

THE USE OF WIKI IN TEACHING/LEARNING PEACE STUDIES: A PLATFORM FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

hware@une.edu.au
b.tynan@une.edu.au

A river flows down its course washing always all kinds of rubbish as the white sands smile up into the sky enjoying the coolness of the water flowing over them... When we love someone as we love ourselves we live in peace. We love and make friends with our enemies — we live in peace.

Severina Bougainville (Global Education)

THE PEACE STUDIES CONSORTIUM

There is perhaps a certain irony in the fact that those in peace studies often find it difficult to work together. Peace workers hold very strong views and find it easier to preach than to practice compromise. However, in Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific, university staff involved in teaching and researching peace have decided to work together in a consortium for the benefit of the region as a whole extending out beyond academia to the very grass-roots of remote island villages. The core of the exercise is being funded by the Australian Carrick Institute, which has recognised that the professionalization of the training of those engaged in practical work in the field as peacekeepers and peacebuilders needs to be recognized and planned for. In our region defence forces are becoming increasingly active – but as peace keepers not war fighters. Equally INGOs are more and more involved in working with people, often traumatised people, in post-conflict situations. There are many, many local problems but no national boundaries to good ideas and sharing as widely as possible opens up new perspectives and vistas for possible new solutions. Whilst the core consortium is made up of Antipodean academics, we regard the INGOs, the aid community and defence as stakeholders and our aim is to maximize the involvement of people and especially youth from right across the region from remote islands to urban squatter settlements.

The different universities each have their own web of connections around the region.

For example, the University of New England has worked extensively in Bougainville (Jenkins and Jenkins 2006) and Timor Leste (Boughton and Durnan 2007; Spence 2007) and has a body of African students working on peace in Africa (Adjapawn 2006). But each has their particular research and teaching interests in the Asia/Pacific region.

We also have different areas of expertise. For example the University of Sydney specialises in the important area of peace journalism (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005); the Australian National University in governance (Fry and Kabutaulaka 2007); Griffith University in spiritual aspects of peace at the grass-roots (Toh and Cawagas 2005) and the University of Queensland is

currently focusing on the responsibility to protect (Bellamy 2006). One important goal of our project is to draw up an intellectual map of the sphere of peace studies across the region and to link it up world-wide. Much of the work on peace studies understandably focuses on Africa so that it is important to look at what other regions may have to offer.

One feature that we share in common is an interest in working in practical ways with people in the field at every level. Although it has clear philosophical underpinnings, peace studies is not an ivory tower academic pursuit. It is a true applied science combining a broad range of disciplines with great powers of adaptation to develop as the world changes (Ware 2005). Whilst there is still a close relationship between the study of international relations and peace, the reality is that the great majority of wars (some 90+ %) now occur within national boundaries rather than between sovereign nations. This makes vital that work on peace studies is not restricted to issues of national sovereignty and disarmament, but is also at a local democratic level, inclusive of the youths with small arms hidden in the bush.

WIKI: THE CONTRIBUTION OF TECHNOLOGY

In the past research often involved outsiders 'parachuting in' for brief visits and then flying out, having become instant experts in the meantime. A marked improvement on this has come with the frequent establishment of continuing long-term relationships with comings and goings in both directions. But now the technology allows a constant interaction between a multiplicity of sites and joint collaborative work by people who continue to live and work in their own communities. Joint publications written when the authors live and work in different countries or even continents are quite simple. This is where a tool such as a wiki can play such an important role.

Given an advance agreement that everyone will use basic non-academic language ideas can compete with one another on an equal basis irrespective of whether they come from village youths or a professor. [One of the joys of working across the Pacific is that a single language –English - is most often the common working language across more than a thousand mother tongues and that it is not restricted to a small elite –most of those who have completed primary school can talk about their lives and their ideas and ideals in English]. From a strictly practical point of view this means that a wiki in English is a realistically accessible resource for people at the village level (Whelan 2006). That said, we in the consortium are very conscious of the need to discuss and debate the meanings which are attributed to what are regarded as standard terms once they are translated into local languages. Most people in the street, do not know what governance means, and to translate it into I-Kiribati would require several sentences of explanation (Takuia Uak personal communication). We need to debate peace beyond the simple 'people have stopped shooting at each other' to explore the extent to which justice, equity and human rights are essential components of peace (Ware 2005).

There has been an explosion of engagement on the Web of universal participation and the phrase 'social networking' offers opportunities for networking, collaborating, sharing and generation of interactive web content that is situated in people's lived experiences, moving to a participatory rather than delivered model. For this project, the discipline sees an opportunity to draw upon the web explosion of social networking tools to transform what might appear to be a simple website idea (primarily knowledge repositories) into an active and bustling community of peace users. The project intends to transcend mere delivery of ideas (although this is also part of the strategy) and seek engagement that is both enabling and guiding in order to open up the ideas of individuals and groups of peace academics in higher education.

A range of social networking tools will be employed in the development of the interactive wiki that will be monitored and maintained by the project leadership. This includes pod/vodcasts, discussion via a wiki, RSS feed, information search engines and sorting organisers and other such useful organising and share spaces for individuals and groups.

So what do we consider to be the definition of a wiki? While there are many ideas to explore (see for eg. <http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?ElementsOfWikiEssence>) it is appropriate to explore the meaning by visiting one of the most well known: wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>).

This is entirely consistent with the aims of this project to allow the broad community of peace academics to interact in a virtual space where they can truly create knowledge together. Just imagine a website where you can change the text, sound and images without complex knowledge of programming code.

Lamb (2004: 38) details "What's unique about wikis is that users define for themselves how their processes and groups will develop, usually by making things up as they go along" Further that "Wikis work great as shared online sketchpads or as spaces for brainstorming. They are perfect for creating perpetually updated lists or collections of links, and most users can instantly grasp their utility as informal bulletin boards".

The Pacific Island countries have a unique and much loved resource in the multi-campus, multi-site University of the South Pacific which was founded in 1968 (USP 2008). USP is much more than an academic institution: it is a broad and deep resource for the community as a whole in each of its twelve member countries. The USP campus in Kiribati was founded as a centre in the local government secondary school in 1976. It currently has 3,000 students (i.e. some 3 % of the total national population) doing courses at school to degree levels. Elsewhere, technicians visited "the small island of Manono off the coast of Upolu, the main island of Samoa, to set up a Rural-link Wifi network for the local community ... brought a receiver with stand, cable and several laptop computers. The equipment was designed to be easy to install and maintain and we were able to ping the relay antenna quite quickly

... The most important issue was not the technical infrastructure we helped to set up, but the long term social and cultural ramifications for the community. ...The role of solar energy and internet-by-radio technologies” are also discussed (Whelan 2006)

UPNG has five open campuses including Bougainville (Haihuie 2000). Whilst there are still many problems of ICT access particularly related to costs, the technical issues are largely resolved. We will never forget visiting a school in Vanuatu, and watching the children search the web for the latest information from WHO Geneva the prevention of malaria. This raised the question of the role of the teacher in a situation where the children crowding around the two computers had already found out more than he knew about the subject at hand: malaria.

THE BOUGAINVILLE CASE

One of the standard debates in peace studies is over the extent to which civil wars are caused by ‘Greed or grievance’ (Collier and Hoeffler 2000). Bougainville presents the unique case of people who were prepared to fight and put their lives on the line, not to gain access to the riches from the mine, but to ensure that the mine stayed closed and that the pollution of the environment would cease. After many years of fighting and suffering under a governmental blockade, peace came but by then there was a whole generation of youths who had missed out on their education and must be regarded as potential tinder for any future conflict. Here a student may well be sharing a bench with the daughter of the man who killed his uncle. The need for peace training has been recognised by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) which is funding work on developing materials for peace education in the local context and training teachers to use them in the class room (Jenkins and Jenkins 2006). But the utility of the materials, extends well beyond the class-room. Indeed, this is where using wiki as a means of sharing is so valuable. Another example would be the theatrical work of the Wan Smolbag Theatre in Vanuatu (2003)

Outside of wikipedia it is not realistic to expect to create a wiki and then believe that people will just come and use it. In fact, the very sketchy entry for “peace” in wikipedia has the note “to comply with wikipedia’s quality standards this article may need to be rewritten”. The consortium’s plan is to work together on a separate peace wiki first before moving in to assist in editing the wikipedia entry. A lot of work has to go into building up the networks so that people know that the peace wiki site is there; so that they know that they can trust its content and finally so that they know that they themselves can feel safe in participating in adding to the content and sharing their ideas. Special attention needs to be paid to involving youth who are so often frustrated by their constant exclusion from economic and political participation (Ware 2004). In the Bougainville case, local and international NGOs, often with strong church and faith connections have played an extremely important role (Hakena et al. 2006). One priority for the wiki will be an exchange of views around the region on anger management in the domestic context both for cultures where violence against women has been the accepted practice and

where it has spiralled in the follow up to the long years of civil fighting. Women rightly play a major role in distance education across the Pacific (Kii 1995).

THE WISDOM OF THE SOLOMONS ?

In looking at the sharing of ideas and materials it is important not to sidestep the difficult question of inappropriate materials. Sometimes people promote their own ideas with missionary fervour irrespective of their appropriateness to local cultures and conditions. Conversely, in 2001, the United Nations Development Program was putting in place an imaginative and highly democratic program which provided for those who did have access to the internet to put forward their views on various constitutional amendments which were being proposed in the hopes of forestalling the break up of the country (UNDP 2004). This was linked with a Japanese funded project to establish an internet café in the capital Honiara, to serve as the hub for the People First Network of 26 rural e-stations across the nine provinces of the country. In these remote rural outposts, development volunteers were available to introduce the system and even to send messages for the less literate (Pipol Fastaem 2008). This experiment in democratic constitution writing deserves to be better known. In future it will be possible to publicize such opportunities via the wiki and to seek comments equally from constitutional experts and those potentially affected but such changes across the region. If one country in the Pacific is proposing to place controls on island to island migration within the country, citizens across the region need to consider the human rights implications of such a move. Even now, the on-line newspaper, the Solomon Star (2008), conducts on-line opinion polls about political issues in which some 5% of the adult population of the capital participate.

Given the vast cultural variations across the Pacific and even within countries such as Papua New Guinea where there some 700 different cultural/language groups, it is vital to offer a wide range of choices so that those on the ground can select what they need and what fits within their cultural context. There always needs to be a consideration of how far traditional customs are still appropriate and what to do where, as is often the case, they would serve to exclude the participation of women and young people. “The concept of rights are less understood where they relate to individual protections. There is still widespread belief that human rights constitute a threat to the traditional value system simply because it gives equal recognition to all” (Tuhaika 2007).

Both Australia and New Zealand have significant indigenous populations, which results in a multiplicity of experiences and lessons learnt which can be shared. This is not a case of those countries with more developed economies telling their neighbours how things should be done – far from it (Anderson 2005; UNE 2007).

CONCLUSION

Technology by itself does not solve problems. But technology can now play a major role in assisting those who already have good ideas and the willingness to act together to create virtual communities working on common problems. Peace studies is an ideal area for such collaborative work. Good ideas have no nationality. And, contrary to much traditional lore, youth is no barrier to wisdom.

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