Kōrero kitea: Ngā hua o te whakamamatitanga. The impacts of digitised te reo Māori archival collections

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Introduction

Using native speakers as a resource to teach te reo Māori, the Māori language, to second language learners, has been a key strategy in efforts to revive the language. In more recent years, the dwindling numbers of people whose first language is te reo Māori has made this approach more difficult. A 2013 conference in Sydney suggested a different, but complementary approach. *Hidden Gems: The Role of Libraries & Archives in Cultural Revitalisation* was a symposium hosted by the Indigenous Unit at the State Library of New South Wales.[1] *Hidden Gems* aimed to examine the role of libraries and archives in cultural revitalisation across Australia and New Zealand (and North America). Specifically, it looked at the reclamation of dormant Indigenous languages using archival materials (such as vocabulary lists compiled by missionaries, early settlers and explorers), and mechanisms to deal with the complexities of access to digitised Indigenous materials. Indigenous people, librarians, archivists, linguists, and museum professionals came together to share their experiences of working in the field of language documentation and revitalisation.

I attended the conference with two colleagues from the Alexander Turnbull Library. We gave a presentation about our Māori language collections and how we are trying to connect these with interested communities. We talked about how the collections were made available to researchers in digital form, but did not cover who was using them and what they were doing with them – because other than our own interactions with researchers, we really did not know.

Alexander Turnbull Library collections

Library photographic collections were available online from the late 1990s, on the (now defunct) Timeframes website. Although this website did feature some manuscript material, the first large scale collection of the Library's te reo Māori manuscripts to be put online is the nearly three thousand letters in te reo Māori sent to the 19th century politician, Donald McLean – the largest collection of te reo Māori letters known to exist. These were part of the Manuscripts and Pictorial website, launched in 2008, accompanied by working translations and transcriptions ("*Series 2*," 2008).

The Niupepa collection of te reo Māori newspapers, launched in 2002 is the largest collection of on-line te reo Māori published documents ("*Niupepa: Māori newspapers*," 2008). This was based on a microfiche copy of newspapers produced for a Māori audience from 1842-1933, and converted to full text Digital Library by the Digital Library research group at the University of Waikato. The website also features transcripts and English language summaries of the niupepa, making them accessible to researchers not fluent in te reo Māori. The collection was officially released at the 2002 Annual General Meeting of Te Rūnanga o Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori (the controlling body of Māori medium schools), and

is extensively used (Witten & Bainbridge, 2007). The availability of niupepa online has led to research and scholarship about their content and how they were produced. It is harder to find information about other ways niupepa and te reo Māori material now available online are being used by researchers. There are some instances of the use of early te reo Māori in language teaching. For example, John Moorfield, the author of a series of textbooks for adult learners of te reo Māori, used extracts from niupepa in *Te Māhuri,* his book for advanced students.

Figure 1: Ngāti Paarau historian Mat Mullany used the National Library's Papers Past website to research Te Waka Maori o Ahuriri and other niupepa (Māori Language newspapers) for the 150th anniversary of the battle of Ōmarunui. This collection was based on images supplied by the New Zealand Digital Library Project, at the Department of Computer Science, University of Waikato.

What value has this digitisation of Māori language material given to Māori? Traditional ways of trying to measure value of digitisation have been via quantitative metrics, such as the number of hits on websites. These tell us about access but not who is using the material, or how, and what difference it is making to their lives.

Kōrero Kitea

A desire to move beyond access as an endpoint and gain a better understanding of uses and users were key drivers for a research project formulated by staff at Victoria University

of Wellington's School of Information Management, with support and contribution from the Alexander Turnbull Library. The project received funding from the Canadian based international research project InterPARES Trust[2], which seeks to understand a range of challenges relating to digital archives.

The focus of the research was to explore some of the ways digitised te reo Māori collections are being used, and what impacts that use is providing to New Zealand – to the people and communities who use digitised collections. Te reo Māori collections can be used as case studies to better understand impact analysis as a whole, with findings intended to be used to support institutions to better articulate their value proposition. Initially, the survey was going to be based on a list of digitised collections, with questions about how these had been used. This was modified following advice from a Māori Studies academic, who suggested we shift the focus away from our own collections, and look more widely to what digitised collections people are using and ask questions about this.

The name of the project, *Kōrero Kitea*, is a reflection upon the concept of 'kanohi kitea' which means to have a physical presence, or literally, that your 'face is seen'. In its original form, the phrase expresses the importance of meeting people face to face, and to be seen and known amongst Māori communities. The title of this project, referred to the kōrero—or expressions of the ancestors present in archival collections—being discovered by the communities that they relate most to, through the act of digitisation.

A literature review conducted as part of the project, suggested that Māori users see digitised te reo Māori resources as a benefit to language revitalisation, and as learning aids alongside other resources and methods. The review reinforced the feedback mentioned earlier, to focus on users' needs. Related to this was the need to focus on relationships (for example, between users and institutions involved with digitisation), and how these could be reciprocal and collaborative. The project was also keen to apply Kaupapa Māori methodology, which encouraged greater emphasis on hearing and listening to narrative, rather than metrics. This was a challenge, given the survey was online.

The online survey ran from April to May 2016, and collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 83 respondents. The data was used to build up a picture of the use of digitised te reo collections by primary users, including how they share the collections with others. The majority of respondents worked in the education and memory sectors; others worked in arts, in the community, and for tribal organisations. As expected, the survey showed that people are using collections for education, cultural and language revitalisation, as well as Treaty of Waitangi claims research.

A key finding from the research related to whanaungatanga[3], a sense of being connected, and making connections. There was strong evidence that digitisation of te reo Māori collections provides a significant societal impact by supporting a sharing and relationship system among communities and whānau. These relationships exist well beyond the bounds of the access interactions between the memory institution and their customer, and therefore beyond the traditional mechanisms of measuring and reporting on digitisation. This is apparently the first evidence of this phenomenon, and while only

indicative, warrants further exploration and investigation.

A high degree of sharing of information was integral to this observation of whanaungatanga. The survey showed 95 per cent of respondents shared the digitised archives they found. A high proportion (67 per cent) liked being able to share the collection with friends and whānau, and more than half (60 per cent) of the shared collections were shared again by the recipient. This repeated sharing of digitised material is analogous to the multiplier effect in economics, where an increase in spending produces a larger increase in income and consumption.

The sharing is happening via Facebook and other social media sites, as well as libraries and archives. In addition, a quarter of respondents had shared with a tribal repository. Reasons for sharing included whakapapa evidence, learning te reo, use in iwi research (including iwi dialect research), language revitalisation, contribution to community, and to educate others. Throughout the survey, respondents cited a sense of obligation to whānau and community members, as well as to share information to those who had a relationship with it.

The research also sought respondents' thoughts around the extent to which the digitisation process, and digital access and use activities might affect the wairua (or spiritual dimension) of the knowledge in the collections. This might be particularly relevant to sacred knowledge, whakapapa, or genealogical information.

There was a mixed response, with some respondents maintaining the wairua of collections can be affected by digitisation but, this was often outweighed by the benefits (for example, by preserving information for future generations). Generally, accessibility and ease of sharing outweighed concerns over adverse effects on wairua, with many respondents supporting open, sharable, usable digitised collections, while still providing caveats on that position.

The whanaungatanga phenomenon noted earlier, where digital collections are establishing or strengthening the relationships among communities and whānau, exists well beyond the bounds of the access relationship between institution and users. An example of this broader presence was the finding that digitisation supports three key government outcomes for New Zealand: the Māori Language Strategy, the Social Cohesion pillar of the New Zealand Treasury's Higher Living Standards measures, and the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process.

The research findings are also consistent with findings and recommendations of *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei* (2011), a report from the Waitangi Tribunal in response to the Wai 262 Treaty claim lodged in 1991 by six claimants from six tribes. The claim called for recognition of rights around, and control of, traditional Māori knowledge, customs, and relationships with the natural environment. Digitised Māori archives were considered in one part of the report (where the Crown controls mātauranga Māori/Māori knowledge). The Tribunal found that tribes have roles and mana (authority) as kaitiaki (guardians) of their cultural and intellectual property. It also found that institutions have a right to collect and care for taonga (treasures). The Tribunal considered that Māori have a strong Treaty-

based interest in documentary and other mātauranga Māori held by the Crown, but there are also important reasons to maintain relatively free public access, and especially Māori public access.

The *Kōrero Kitea* research was a pilot study and further research in this area could include more about whanaungatanga, to consider whether this is more or less prevalent with Māori than other groups. The effects on traditional knowledge transfer where kaumātua, as traditional repositories of knowledge, are bypassed is another area to explore. Lessons from the research include the need to extend thinking and actions beyond access, promoting a better understanding of impact assessment, and considering messages to improve the narrative used by institutions about their collections. For example, highlighting the multiplier effect from the use of digitised Māori language collections. The research also illustrates how the research environment has changed with digitisation. For example, the loss of control over how collections are used. Libraries and archives also need to consider how to build and maintain relationships with researchers, who may not be coming into the library.

Conclusion

Connecting collections with communities is the raison d'être for institutions such as the Alexander Turnbull Library. The *Kōrero Kitea* research gives insights into how this is happening in an increasingly digitally connected world, together with information about the difference access to collections is making in peoples' lives, identity, and well-being. *Kōrero Kitea* shows that digitisation of cultural material is an important ICT mechanism for Māori to engage in matters of education, identity, and language revitalisation. It also suggests that a significant benefit of ICTs is their potential to connect people, whānau, and communities, through the sharing of digital cultural heritage.

Endnotes

[1.] http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/jol/2013/09/27/slnsw-hidden-gems-symposium/

[2.] InterPARES Trust (https://interparestrust.org/) is based in the Library, Archive, and Information School at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver and is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

[3.] http://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan= &histLoanWords=&keywords=whanaungatanga

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