

Title: Using the Māori concept of 'Ako' to develop collaborative professionals in a postgraduate programme and beyond

Presenter: Bernadette Knewstubb
Victoria University of Wellington

Session Learning Outcomes

- Articulate their interpretation of the learning-teaching relationship in classes and in group projects
- Explain how the concept(s) of Ako might play out in their own practices
- Link specific group activities to 'Ako' moments
- Design group collaborations which incorporate Ako principles.

Session Outline

As with 'dysgu' in Welsh, the Māori verb 'ako' means both to learn and to teach, which leads to interesting conceptualisations of this educational relationship (e.g. Alton-Lee, 2003; Ka Hikitia, 2008). While it is usually associated with supporting the success of Maori students in culturally appropriate ways (e.g. Santamaría, & Harker, 2014), Alton-Lee's (2003) description of the ako concept has relevance to all those who work in higher education, including academic developers:

"the concept of [ako](#) means both to teach and to learn. It recognises the knowledge that both teachers and learners bring to learning interactions, and it acknowledges the way that new knowledge and understandings can grow out of shared learning experiences." (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 20).

Adopting this concept in everyday academic development activities is fruitful, as it focuses both academic developers and those they work with on the things that they can learn from one another, both in the classroom, but also in university projects more broadly, by focusing not only on the expertise we offer to our groups, but also on what we can learn from those with different knowledges and skills.

This discussion presentation will use the example of a PGCHE course to show how different 'ako' concepts were embedded, and the ways in which they affected the collaborative learning of the academics and learning support staff studying together in the course, and how they in turn have taken this concept further in learning and teaching projects post-graduation.

Key issues to be addressed are:

Participants will be asked to discuss ways in which the concept of 'ako'

1. Can be made sense of in their current group and team activities.
2. Challenges or supports current ways of practising, personally and in their experience of educational development activities.

3. Is either already apparent, or could be better embedded in collaborative group development in their own practice.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The session will comprise:

Presentation (20 minutes)

Introducing the concept of Ako in the New Zealand and VUW context (5 minutes)

Case study: Ako in a PGCHE curriculum (10 minutes)

- developing an ako-based PGCHE curriculum
- activities inside the course
- outcomes beyond the course

Discussion (25 minutes):

- Reflective questions (15 mins) – can you identify an ‘ako’ moment in your own experience as a learner, academic, or educational designer?
- What might be useful applications for this approach, and how can we facilitate it?
- What might support/hinder an ako approach in our everyday practice?
- Group discussion of individual reflections (10 mins)

Conclusion – use of Ako in other educational development activities (5 minutes)

References

- Alton-Lee, A., 2003. Best evidence synthesis: Quality teaching for diverse students in schooling. *Wellington: Ministry of Education.*
- Hikitia, K. (2008). Managing for success: Maori education strategy 2008–2012. *Ministry of Education.*
- Santamaría, L. J., Lee, J. B. J., & Harker, N. (2014). Optimising Māori academic achievement (OMAA): An indigenous-led, international, inter-institutional higher education initiative. In *Māori and Pasifika Higher education horizons* (pp. 201-220). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.