

Āta-kōrero: Evaluative conversations

Within matauranga Māori there lies a concept that is valuable for framing our approach to self-assessment and evaluation as programme teams.

“Āta” means to take one’s time in doing something, to practice deep thoughtfulness. It asks us to do so particularly mindful of the relationships that are crucial to our work – relationships between and with leaders, staff, students, support services within programmes, schools and across Unitec, and our stakeholders, including iwi and community groups, and industry.

As Taina Whakaatere Pohatu notes:

Āta...accords quality space of time (wā) and place (wāhi)...demands effort and energy of participants...conveys the notion of respectfulness...of reciprocity...the requirement of reflection, the prerequisite to critical analysis...the requirement of discipline...[and] ensures that the transformation process is an integral part of relationships.¹

When joined with a verb, āta lends reflective and perceptive thoughtfulness to the action.

This is particularly pertinent as we come to self-evaluation – in Programme Evaluation and Planning a collaborative conversation gathering evidence. **Āta-kōrero** can be translated to ‘Evaluative Conversations’ – conversations that are careful and deliberate in gathering all evidence, broadly and deeply analyzing what has been, looking for lessons that can creatively inform goals for the future, all conducted mindful of the people crucial to the relationships that support this work.

The process of Āta-kōrero: Evaluative Conversations thus unfolds, drawing upon other verbs that, when combined with Āta, call us to deep and wholistic deliberation in our work.

1. Āta-haere: Preparation
2. Āta-titiro: Reading your evidence
3. Āta-whakaaro: Interpreting your evidence
4. Āta-tohutohu: Setting SMART goals
5. Āta-tuhi: Reporting on

As Pohatu explains:

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| Āta-haere | Be intentional and approach reflectively. Be deliberate and move with respect and integrity... |
| Āta-titiro | To look and study kaupapa and their many relationships, with reflective deliberation... |
| Āta-whakaaro | To think with deliberation, considering possibilities. It allows space for creativity, openness and reflection. The consequence is that action is undertaken to the best of one’s ability. |
| Āta-tohutohu | To deliberately instruct, monitor and correct. Grounded knowledge is a constant and valued companion... |
| Āta-tuhi | To communicate and write with deliberation. The need to be constantly |

¹ Taina Whakaatere Pohatu, *Āta: Growing Respectful Relationships*, <http://www.rangahau.co.nz/assets/Pohatu/Pohatu%20T.pdf> (Cited 5 December 2018), 5.

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| | reflective; to know for what reason writing is being undertaken. The significance of consistently monitoring and measuring quality is implicit... ² |
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And some others to keep in mind:

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| Āta-kīnaki | To be deliberate and clear in the choice of appropriate supports to enhance positions taken... |
| Āta-whakamārama | To explain with reflective deliberation. How, in order to enlighten, it is vital that the channels of communication at the spiritual, emotional and intellectual levels of the receiver and deliverer are mutually respected, understood and valued, within any relationship. ³ |

There are five principles that help guide processes of Āta. They are important to keep before us as we engage in Āta-kōrero.

- Kia tōtika – aspiring to standards of quality
- Kia tika tonu – acting responsibly and respectfully
- Kia pai – being considerate, deliberate
- Kia rangatira te mahi – mindful of the uniqueness of actions and people
- Kia tūpato – careful of the consequences

The following karakia grounds us as we work, reminding us of the principles of Te Noho Kotahitanga that need to underpin our thinking, for the well-being of us all:

Mā te Rangatiratanga
Te Whakaritenga
Te Kaitiakitanga
Te Kotahitanga
Me Te Ngākau Māhaki
Ka tau i raro i te whakaaro kotahi
Hei oranga mō tātou katoa.
Haumi ē! Hui ē! Tāiki ē!

² Pohatu, *Āta*, 5-7.

³ Ibid.