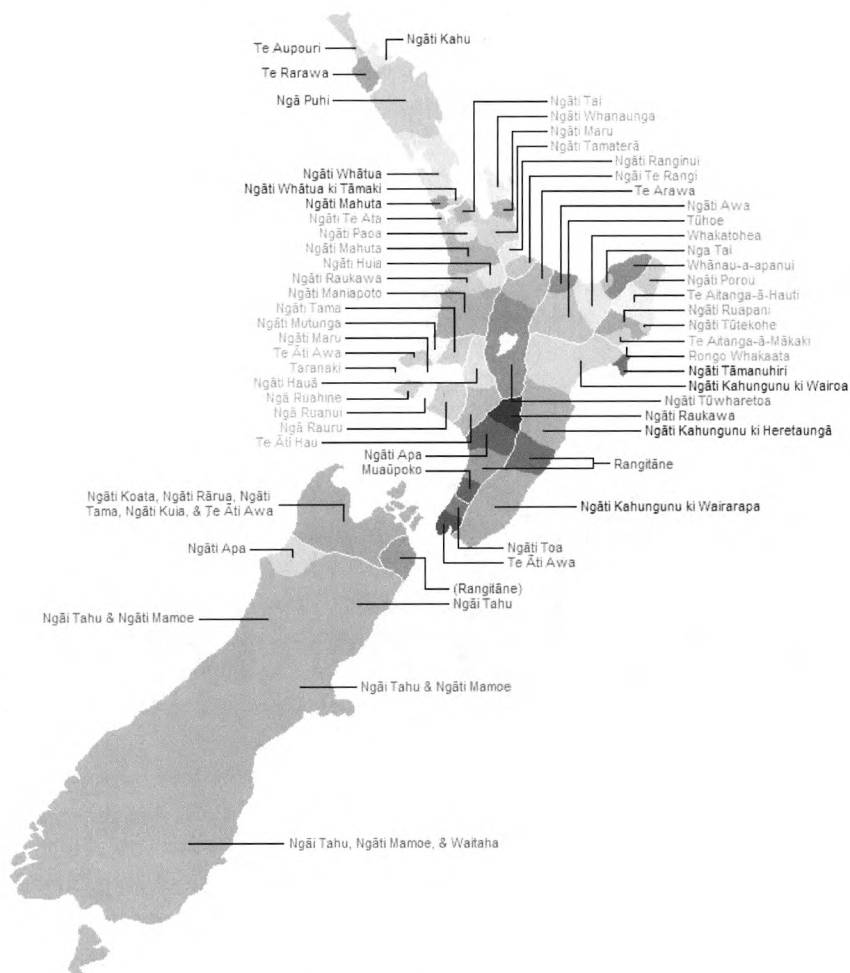
Figure 2: Iwi (Tribal) Map of Aotearoa[6]

students were well aware of the potential for knowledge appropriation within imbalanced colonized power structures, and also the ways in which knowledge might be conceived as being diluted during this process and, therefore, less legitimate. In the following quote, students also questioned the processes and outcomes of simply describing IK without considering its implications, including its benefits and challenges:

What are your thoughts about the level of acknowledgement Western Science displays toward Indigenous Knowledge as having practical applications and benefits to the lives of both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous peoples as well as the environment? Is describing Matauranga being 'useful' enough? Do we need to say it is vital and should always be considered?

In the following section, we discuss the setup of and data from the 2011 exchange, including our use of Skype for small group work.

Bringing Faces into Breakout Spaces: Using the
More Informative and Personal Skype

Prior to the 2011 exchange with UAF's *Communication in Cross-Cultural Class-room* course, we decided to use Inupiat scholar Leona Okakok's article *Serving the Purpose of Education* (1989) that examines worldview, cultural, and colonial influences on education. Okakok discusses the etymology of the term *edu-cate*—that is, *to assist at the birth of a child*—illustrating similarities to the Inupiaq term meaning *to cause to become a person*. She goes on to explain how an Indigenous pedagogy is conceptualized within the Inupiaq culture, and discusses challenges in implementing local place-based initiatives for maintaining culture and language within the Western-imposed educational system. As the companion Aotearoa piece, we drew upon the work of Māori scholar Wally Penetito's (2009) *Place-Based Education: Catering for Curriculum, Culture, and the Community*. Penetito's article examines challenges and possibilities for Māori place-based education (PBE) within the still-colonized context of Aotearoa, concluding with implications and questions for future research.

Most students who enroll in the *Communication in Cross-Cultural Class-rooms* course are pre-service elementary teachers who are required to take one diversity-focused course to complete their program. Leonard teaches this course with an emphasis on development of "a critical language awareness" (Cummins, 2001) through readings and discussions on lan-guage, identity, and education. Although class topics diverge from a specific focus on Indigenous knowledge and education, Leonard does introduce topics and themes from an Alaska Native perspective, utilizing the previously referenced 2009 publication based on her dissertation research to introduce herself and her research to the class. The exchange with VUW was an opportunity to engage with Indigenous educational issues beyond the usual focus on US practices and policies, and was also a new opportunity for UAF's undergraduates, as place-based education courses are only offered at the graduate level.

Once students finished reading the Okakok and Penetito articles, we assigned student groups and had each group discuss (via Blackboard and Skype) a list of common deficit beliefs (statements) regarding culture- or place-based education—some paraphrased from media and others taken from students' comments responding to a previous guest presentation on anti-racist education (Au, 2009). Several of these deficit statements focused on multicultural education while others were specific to PBE (yet broadly so)—for example, "presenting educational content using multicultural per-

spectives takes away from the regular curriculum" and "using a PBE approach means not learning about the 'outside world'". We distributed a guideline for the Skype exchange, including the referenced statements well in advance of the exchange, and students enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate and debate. One student commented as follows:

> I thought the talking points were great and liked that they were provided ahead of time. Everyone was able to think about them and came prepared to discuss those issues. I think that made our discussion a lot more fluid and eliminated long awkward gaps of silence that probably would have occurred if we had tried to think about topics on the fly. (student, personal communication, 2011)

Exchange of written reports on the Moodle forum and by Skype exchange varied widely. However, most students were quite focused in their answers: "[PBE] enhances lessons, doesn't take away from them"; "a natural way to teach and interact with students"; and "PBE gives students motivation to learn."

Glitches in the Architecture: Working through
Challenges, Facilitating Respect

Our course materials foreground Indigenous authors. Student arguments were thus influenced and shaped by critical Indigenous scholarship. Some students were more accustomed to this mode than others but, through the exchange, we reinforced the tone for discussions by laying out complementary assumptions, values, and principles in our course syllabi. Course objectives steered students toward specific and common outcomes. By co-modelling Indigenous pedagogies, students enacted a respectful critical space utilizing Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) values through guidelines constructed by the instructors. While a successful exchange relied upon a safe interactive space, our expectation was that students were mature enough to respect each other's contributions. In our instructions on Internet forum etiquette, we stated: "In your postings to the forums, we know [emphasis added] that you will all observe the number one guideline: respect." We asked students to approach us if we felt that trust in the forum had been breached but none did. In the three years of exchange and approximately 350 posts, we removed just one post from an Aotearoa student who used angry rhetoric, accompanied by swearing, which, while directed at oppressive state forces, could have given offense to other students. Mercier emailed and spoke to the student in question, who apologized and continued to engage in other discussions.

Students enrolled in the *Documenting Indigenous Knowledge* course are often not familiar with critiques of Western science and the style with which Māori scholars engage in this critique; that is, use of direct language

often interpreted as being angry or dismissive. This led to further discussions with students on issues of power and privilege (McIntosh, 1990; Miner & Peterson, 2001). The posts of one student prompted Leonard to remind students that a critique of Western science is not necessarily a case of reverse discrimination, in that Indigenous knowledge[s] have often been dismissed by Western academics who, indeed, hold much of the power in terms of being able to validate or invalidate other ways of knowing, being, and doing (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). The following is an excerpt from the 2010 exchange posted by Leonard, who urged students to critically consider audience, collaboration, and counter-narrative in Indigenous academic writing:

> In this piece, Stewart is engaging two non-Māori scholars, Patterson and Salmond, examining and critiquing their work using a variety of strategies (the same strategies often used by Western scholars to invalidate IKS) ... trying to reframe and redefine what "rationality" is from Māori perspectives. So, when looking at Western methodologies/theories from a Māori framework, the Western paradigms do come across as "irrational" (and vice versa when using Western epistemological and ontological assumptions) ... [I] would encourage all students in this class to move beyond "reverse discrimination" arguments. There are certainly Western scientists who have chosen to work in respectful, collaborative ways with Indigenous peoples. However, Indigenous peoples have had to struggle to have their histories and knowledge systems validated within the academic community, and there are still a number of ways in which our cultures are misinterpreted and misrepresented in academic contexts.(Leonard, personal communication, 2010)

While this led to an animated email exchange between Leonard and the student in question, the intervention ensured a safe space within the forum for everyone's contribution. A survey of the frequency of posts in the period between September 19, 2010 and October 11, 2010 show that this post was not an interruption to general discussion.

Clear and precise communication of other boundaries—deadlines for bios, assignment value, time (accounting for time zone differences and daylight savings time changes, venues for videoconferences, attendance expectations)—provided important guidelines for students in defining the architecture of the assessment. We responded to student calls for more face-to-face contact and videoconferencing by introducing the previously referenced small group Skype discussions in 2011. Students thoroughly enjoyed this and, afterwards, students from both institutions suggested multiple Skype sessions. Students wanted more time to connect: "Really fun. I wish it could have been longer" (student, personal communication, 2011) to enhance the quality of the conversation and "I think once you become more familiar with someone it's easier to open up more and express yourself. Maybe have three sessions?" (student, personal communication, 2011).Students commented on the ability of Skype to expand

upon the issues raised: "The video conference was good but did not include the opinions of the whole class … the skype sessions were more informative and personal and helped to conclude ideas and concepts directly, complemented written forum well" (student, personal communication, 2011). The patchy WiFi connectivity at VUW was an unforeseen barrier to Skype communication but only one student mentioned this as an area for improvement

Lessons from the Exchange

We have already presented substantial student commentary in the context of describing the exchange architecture, broadly characterising this as about *place*. In the following concluding sections, we present a small selection of student quotes (out of the more than 350 posts) that capture the essence of several major discussions over the four exchange years. These broadly fall into the themes of identity and roles.

Identity — Engaging IK as Indigenous People with Questions about the Other

On another level, it felt great to be able to drop the 'academic western hat' and to just engage outside of 'research' and to engage as indigenous people with questions about the other. (Māori student, personal communication, 2009)

Indigenous methodologies ground research, pedagogy, and the construction of knowledge within unique value systems; these systems focus on relationships and relationality, with an eye towards the potential benefits of research for Indigenous communities (Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl, & Solyom, 2011). The quote above suggests that the structure of the exchange allowed this Māori student to comfortably explore and exchange knowledge within the forums, through engagement with an IKS value system, to foreshadow dialogue and build relationships with the other Indigenous students, thus modifying the traditional posturing style often expected in Western academia.

Identity — Examining Indigenous Struggles within the Colonial Project

It's helped me to get out of the mindset of seeing Indigenous struggles from a "Māori only" point of view. The interaction brought home how these inter-Indigenous relationships need to be approached. (student, personal communication, 2009)

The struggles of Indigenous peoples on a global level are similarly situated in contexts of European colonization and imperialism (Brayboy, 2005; Smith, 2012; United Nations, 2008). The socio-historical, place-based contexts of Indigenous peoples are examined in both courses; however, the exchanges extend the framework for understanding Indigenous issues on a global level. The quote above reflects a growing

understanding of Indigenous challenges in this student's response to the course evaluation question: "How did this exchange help you understand some of the similarities and / or differences between the Indigenous contexts of Alaska and New Zealand?" Course exchanges expand place-based perspectives on Indigenous issues outward which, in turn, reflect an Indigenous pedagogy and perspective on human development (Kawagley, 1995).

Roles — Recognition of the Colonial Project

The following comment by a Māori student names specific sites of struggle within the colonial history, as well as a reference to Indigenous rights, a topic often under-represented in higher education core coursework and misrepresented through media:

Many of the problems are shared through (separate) experiences of the colonial project ... [There are] similar contexts of defined knowledge, language revitalization, economic advancement (or lack of), environmental problems, traditional resources and recognition of Indigenous rights. (Māori student, personal communication, 2009)

Complementary student dynamics, shared relationships, and understandings within the forums provided students the freedom to focus on specific aspects of the colonial project. In a common theme, from year to year, students often expressed frustration with the devaluing of Indigenous knowledge(s) illustrated by the absence of Indigenous histories (Manning, 2009; Ongtooguk, n.d.) in classroom education and the media:

The education system is a colonising system, especially mainstream schools and from my experience I learnt nothing of the history of New Zealand that involved Maori history or Pakeha history.... It was not until University that I even learnt about the Treaty of Waitangi which opened up feelings of shock, sadness and then anger as this history had not been taught sooner or to everyone living in Aotearoa (NZ). (student, personal communication, 2007)

Similarly, the following post responds to a forum question around the devaluation of Indigenous knowledges and cultures:

My focus is on leadership and indigenous people. Given the cultural struggle and overlay of Western culture on indigenous people around the world, their absence in leadership roles is troubling. (student, personal communication, 2007)

Roles — Revitalization, Research Challenges, and Responsibilities

I don't believe it should be the right of the state to 'save' IK from dying out with the elders, or the job of the PhD student to blitz through, record the information, and leave again. I think that there are people out there who have the right intentions, and are willing to spend time in the community to learn the IK, and will not exploit it for their own benefits (or the perceived benefit to the culture). I think that in order to protect IK, indigenous peoples should continue to value iwi and hapu groups (and the Koyukon and other equivalents) so that the knowledge can be transmitted in traditional ways. (student, personal communication, 2007)

Forum topics and discussions highlighted Indigenous methodologies and research paradigms within the contexts of self-determination and sovereignty. Academic discourses around research and knowledge—construction, production, and ownership—often do not address aspects of power and privilege within the research arena, and who, historically, has had the right to name *others* and *own* knowledge (Smith, 2012). Thus, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students new to the research arena are asked to examine their assumptions about knowledge and identity, including the role of insiders and outsiders in research. Non-indigenous or Pākehā students, prior to taking courses in Indigenous or Māori Studies, may not have the opportunity often in their educational backgrounds to examine issues of identity, heritage, and history.

I feel that being a "pakeha" I am a bit lost as to who I am ... more and more I feel myself struggling with who I am and who my people are, but I am learning to hold tight to my beliefs and seek the answers I need. (student, personal communication, 2007)

Construction of knowledge, cultural and intellectual property rights, and protection of sacred knowledges were also themes within student posts. The following post by a cultural insider advocates for active documentation of Indigenous knowledge. Historically, Western colonizers actively suppressed Indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and identities. Currently, community activists and individuals are participating in the repatriation of this knowledge using Indigenous research methodologies to reconstruct and relearn traditions and, as articulated by this Alaska Native student, "I do not advocate not documenting knowledge ... I am thirsty to learn more about who I am, where I come from, what is my history" (personal communication, 2007).

Concluding Comments

In this article we present strategies, enhanced through collegial collaborative methods, in our efforts to reclaim higher education for Indigenous peoples in classroom spaces at UAF and VUW—spaces physically located on Indigenous lands. Within these spaces, we seek to facilitate relevant, respectful, and responsible engagement of IK, Indigenous epistemologies—or an Indigenous "intellectual thought world[s]" as articulated by Seneca scholar Arthur C. Parker (quoted in Brayboy et. al., 2011, p. 425). We have identified some of the unique outcomes of an international exchange. First, it necessarily gives a critical sense of place, of one's local context, but also a sense of place in relation to other Indigenous contexts, and to global contexts, more broadly. Second, in negotiating their relationality with each other, the exchange compels students to (re-)orient

themselves in terms of Indigenous identities and realities. Third, the exchange causes students to reflect on their current and future roles in shaping spaces that promote Indigenous justice.

From the beginning, an international Indigenous component was key to course content, and the relationship between us and our classes arose out of this need. Copies of forum exchanges, course evaluations, and personal communications and observations helped us to refine the course. Although methods and course content may change from year to year, the emphasis on Indigenous spaces underlies course priorities. We accomplish this through privileging Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in our classrooms spaces, as described in earlier sections. Students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, respond positively to these academically rigorous yet non-competitive and non-posturing spaces. Following course outcomes and objectives, students are encouraged to critically examine *webs of relationships* and construct relational frameworks applicable to their research or study interests. Understanding and constructing relational frames are critical to addressing Indigenous challenges; this process is clearly illustrated in forum posts, for example, where students question colonized, deficit (or absent) discourses in Indigenous education, discuss the validity of Indigenous science[s], or examine the implications of losing Indigenous languages for the fields of Indigenous knowledge[s] and science[s].

Our purpose was to describe a methodology and model for Indigenous exchanges in higher education, and we have also provided evidence of the rich conversations from the exchanges. Course and exchange evaluations have been overwhelmingly positive, and exchanges continue to generate excitement among the students who are anxious to interact with peers internationally. The outcomes for students described here provide a strong rationale for not just continuing, but expanding Indigenous spaces across higher education institutions. While similar international Indigenous exchanges occur, our commitment to the collaboration, deriving from its manifold rewards, has led to its sustained presence in our programs. An expanded exchange in 2014, for example, involved UAF and VUW sharing a classroom for almost two thirds of their semester/trimester, which we will discuss in a future publication. Ideally, this article will contribute to the larger conversation on the continuing successes and challenges in shaping Indigenous spaces for the benefit of all faculty and students in higher education.[8]

Notes

[1] The co-authors of this paper met during Mercier's visit to Alaska in 2007. Mercier is the first Māori woman to earn a PhD in physics. Of Athabascan descent, Leonard is the fourth Alaska Native scholar to earn a PhD from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

[2] Deg Xinag is part of the Dene/Athabascan language family.

[3] Pākehā is the Māori term for New Zealanders of European ancestry.

[4] For maps and more information on Alaska's cultural groups, see the Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks at: http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/

[5] Alaska Native Language Centre, University of Alaska Fairbanks. (2010). Indigenous peoples and languages of Alaska. Retrieved from
http://www.uaf.edu/anla/collections/search/resultDetail.xml?id=G961K2010

[6] Wikimedia Commons (2014). Iwi map. Retrieved from
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IwiMap.png

[7] See Barnhardt (2005) for a discussion and illustration of integrating knowledge systems (i.e., the *converging streams of knowledge* metaphor).

[8] We wish to thank students at both institutions for their engagement and contributions to the success of these courses; the organizers of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Arizona State University-sponsored writing retreat/Indigenous space in Juneau, Alaska in 2012; and finally, the UAF and VUW technical support staff.

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