

# **Teaching Invitational Theory within the Context of a New Zealand Polytechnic**

**Patsy Paxton**

*Auckland Institute of Technology*

*Auckland, New Zealand*

**Pip Bruce Ferguson**

**Stephen Bright**

**Jenny Newby-Fraser**

*The Waikato Polytechnic*

*Hamilton, New Zealand*

*Relevant examples of practice and case studies are used to clarify and explicate the theoretical framework and to illustrate the success of Invitational Theory as one of the theories taught in The Waikato Polytechnic's Diploma of Adult Learning and Teaching. The paper concludes by pointing out a number of challenges Invitational Theory poses for adult educators in general and New Zealand Polytechnic lecturers in particular.*

The Waikato Polytechnic, situated in Hamilton, is the fourth largest polytechnic in New Zealand. Due to mergers about to take place, it will soon become the second largest in New Zealand with almost 8,000 equivalent fulltime students. It has a staff of over 1,500 including part-time teaching and support staff.

Polytechnics form part of the tertiary education sector and by their nature and purpose focus on delivering quality vocational and technical training and education to a wide-ranging population. The age level of students varies from 18 year-old school-leavers to mature adult students returning to study or embarking on study for the first time. In terms of the Education Act of 1989, polytechnics can offer the full range of programs from low level certificates up to Bachelors and postgraduate

qualifications. The Waikato Polytechnic has the largest percentage of Maori<sup>i</sup> students than any other polytechnic in New Zealand and in terms of its charter is bound to give consideration to the partnership intent of the Treaty of Waitangi<sup>ii</sup>.

### **Case Studies from the Teaching of Invitational Theory at The Waikato Polytechnic**

Since 1995 invitational theory has formed an integral part of the education theory module of the Diploma of Adult Learning and Teaching (DipAlt) which is offered to lecturers of The Waikato Polytechnic as part of their professional staff development. Educational theory is taught as a compulsory course (usually the first formal one undertaken) for the DipAlt. Lecturers undertaking the course have therefore normally completed a tertiary qualification in their specialized vocational or technical field before commencing DipAlt, and generally have had little exposure to formal educational theory.

The first year of the DipAlt concentrates on practical strategies and tools to assist the new polytechnic lecturer. As a result educational theory is sometimes perceived as a cognitive shock! It is here that invitational theory has been so valuable. Rather than utilizing arcane terminology which students find confusing, and concepts which possibly seem esoteric and lacking in practical application, Invitational Theory has proved to be an easily understandable and adaptable approach to facilitating quality learning situations. The reason for this is clear: the practical application of this theory is something which the lecturers find relatively easy. Listed below are some ways in which these lecturers have applied the principles of Invitational Theory within their own contexts. These examples are drawn from assignments, project work or descrip-

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<sup>i</sup> Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. They comprise of a number of tribes (Iwi) which together total some 14% of the New Zealand population.

<sup>ii</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi is a declaration signed by both the Maori and the Crown in 1840 and in essence acknowledges the partnership between the indigenous Maori people and the Pakeha (people of European extraction).

tions of poster presentations completed by the two lecturers. The first comes from a lecturer in the Department of Mechanical and Construction Engineering, Mark<sup>iii</sup>, who commenced the DipAlt some years after first completing his Certificate of Adult Teaching. He said in his introduction that he "came to the conclusion that there is a golden thread of truth running through all the theories. . .but no one theory holds all the answers". He chose to concentrate on Invitational Theory "because it outlines a model of positive action towards a clearly defined goal", determined by assumptions underlying the invitational model. He commented that he "found this the most inspiring of the educational theories. It gives meaning and direction to many of the things that I am trying to achieve in my role as a lecturer".

In applying Invitational Theory to his teaching, this lecturer focused initially on the 'people' aspect of the five 'P's of invitational theory. He argued that a cohesive, co-operative team of staff at The Waikato Polytechnic was essential in order to develop a campus that was inviting to students. Applying the theory to his students, Mark stated that "a priority as a lecturer must be to acknowledge and affirm the uniqueness of every person in your class and create a learning atmosphere that is seen by each of them as inviting." He rebuts claims that fairness means treating every student as the same, and argues rather that "equality is not about sameness, it is a celebration of uniqueness." To be truly invitational, then, one must try to understand and to provide appropriate learning opportunities for *each* student. He suggested that lecturers apply the theory to students by genuinely appreciating them as people of value, who are able, valuable and responsible. Mark went on to suggest ways in which the physical environment of The Waikato Polytechnic could be adjusted to be seen and to be experienced as more inviting to students. One way that this could be done would be to provide an escort service for students who needed to get to their cars after a late lecture at night. Moving from the physical aspect to the processes of the institution, he suggested the use of accelerated learning techniques to provide appropriate teaching and learning strategies to suit the learning styles of each student. He listed ways in which lecturers can challenge and extend the premises

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<sup>iii</sup> All named DipAlt participants' work quoted with permission.

which underpin students' learning approaches, critiques the current emphasis on unit standards<sup>iv</sup> if the underlying connection between these disparate 'blocks' of learning is not made clear to students, and suggested ways in which the institution's policies could both invite and disinvite students.

In his conclusion, Mark claimed that "by creating an intentionally inviting environment throughout the institution, we can ensure that every community member feels welcome." His emphasis on the whole community is a strong feature of his essay, and atypical of the assignment work, which tended to focus on how Invitational Theory benefits students rather than necessarily the lecturers and support staff in the institution. He concluded, "An invitational institutional policy will enrich the lives of the staff and students, and allow us all to make a positive contribution to the community in which we live."

The second work which warrants mention is that of a Maori learning and communications skills lecturer. It has been very encouraging to see the extent to which Invitational Theory has been adapted by Maori lecturers in the course. While one person's assignment is referred to in this section, it should also be acknowledged that at least three other Maori lecturers have utilized Invitational Theory as either the only, or a strong contributing theory in their assignment work.

In the work presented in this paper the lecturer, Paulene<sup>v</sup>, links Invitational Theory with what she terms 'kaupapa Maori theory'. She commenced with the statement that "until recently, academic developers have tended to separate learning theory from the study of indigenous experiences of education. However, in New Zealand an awareness of the ways Maori students express their learning priorities and their understanding of universities and polytechnics, is crucial to the learning and teaching process." In her essay she went on to explain how she integrates the key education theory of kaupapa Maori with European learning theo-

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<sup>iv</sup> Unit standards are registered on the New Zealand National Qualifications Framework and are assessed according to the competency based assessment paradigm.

<sup>v</sup> All named DipAlt participants' work quoted with permission

ries. She defines kaupapa Maori as the philosophy and practice of "being and acting Maori", and expanded on this theory in the body of her assignment.

Moving on to consider some aspects of European learning theories, Paulene explained how Invitational Theory approaches the learning and teaching process with the aim to understand the many positive and negative aspects of kaupapa Maori theory. She indicated how she united the aroha (love, trust), hui (meeting), manaaki (hospitality) and tiaki (nurture) aspects of kaupapa Maori theory with the four key elements in Invitational Theory of trust, respect, optimism and intentionality. Furthermore, she extended the five P's of places, programmes, processes, people and policies to include partnership and protection under the Treaty of Waitangi. She explained that this approach should assist Maori who want success in both Maori and Pakeha<sup>vi</sup> cultural frameworks.

Having considered the broad philosophical issues, Paulene then suggested specific ways in which lecturers working with Maori students can make their practice more inviting. She based these suggestions on ideas which have worked well for her in her own teaching context. She listed the articulation of specific learning goals; the provision of an explicit course structure; the expression of genuine interest in all student responses; the making of rigorous connections between teaching objectives and learning activities; the provision of appropriate teaching methods to meet students' learning needs; the development in students of different ways of learning; the provision of positive feedback for contributions and time spent; the setting up of peer learning groups as a means of student support; the development of resource files covering appropriate research and the encouragement of Maori and other lecturers to use these files; the learning of one's mihi<sup>vii</sup> to facilitate connection and identification with other Maori teachers and learners.

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<sup>vi</sup> "Pakeha" is the Maori term for New Zealanders of European descent.

<sup>vii</sup> Mihi is the Maori word for a speech to greet, admire, pay respect to or congratulate.

## Conclusions and Challenges

Invitational theory has proven to be both accessible and easy to understand for staff and community participants studying educational theory at The Waikato Polytechnic. The course has provided a basis for participants to examine and evaluate their own practice in terms of the invitational approach. It has been used by Maori course participants to illuminate some of the practices of the Maori learning environment, and is now being regularly taught as part of the professional development of lecturing staff of the Waikato Polytechnic.

Because of the holistic nature of Invitational Theory, some of the challenges and questions it presents to a learning institution are:

- how inviting are the people, eg., caretaker, cafeteria staff, lecturers, secretaries, receptionists, lecturers...?
- how inviting are the policies, eg., entry, assessment, computer access, library use...?
- how inviting is each lecturer with course participants, eg., welcomes, coffee and tea, clear assessment schedules and requirements, comments to individuals in class, feedback on assignments...?

*Send correspondence to Dr. Patsy Paxton, Directorate, Auckland Institute of Technology, Private Bag 92006, Auckland, New Zealand, or email: [patsy.paxton@aut.ac.nz](mailto:patsy.paxton@aut.ac.nz).*

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### **Levels of Ego Development and Attitudes toward Women in Authoritative Positions among Adolescent Males: Inviting or Disinviting?**

Salene J. Cowher