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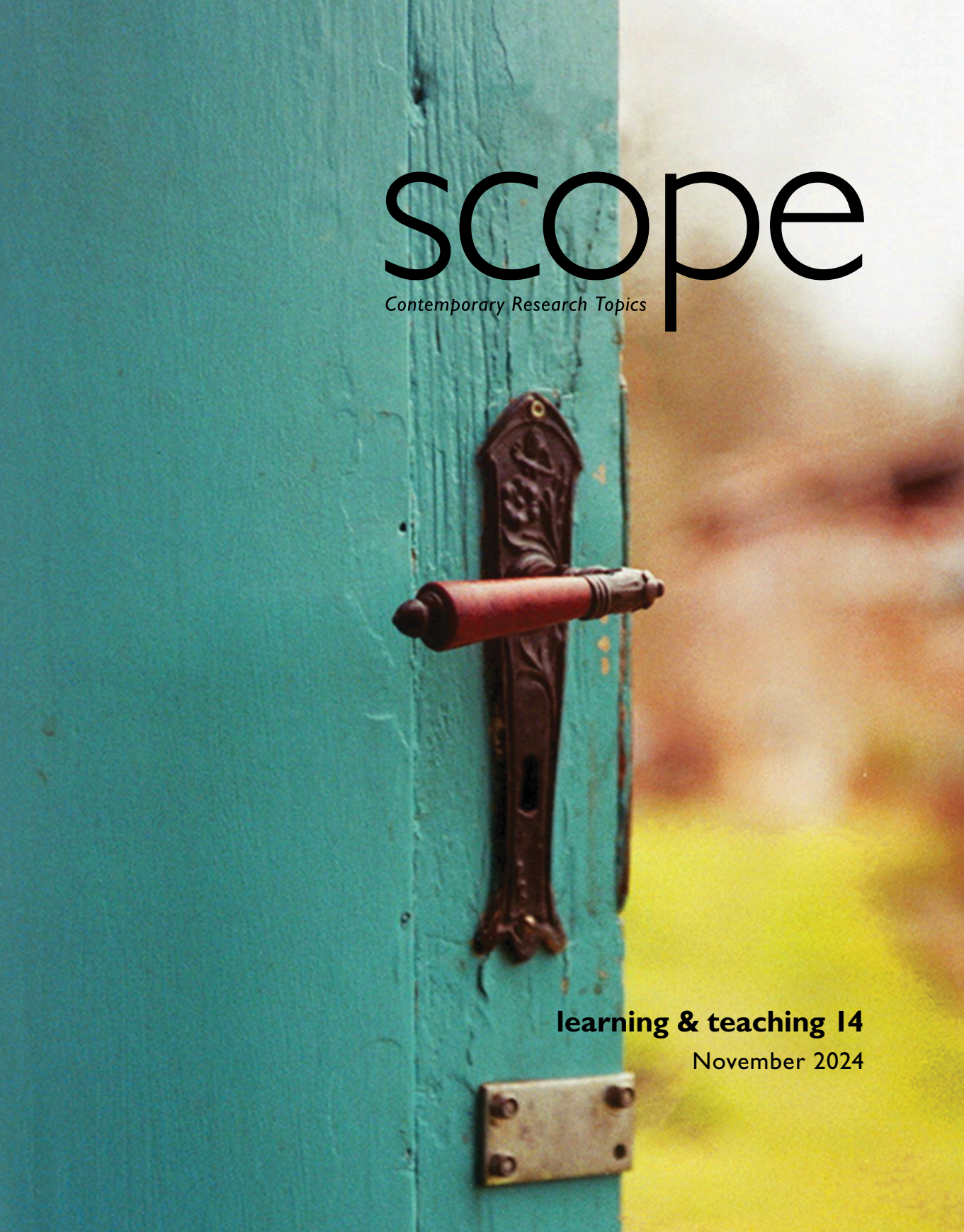

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learning & teaching 14:
Teaching Excellence

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This special issue of *Scope (Learning and Teaching)* focuses on Teaching Excellence. It seeks to address current thoughts around teaching excellence in the field of tertiary and vocational education, and to contribute to the ongoing conversations around this topic.

The journal *Scope (Learning and Teaching)* is concerned with views, critical debate and reflections on learning and teaching theory and practice. It seeks to address current topical matters in the field of tertiary education. Its focus is on building a sense of community amongst researchers from an array of New Zealand institutions with the goal of linking with a wider international community.

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TEACHING EXCELLENCE: WHERE ARE THE GOALPOSTS?

Claire Goode

The idea for a special issue of *Scope (Learning and Teaching)* focusing on 'Teaching Excellence' came about as an indirect result of my doctoral research, investigating the stories of national Tertiary Teaching Excellence awardees (Goode, 2021). One outcome of that research was my drive to organise a Teaching Excellence Symposium, which was subsequently hosted by Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, in June 2023. The interest in teaching excellence suggested that fellow educators, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally, want to contribute to the discussion on this complex topic, and this special issue was born.

Why complex? The literature agrees that there is no widely accepted definition of 'teaching excellence,' yet it has been at the heart of conversations around multiple elements of education, including quality assurance, governmental and policy discourse, teacher development, and the student experience, for around three decades (Bartram et al., 2019; Horrod, 2023; Skelton, 2005). One challenge of the multi-faceted concept of excellence is "the ease with which politicians use the word and the idea that excellence can be quickly and easily achieved" (Brusoni et al., 2014, p. 5). This is one problem which has been tied to the introduction of league tables, ranking institutions according to purported measurements of quality, and pitting educational organisations one against another in "an increasingly competitive and turbulent higher education landscape" (Lundberg, 2022, p. 1). The political focus on excellence inflicts a regime of key performance indicators and other metrics: "Since excellence is a measure of a thing, and since everything in post-secondary education is committed to excellence, everything must be measured" (Saunders & Ramírez, 2017, p. 399). Is excellence, then, "a mark of distinction, describing something that is exceptional, meritocratic, outstanding and exceeding normal expectations" (Brusoni et al., 2014, p. 20)? Surely it is relative, contextual, and depends on the criteria being used. In other words, as educators, we find ourselves in a competition in which it is not clear where the goalposts are.

If the goal is teaching excellence, what does that look like, and whose goal is it? Is it the same as 'good' or 'best' practice, or perhaps 'research-informed' practice? While the much-used concept of 'best practice' may suggest that there is only one way of doing something well, 'excellence' implies that different approaches and strategies in learning and teaching may be alive and well in countless areas, disciplines, and contexts. Nevertheless, we still come back to wondering who decides what is considered excellent. Should it be governments or ministerial departments, organisational leaders, teachers, or learners? Their views are all likely to be quite different (Goode, 2023; Lundberg, 2022). Politicians and chief executives, for instance, would probably refer to targets such as course completion rates, student retention levels, or destination surveys, while for learners, teaching excellence may relate to improved confidence, increased motivation, or new opportunities.

For the authors in this special issue, teaching excellence might be as much about educators' values, skills, and communities as it is about student outcomes. Flexibility is needed for digital transformation in higher education, as Delouche, Viselli, and Woodside highlight when reflecting on the success of eCampus Ontario's 'Empowered Educator' programme, and Quadling-Miernik also considers excellence in the context of online learning. Crawford introduces us to his "pedagogic palette," enabling educators to scaffold and tailor learning experiences through their choices and blends of different pedagogic styles and approaches. Teaching excellence may also be founded on giving learners nourishment and opportunities to grow (Crawley), building relationships and

fostering connections (Byars and Hayes), or embracing the affective aspects of mentoring in moving towards authentic excellence (Andrew). Jones and Cowie, too, emphasise authentic relationships as being key to learner engagement and enjoyment, and champion the integration of mātauranga Māori into our teaching environments. Ker and van Gorp shine a light on effective facilitation for neurodiverse learners, while Rasheed sets out how culturally responsive pedagogy, which honours cultural identities, languages, and lived experiences, has contributed to the academic success of Pasifika learners. I am grateful to all of the authors for their contributions, and know that they provide further food for thought on how we, as educators, educational developers, or programme leaders, can work towards teaching excellence in different contexts.

My thanks, too, go to the Editorial Board for this special issue: Professor Liz Ditzel, Dr Peter Gossman, Dr David Porter, and Professor Yvonne Thomas. I am incredibly grateful for your input and support. To our wonderful editorial assistant, Megan Kitching, thank you for everything that you do, and for keeping us on track! Thank you also to the Otago Polytechnic Publications Committee for the opportunity to see this special issue come to life.

At the time of writing, the 2024 Summer Olympics and Paralympics are drawing to a close in Paris; our television screens, news bulletins, and social media pages have been filled with commentary and reflections on athletes competing for gold, for new world records, or to beat their own personal best. We, the spectators, recognise that *all* Olympic athletes are exceptional at what they do, regardless of whether they stand on the winners' podium or not; they have dedicated time and effort to become better and better in their respective fields. We often hear medal holders humbly suggesting that 'luck' was on their side, or that it could have been any of the competitors who won on that particular day – in other words, excellence abounds.

This seems a positive note to close on. As Bartram et al. (2019, p. 1295) conclude, through their study comparing the views of 120 Australian and English academics, teaching excellence in higher education is "an accessible aspiration for us all." Our Olympic athletes are a reminder of the power of establishing good habits, regardless of the field in which we work; repeated choices to do simple yet meaningful things with discipline every day. For me, this is what lies at the heart of excellence for our learners and colleagues: striving to do the best we can, to make a difference.

Claire Goode is a Principal Lecturer in Otago Polytechnic's Learning and Teaching Development team, and works alongside academic staff to build their capabilities in multiple aspects of pedagogical practice. This role brings together skills, knowledge, and practice acquired throughout more than 27 years in a variety of education contexts in New Zealand, France, and the UK. Claire is particularly interested in teacher development and the scholarship of teaching and learning. She also enjoys seeing how educational technology can enhance the learning experience of different students, while opening many teachers' eyes to new opportunities. Claire is a 2024 recipient of a national Te Whatu Kairangi Aotearoa Tertiary Educator Award.

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MICRO-CREDENTIALED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO ENABLE FLEXIBILITY FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Charlotte Delouche, Laura Viselli and Lindsay Woodside

INTRODUCTION

eCampusOntario is a provincially funded non-profit organization that leads a consortium of publicly-supported colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes in the province of Ontario in Canada. Our focus is on supporting digital learning and digital pedagogies in all their forms – that is, online and technology-enabled learning – for our 53 member institutions. eCampusOntario provides supports needed to further innovation and collaboration to advance digital transformation in the postsecondary education sector in Ontario.

In higher education, digital transformation is "a series of deep and coordinated culture, workforce, and technology shifts that enable new educational and operating models and transform an institution's operations, strategic directions, and value proposition" (Grajek & Reinitz, 2019). The need for digital transformation reached a critical point when all publicly-supported colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes in Ontario transitioned to emergency remote teaching and learning in 2020. As important as the infrastructure and hardware required for this shift are, the skills required for digital transformation play an equally critical role.

eCampusOntario recognized this necessary skill set prior to the major inflection point for many others through the development of our first micro-credentialed professional learning program, Empowered Educator. The Empowered Educator program is designed to enhance digital fluency and pedagogical practices among educators. Since 2017, the program has evolved to meet the needs of modern educators, notably embodying flexibility in both structure and content. Research conducted by eCampusOntario through 2021 and 2022 revealed several emerging trends which suggested an increasing need and desire for flexibility in postsecondary education. To further understand flexibility, eCampusOntario engaged educators in 2023 to identify key mechanisms to support flexibility. One such mechanism is equipping educators with the space to experiment and skills to discern what tools and methods are best for them and their students. This article explores how this micro-credentialed professional learning program provides that space for educators and, in doing so, furthers the flexibility of today's post-secondary institutions.

HISTORY OF EMPOWERED EDUCATOR

In 2017, eCampusOntario identified a need for a professional learning model to underpin a foundational approach to technology-enabled learning and teaching. In response, we collaborated with six colleges and four universities in northern Ontario to develop resource materials that could provide a common baseline of knowledge and complement local training and development programming. The framework for these resources is based on Simon Bates' model of the Anatomy of a 21st Century Educator (2016), providing a robust foundation for educators aiming to transform and extend their teaching and learning practices. In 2017, the program was named Ontario Extend and now, in 2024, it has been renamed Empowered Educator.

The program modules were originally created for the Northern Capacity Building project, an initiative involving 10 publicly-assisted postsecondary institutions in northern Ontario and led by Northern College. The project focused on designing a collaborative approach to knowledge building, skills development, and resource sharing to support the technology-enabled learning initiatives of the institutions. The resources were piloted with a group of 30 participants from 10 colleges and universities in northern Ontario during the Extend Institute in August 2017. After the Institute, the Extend program was made freely available on the Internet and educators were encouraged to use the materials for self-paced learning, to complete the Daily Extend activities, and to share their work via X (formerly Twitter) by including @ontarioextend and the hashtag "#oextend" in their tweet.

In 2018, eCampusOntario published an Ontario Extend research report that explored the experiences of educators who participated in the initial iterations of the program (Lopes & Porter, 2018). This report examined what, if any, pedagogical values and practice influenced the participants' reviews after interacting with the program, and summarized recommendations from participants for changes or improvements to the program design, materials, and facilitation strategy and approach. Key report takeaways include the identification of specific areas where digital literacy and pedagogical practices need strengthening, the importance of incorporating experiential and self-directed learning opportunities into the program, and the necessity for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of educational technologies. The report highlights the value of a supportive community and mentorship in enhancing the efficacy of professional learning, recommending that such elements be integral components of future iterations (Lopes & Porter, 2018).

From January to May 2019, a facilitated version of the six modules was offered to educators as a 'medium-sized Open Online Course' (mOOC) via the support and communication tools of the edX platform hosted by EDUlib. Thereafter, the program continued to be offered to post-secondary institutions to complete at their own pace during 2019.

In early 2020, the *Ontario Extend in Practice* report was published (Mackie, 2020). This report identified and surveyed the number of Ontario postsecondary institutions that had adopted and/or customized the modules or resources in some format. Attention was specifically paid to: formal teaching and learning department adoption and customization; informal local adoption and customization; module-specific adoption and customization, delivery modes, and technology used for customization. Key report takeaways included a broad acceptance and active use of program resources across 10 Ontario postsecondary institutions. The feedback from these institutions was overwhelmingly positive, with many planning to expand their use of the program to further enhance teaching and learning. The ongoing engagement and planned expansion highlighted the significant impact of the program on enhancing educational practices through technology (Mackie, 2020).

By the summer of 2021, the Extend program was migrated from its WordPress site to the Brightspace learning environment. This strategic move to offer programming in a learning management system (LMS) allowed for a higher-quality online learning experience. Each course model had facilitators available to support learners as needed. Educators were able to 'drop in' at any time to the virtual classroom check-ins and debriefs. Overall, the team observed a high uptake of program activity in the LMS, with a more than 200 percent increase in engagement since the initial offering, totaling 406 learners enrolled throughout the May to December 2021 session.

During this time, Empowered Educator also began to seek institutional endorsement partners to endorse the program as a credible micro-credentialed professional learning achievement. Conestoga College was the first Ontario college to provide an endorsement and pathway for Empowered Educator micro-credentials. All program participants would now be eligible to apply the 'Empowered Educator' micro-credential for credit toward Conestoga's recently launched Certificate in Post-Secondary Teaching. Available to all educators, this 30-credit certificate program prepares educators to teach credit and non-credit courses in colleges, universities, apprenticeships, and other programs for adult learners. To date, the Empowered Educator Program has nine

endorsement partners: Conestoga College, Fanshawe College, Georgian College, St. Lawrence College, Mohawk College, Nipissing University, Trent University, Brock University, and Windsor University.

Today, Empowered Educator continues to use the LMS to deliver facilitated professional learning sessions. Some of these sessions are enhanced with guest speakers who provide insights into and practices for educational technology and pedagogical innovation. Our facilitators offer regular check-ins and debriefs, ensuring ongoing support and interaction for all participants, arguably leading to stronger program completion rates. This program is structured around six modules – Teacher for Learning, Technologist, Curator, Collaborator, Experimenter, and Scholar – that each demand approximately 4–6 hours to complete. Upon successful completion of each module, participants earn digital badges, which cumulate in the Empowered Educator micro-credential.

The content of Empowered Educator is designed to address key skills, knowledge, and attributes essential for the modern educator. It aims to:

- **Empower educators** to design effective learning activities grounded in research-based learning principles.
- **Enhance abilities** in curating educational content, emphasizing the use of open educational resources and Creative Commons licensing.
- **Improve technological proficiency** to address specific learning challenges through a design thinking approach.
- **Encourage collaboration** by building personal learning networks that extend across and beyond disciplines.
- **Foster experimentation** with new pedagogies and technologies to enhance learning.
- **Advance scholarly activities** by supporting educators to systematically explore and improve student learning outcomes.

Central to Empowered Educator is its flexibility and accessibility. Participants can explore course materials at their own pace each week and have the option to join live sessions guided by an expert facilitator. In keeping with this commitment to flexibility, the program is offered in both English and French, under the name "Pédagogie numérique certifiée." This bilingual delivery enables educators from Francophone and bilingual institutions to fully participate in the program in their language of preference. Since its launch in 2023, the French version has garnered 593 registrations, with 192 micro-credentials awarded to date. Fifty-two percent of these enrolments are from aspiring French language teachers who are enrolled in French Language Teacher Education Programs at eCampusOntario member institutions, reflecting the strong interest in developing digital literacy skills among this group. The content can also be integrated into existing institutional teaching and learning programs, thanks to its open licensing in both English and French and compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

THE VIRTUAL LEARNING STRATEGY

As all publicly-supported Indigenous Institutes, colleges, and universities transitioned to emergency remote teaching and learning, the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities launched the Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS) with funding totaling $70 million dollars to drive growth and advancement in high-quality virtual and hybrid learning (Government of Ontario, 2020). eCampusOntario was entrusted with supporting the implementation of the VLS (eCampusOntario, 2020), during which the Empowered Educator program continued to evolve by implementing enhancements to align with the needs of educators and the sector. Key initiatives include integrating Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies into the curriculum, and improving accessibility in line with the standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Publicly-supported postsecondary institutions in Ontario include Indigenous Institutes. Indigenous Institutes offer a culturally relevant education for their students, and act as a gathering space for communities. Every Indigenous Institute is unique and offers a variety of opportunities, from Indigenous language and culture classes

to apprenticeship programs and more, which reflect the needs and desires of their communities (Government of Ontario, 2019).

eCampusOntario initiated the Indigenous Knowledge Integration project in the fall of 2022, in alignment with the National Truth and Reconciliation Committee's Call to Action #62 ii: "We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to provide the necessary funding to postsecondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). This initiative aimed to decolonize the Empowered Educator curriculum by incorporating Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies, working closely with Indigenous educators. Through this project, the Empowered Educator modules were reviewed and revised to enhance the curriculum to reflect a broader spectrum of perspectives and educational practices.

Building on a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization, eCampusOntario made significant strides in ensuring that the Empowered Educator program adheres to AODA standards. These efforts include enhancing document accessibility, ensuring the accessibility of learning activities, and streamlining the course layout by integrating activities directly within the Brightspace platform. This transition not only enhances accessibility, but also streamlines the user experience, making the learning process more intuitive and compliant with AODA requirements. The full integration of these accessibility improvements was released in summer 2024.

As part of the third round of the Virtual Learning Strategy, eCampusOntario introduced Empowered Educator Sprints – an accelerated, condensed version of the program designed to be completed in just three weeks, with synchronous sessions to engage participants more intensively. This sprint model allowed educators to quickly develop key skills while accommodating their busy schedules. eCampusOntario organized four sprints, which saw participation from 397 educators across 44 institutions, including 22 colleges, 20 universities, and two Indigenous Institutes. The sprints were offered in both English and French, further supporting the program's bilingual reach and reinforcing the flexibility and accessibility at the heart of Empowered Educator.

RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT

In tandem with the VLS, eCampusOntario launched Research and Foresight services to support the higher education sector's ability to anticipate potential disruptions and prepare for 'digital by design' educational futures. In these publications, eCampusOntario explored the rapidly changing landscape of the postsecondary education sector, identified major factors impacting postsecondary education, presented current trends, and proposed questions to examine possible future implications. Through this work, it became clear that today's learners have evolving expectations necessitating more online options and new approaches to learning. This demand for flexibility is further articulated in our first report on flexibility, *Flexibility Brief 1: Making the Case* (eCampusOntario, 2023).

In the fall of 2023, eCampusOntario's Research and Foresight team engaged with educators from Ontario's publicly-supported postsecondary institutions to discuss their experiences, perspectives, and future visions around flexibility. Through a series of participatory workshops, we sought to learn how flexibility impacted the role of educators, the challenges they faced, and how they hoped to integrate flexibility in the future. Forty-five instructors from Ontario participated over six workshops. Calls for participation went out across eCampusOntario's member institutions. Twenty-nine participants taught at publicly-assisted colleges and 16 participants taught at publicly-assisted universities. Twenty-four participants self-identified as full-time instructors, and 17 self-identified as seasonal or part-time instructors. Four participants self-identified as staff from teaching and learning departments, directly supporting instructors at a postsecondary institution. No instructors from Indigenous Institutes participated.

The workshops were designed using strategic foresight methods to frame the conversations. These methods included: Futures Triangle, to understand the interrelationships among future visions, present drivers of change, and past limitations (Inayatullah, 2008); Causal Layered Analysis (CLA), to explore the assumptions that underlie the way we frame problems, situations, and solutions (Inayatullah, 2023); and Three Horizons, to explore what it would take to transition from present situations to future visions (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2006). Through these participatory workshops, eCampusOntario sought to gain a deeper understanding of what flexibility means to the sector, the factors driving the need for it, and how flexibility can be achieved.

EMBODYING FLEXIBILITY THROUGH EMPOWERED EDUCATOR

Our research collected recommendations from educators and informed our own recommendations for the sector. It was critical that any discussion stewarded by eCampusOntario about flexibility included the educators who are at the forefront of embodying flexibility. Recommendations rooted outside of their perspectives, ideas, and fears would not capture the nuance and the complexity of enacting large-scale transformation.

Listening to educators shaped the following recommendations from eCampusOntario to support transition design and change management:

1. Meeting the complexity of diversity with systems for agile, large-scale dialogue:
    - Educators noted that the growing diversity among postsecondary learners' profiles is a key driver of flexibility and personalization. However, they acknowledged that professional development is needed to adequately support diverse needs. Additionally, the profiles, needs, and perspectives of educators are very diverse. This diversity was reflected in the conversations about feelings and assumptions underlying the educators' perspectives around flexibility. The feelings, assumptions, and visions shared in our workshops do not represent all educators' experience. Therefore, having the space to hear, understand, and consider all perspectives is critical.
2. Enabling the scalability of innovation with exnovation:
    - Participating educators' feelings of being overwhelmed were ever-present throughout the conversations. Educators' shared perspectives on the need to learn more technological tools and teaching methods reflected a perception of continuous increase of workload as opposed to modification of workload. The establishment of a multi-stakeholder working group to explore exnovation strategies for the sector can identify programs, tools, and processes that need to be phased out. The efficiencies realized from the exnovation areas can be re-allocated to areas that require further support for experimentation and innovation.
3. Facilitating a forum for ongoing multistakeholder collaboration with a bias towards action:
    - The experiences and perspectives shared by educators in this study are only representative of a portion of Ontario's postsecondary education instructors. Ensuring sustainable digital transformation strategies, enabled by flexibility, will require continuous mechanisms for multistakeholder collaboration. We recommend establishing a multi-stakeholder forum where representatives from the sector can come together to co-design and agree on mechanisms to discuss future-focused challenges and opportunities facing the sector. This forum would also co-design and agree on productive ways to explore the issues and commit to action.
4. Supporting agile, shared, and safe spaces for experimentation and iteration:
    - Educators shared that the rapid pace of change within and around the sector is a key driver of the need for flexibility, but they shared concerns about their ability to keep up. Additionally, we observed that new measures to support flexibility in practice, infrastructure, and policy need to be tested before they can be scaled. Furthermore, sector collaboration in those experiments is critical if it is intended to have a large transformative impact in a short timeframe. Supporting a shared hub for safe experimentation and iteration, where multiple institutions with similar needs can collaborate on pilots for improving flexibility and then scale the results in their institutions, can reduce implementation time and cost. This model was piloted in the rollout of the VLS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our research also collected recommendations from educators. Educators referred to flexibility both as a goal for future education systems, and also as a means to reach that goal. Addressing the need for flexibility involves reconsidering and iterating on many things, such as: flexible practice, which has room for educators to experiment, iterate, and learn, and which grants them the autonomy to choose the best methods and tools for them and their students; flexible infrastructure, which is a dedicated space supported by institutions for educators to access new tools and systems, and flexible policy, which uses updated funding models and operational structures to support new ways of teaching, learning, enrollment, and assessment.

Empowered Educator provides the shared space for collaboration and experimentation needed for flexible practice to further large-scale digital transformation in higher education. This is achieved through program content and learners' choice of:

- Modularization: Learners can start/complete the module which addresses their immediate needs. They are encouraged to use their own professional experiences, no matter the role, to complete the activities.
- Language: Empowered Educator is offered in English or French to allow educators the opportunity to complete the program in their linguistic preference.
- Modality: Learners can complete the program asynchronously, which accommodates schedules and linguistic preferences, and fosters inclusivity.
- Accessibility: Empowered Educator is AODA compliant and offers multiple engagement options, ensuring access for all learners.
- Engagement: Empowered Educator is accompanied by a community of practice, with live sessions to share insights and experiences related to program content. These sessions support large-scale dialogue that respects and incorporates the diversity of educators' perspectives.

Supporting agile, shared, and safe spaces for experimentation and iteration is fundamental to enabling flexibility. The program empowers educators with the skills necessary to make informed choices about technology and teaching methods. Space is provided to enable them to answer questions such as: which tools, practices, and resources best meet my needs and the needs of my learners? Which ones should be eliminated and for what reasons? The importance of this space is critical, as new technologies continue to change the dynamics between learners and educators, and the skill sets required in the workforce evolve.

CONCLUSION

Built collaboratively out of a need for foundational approaches to technology-enabled and online teaching, Empowered Educator has supported over 2,700 educators to transform their teaching and learning practices. Over the past decade, the changes in the higher education landscape have further necessitated the growth of this program. This landscape has shaped learners' expectations, necessitating more online options and digital approaches to learning.

eCampusOntario's research with educators to understand their relationship with flexibility today, and their desires for flexibility in the future, illuminate the fact that flexibility is not only a means to digital transformation, but a key component of it. The Empowered Educator program provides educators with the skills and communities to enable the flexibility that is essential for digital transformation in higher education.

Charlotte Delouche is a Digital Learning Associate at eCampusOntario. In this role, she leads the scaling and growth initiatives for the Empowered Educator program across the province of Ontario. She enjoys utilizing technology to enhance education and increase accessibility and engagement for learners. She has a strong passion for her work and continually seeks opportunities to enhance her skills and stay current with the latest trends and advancements in the field.

Laura Viselli, M.I., is the Senior Manager of Research and Foresight at eCampusOntario. She completed her Master of Information, specializing in Library and Information Science, at the University of Toronto and completed her Bachelor of Arts at Wilfrid Laurier University. Laura has built her career as a mixed methods researcher with experience leading and contributing to various research activities at postsecondary institutions, cultural heritage institutions, and charitable organizations.

Lindsay Woodside is the Director, Programs and Services at eCampusOntario, where she heads a diverse team dedicated to growing the footprint and impact of digital teaching and learning supports to account for hybrid futures in education. Lindsay has spent over 20 years working in a variety of roles in both the secondary and postsecondary education sectors in the Province of Ontario. She also founded Ontario's first cooperatively owned craft brewery. Lindsay is always excited to be a part of facilitating conversations, building community, and driving innovation and transformation in technology-enabled teaching and learning environments on behalf of educators and learners in Ontario and across Canada.

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Article

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THE LEARNINGS PROJECT: LEARNING FROM THE FIRST YEAR OF AN ONLINE CAMPUS

Leigh Quadling-Miernik

INTRODUCTION

What makes an educational institute an excellent place for learning? More specifically, what is excellence for learning online? For non-university tertiary providers, it might mean being accredited with approved courses, while maintaining a category 1 or 2 status (NZQA, 2024). It might be built around Bangert's (2004) Seven Principles of Good Practice framework. It might be as simple as having an excellent team (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2021). An online campus is a space which differs greatly from a face-to-face campus. There are no chance doorway encounters to chat, nor a staff kitchen in which to grab a coffee or a student common room to meet up in. However, the goal of an online campus is like that of every other campus: to support students to achieve their educational goals. What is experiencing excellence in learning for an online student? It might be that the school has followed any of the nine principles set out by Henry and Meadows (2008), such as understanding "Principle 1: The online world is a medium unto itself," (p. 1) and so knowing the teaching and learning environment is a completely different one compared to a face-to-face environment. Or it might mean knowing that the students need to feel the presence of and engagement with the faculty and the school community (Wylie, 2023).

The Online Campus is one of five campuses within Yoobee College of Creative Innovation. The Online Campus' inaugural year in 2022 launched with six programmes within the faculties of Foundation, Design and Technology. The Level 4 to Level 6 programmes range from 20-week certificates to a two-year diploma. All programmes are delivered in a facilitated asynchronous manner. The content and formative and summative assessments are on the bespoke Learning Management System (LMS) and the tutor facilitates discussions and hosts live session tutorials as well as answers questions via email, the LMS message system, or MS Teams. This method of delivery enables the online tutors to encourage and strengthen learners' engagement with the content on the LMS.

In the first year of delivery, there were six intakes in February, April, July, August, October, and November, with some intakes having all six programmes starting in their full-time and part-time modes, and some intakes only having a few programmes. By the end of 2022, the Online Campus had over 1,000 students in 33 cohorts (some rolling over into 2023), with 729 of those students completing their programme successfully.

There is research that focuses on developing online delivery within existing face-to-face institutes (Edge et al., 2022; Libo & Fuyao, 2012; Tanis, 2020). It is not often a specifically online campus is set up, allowing reflection on whole school development. This is a whole school, and all its programmes are delivered in a facilitated environment, rather than part of the school going online. A small research initiative, entitled The Learning Project, arose as a way to capture the experiences of those involved in the first year of the campus. This was a rare opportunity to hear from people who had experienced the setup, the successes, and the hiccups of the first year. The Learning Project had two areas of focus along with one goal.

The focus areas were:

- to gain an understanding of the online team's learnings from the first year of the campus.
- to utilise the learnings to inform future development.

The goal was:

- to inform the Senior Leadership Team of the results in order to make informed decisions on the direction and the growth of the Online Campus by way of a report.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online education is not a new mode of delivery; for some institutes, it has been their only environment. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a global shift by educational institutes to online teaching. This had the goal of keeping both staff and students safe, while maintaining the educational journey the students were on. The shift to online delivery during the pandemic is often described as "emergency remote teaching" (Hodges et al., 2020) to distinguish this unplanned and atypical delivery and learning of content from a deliberate and intentional method. Many institutes choose online teaching and learning after careful planning, preparation, and much research to support strategic decisions. Coming out of the pandemic, more and more institutes have seen the opportunity that exists for a flexible delivery mode, be it via blended delivery or a fully asynchronous mode (Aristovnik et al., 2023; Tang, 2023).

Tanis states that "online teaching requires a different perspective compared to on-ground teaching" (2020, p. 19). An online classroom requires educators to look differently at the interaction within the programme around the content or subject matter. It also requires a different view on students' engagement and achievement beyond the actions observed in the classroom. New and different demands are placed on the online educator that stem from these different perspectives (Kwapy, 2014).

Creation and maintenance of an online community goes beyond the technology used to deliver the content (Tanis, 2020). A social presence within the online space arises through interactions. These interactions connect the campus to the students, creating a community: a learning community or a community of practice. Wenger (1998) describes a community of practice as a group of people with a common goal who interact to improve their understanding. One important characteristic of a successful community is a connection between an educator and the students (Kwapy, 2014). The challenge of building a community that may be scattered and asynchronous requires careful and consistent communication in order to halt the perception of isolation.

In an online asynchronous campus, students may have little to no human contact throughout their programme. The role of the educator or motivator changes to become more visible within their limited communication and interactions. There are no immediate smiles, thumbs up or questioning glances. Understanding the role an online educator takes is an important aspect in building the online community (Kwapy, 2014). In a community where all belong but have little social interaction, the educator needs to use different strategies to create a sense of belonging. It is not just about creating the community but also fostering it so that it continues (Henry & Meadows, 2008). Managing the expectations of the students towards the educator is also required. In a synchronous environment, students know the tutor is there for immediate answers and encouragement; however, in an asynchronous environment, answers may come a day later. Students need help to understand that the different environments have different operational practices. The educator is required to carefully consider every student within the whole group through individual communication (Libo & Fuyao, 2012). Answering whole-class or individual questions, providing support, advice and direction, and enhancing confidence and participation are just a few aspects of the role. Providing educators and students with the appropriate tools and training is important for individual success (Kwapy, 2014). Not only do tutors need to be tech-savvy (Aggarwal et al., 2006), but they

must be aware of the different pedagogical approaches that are required. Research has shown that students need an online educator who is engaged, organised, and communicative (Tanis, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The Learning Project's first focus was to gain an understanding of the Online Team's learnings from the first year of the campus. This meant that everyone involved in the Online Campus was a potential participant; a total of 15 people with roles from administration, teaching, campus management, and strategic leadership. Anonymity was given and participants chose pseudonyms should any responses be used in the eventual report to the Executive Team. The research design for the project was a small qualitative-based investigation extended to all potential participants.

After gaining initial approval from the organisation's Research Ethics Committee, The Learning Project was planned to invite written responses to questions with a specific focus, to elicit thoughts on the given topic. The potential participants were sent an introductory email outlining the investigation and the process for gaining information over the coming weeks. Each week for five weeks the participants were sent a Microsoft form link to that week's focused question along with the detailed information about the project. Each Microsoft form gave recipients the option to opt into the research before answering the question.

Questions

> Question 1: How does the Online campus differ from a F2F campus in terms of: your role as a tutor, an administrator, a leadership team member? Your processes, your practice?
>
> Question 2: How does the Online campus differ from a F2F campus in terms of: building a relationship with students? What stories do you have on how you built a relationship with a student, a group, or an intake?
>
> Question 3: How does the Online campus differ from a F2F campus in terms of: building a relationship with fellow staff members? What stories do you have where you changed your actions to build a relationship with a colleague/colleagues?
>
> Question 4: How does the Online campus differ from a F2F campus in terms of: creating a learning environment for students, for you, for others? What stories do you have where you created this environment?
>
> Question 5 (final): What do your learnings mean for the overall improvement of the Online Campus as we grow?

The questions were designed to take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to answer. Participation was voluntary with the weekly option to opt in, depending on the participant's time, and consideration of the focus area. Data was not reviewed for analysis until after the week six email.

- Week 0: Introductory email to all, outlining the project's aim, the potential outcomes of the research, and the method of data collection.
- Week 1: Email with link to an MS form asking if they agreed to take part, what their pseudonym would be, and question 1: their role in the Online campus compared to the F2F campus.
- Week 2: Email with link to the second question: relationship building with students.
- Week 3: Email with link to the third question: relationship building with colleagues.
- Week 4: Email with link to the fourth question: creating a learning environment.
- Week 5: Email with link to the fifth question: learning for overall improvement.
- Week 6: Thanks, with links to the MS forms with focus topics for any extra data they had to offer.

The raw data of a total of 35 responses was collated, put into a spreadsheet under each of the questions, and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as it is a robust method that allows for developing and analysing patterns across a specific dataset from coding to themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis started with the question, "What is this story trying to say?" The answer to this question led to words and phrases that became the codes seen across the entire dataset. Some codes were frequently seen, including *techno focus* and *isolated*, while others were intermittent, such as *WFH (work from home) – a bonus.* From the codes, themes were identified. Some had an overall topic focus and subtopics within that; for example, *communication* was broken down into sub-topics: *communication – challenging, communication – time consuming, communication – techno.*

As the questions each had a different focus, it was important that the themes that arose were different to the topic areas. Braun and Clarke (2022) have three guidelines when coding: do not copy, identify the angle, and indicate the analytical take. Taking question two, for example (How does the Online campus differ from a F2F campus in terms of building a relationship with students?), the topic area is relationship, but the themes arising emphasised the differences within relationships such as a difficult connection or communication challenges and building trust.

Maintaining distance and anonymity

The researcher is a part of the Online Campus; therefore, it was important that all data was deidentified and could not be associated with the participants. Although the Microsoft Forms response spreadsheets had participant names within them, only participants' responses were added to the separate data analysis spreadsheet after data collection had closed. This allowed coding and analysis to focus purely on the responses. The responses were mixed up so that each participant's answers were not in the order in which they were received. This created distance between the two spreadsheets and any knowledge of the participant or previous conversations had around the Online Campus. If the report to the Executive Team required any responses which needed names associated with them, then the pseudonyms would be employed.

Limitations of The Learning Project

As the survey was voluntary with the opt-in approach across the weeks, not every participant responded. Some responded only once or twice, others responded to all five questions, and some not at all. The questions had a short response time so as not to add to participants' already-overburdened workloads. This gives a shallower depth of data than one would hope for.

FINDINGS

The Learning Project's first focus was to gain an understanding of the online team's learnings from the first year of the campus. This understanding led to the project's second focus: to utilise the learnings to inform future development, namely to the Executive Team who have the power to make decisions. From the data analysis, the codes were collated, and four key themes arose, some with sub themes:

- Connection: The importance of building it and the challenges in building it.
- Communication: Online communication challenges, the different communication strategies used to build relationships, and the intentional efforts used.
- Intentionality/Proactiveness.
- Isolation of the students and of the staff.

Quotes from participants have not been adjusted for grammatical errors.

Connection

Connection between the educator and the students is considered an important characteristic of education, especially within the online environment (Kwapy, 2014). It is therefore very significant that the first theme that arose was the importance of connection and the challenges of building it. Connection covers aspects of the relationship between educators and students, the social and learning interaction, the trust that is within the connection, and the sense of community within the cohort. Many participants commented on the need to build this sense of a community, relationship, or connection between the individual and the cohort. One participant highlighted that, due to the invisibility of the educator, the students may wonder who or what the educator actually is: "In the online campus environment, students cannot get in touch with the tutor directly and they don't even know whether the tutor is a real person or just a robot with AI." The response highlighted the experience of the participant with a student who was surprised to find that the communication received was from their tutor not a generated AI response.

Creating a connection that is personal, honest, and empowering for the students generated some common statements. One participant listed their important focus areas as "encouraging active participation, giving clear and timely feedback, fostering a sense of community, and utilising the right tools and resources." Challenges with building that connection were also a common theme among participants. One respondent claimed that "the majority of the learners do not want to engage with the tutor/facilitator. They are happy to do the work and complete the qualification."

Attention was also drawn to the obviously different environment: "there is a lack of face-to-face interaction. Without the ability to physically see and interact with students, it can be harder to establish a personal connection."

Respondents also considered the educator's role: "Another challenge in online is that there should not be too much tutor involvement and so as a tutor I struggled with where to draw the line. When am I building relationships and when am I giving more than I should."

Communication

Communication between educators and students is considered to be critically important (Tanis, 2020). Within online teaching, communication tends to be more written than verbal. Various tools are used by the participants, such as email, video conferencing, and chat/message systems, but in general "all communication is more 'laboured'" was a comment that was present throughout the data. Written communication could be seen as more formal than spoken communication, as written exchanges lack the nuances that can be expressed in verbal tone, facial expressions, and body language. One participant summed it up in one sense: "It takes longer to type something (and word it well), then [i.e., than to] quickly pop over in person and say something."

There was a strong awareness of the challenges various communication methods posed, not just in communicating between the educator and students but between colleagues. Proactiveness in reaching out, quick response times, and regular communication and feedback featured in the participants' comments. One participant has learnt to distinguish their communication based on the recipient: "Some colleagues take in information (and action it) better when it is written, not spoken. I have learnt which I do a quick video call then convey the info verbally and which I type up what I want them to do."

Intentionality/Proactiveness

Kwapy (2014) considers three areas important for developing online communities: careful planning, continued support, and intentional tasks and activities. The Online Campus team members highlighted their awareness of

their actions. They were intentional in building relationships and connections with the students as well as with their colleagues. They did this not only by having regular meetings or using collaboration tools but also by how they communicated: "More greeting and use more emotion symbol to reduce the possible misunderstanding between each others."

The participants were aware of their actions creating connection with the students as highlighted by this comment:

> Sometimes during 1:1s I'll practise active listening and connect with the students in that way .... I enjoy getting to know people and so I generally can connect with students easily in a 1:1. I realised that I needed additional time between the 1:1s to allow the students to share about themselves and foster that connection.

As an online campus has the challenge of fostering more social interaction, the push to create moments where it was "more play than business" was a sub-theme. This often involved taking an interest in the person's life, having more sideline chatter, and meeting for the sake of personal interaction rather than a discussion about education.

Isolation

The Online Campus team all work from home, so the participants are located across Aotearoa New Zealand. There is no ability to all meet in one face-to-face campus without booking flights and accommodation. Flexibility with work, no traffic, and no parking issues were mentioned as bonuses of being part of the Online Team; however, there was awareness of the isolating nature of the campus environment, not just for students but also for the staff. Working from home is part of normal Online campus operations, yet there is a lack of policies and procedures to support staff in isolating environments, beyond those that were created for the temporary COVID-19 emergency lockdown response. The online environment lacks human contact unless people make the intentional effort to create a sense of community (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Henry & Meadows, 2008). One participant observed that students "only want to reach out once they have seen/heard the facilitator and have confidence that the desire to connect is real."

The awareness that students need a high level of self-motivation and resilience was a sub-theme, echoing Wylie's (2023) research. As one participant described, without the "tutor's gate-keeping" to manage the progression of learning, some students feel empowered; however, without the "spoon feeding of information by the tutor, some students struggle more than if they are based in a classroom."

OUTCOME

The Learning Project had two focus areas with one goal: to gain an understanding of the Online Team's learnings from the first year of the campus, and to utilise the learnings to inform future development. Learnings from this research led to a report with recommendations to the Senior Leadership Team to consider in their strategic planning for the Online Campus.

Recommendations covered:

- A revision of the Tutor induction process to incorporate the intentional effort that is required to build and maintain communication and connection with both students and staff.
- A suggestion that every team member work on campus at least once a fortnight to build connection with the face-to-face campuses and reduce the feelings of isolation.
- Improved communication flow of face-to-face campus events that staff and students can attend.
- Consideration of the policies around working from home.
- Consideration of the health and wellbeing of the Online staff.

CONCLUSION

It is rare that a new school is set up from scratch allowing for whole-school reflection leading to improvements from what is learned. The purpose of The Learning Project was to gain an understanding of these learnings and to utilise them to inform future development. The four themes highlighted in this project are known factors in the operations of an online institute. Being similar to other online institutes allows the Online Campus to know they are following a similar journey, and from this knowledge comes great opportunities to bring change and improvement for everyone involved, from staff to students. Currently, the Online Campus has been described as "an invisible campus held together by spreadsheets." This is an apt description. The Online Team strive to be and have excellence within our campus for both the Online staff members and the students through improved practices around connection and communication. We strive to uphold Henry and Meadows' (2008) eighth principle for excellence in web-based teaching: "Excellence comes from ongoing assessment and refinement." It is hoped that with these findings the Senior Leadership Team will be able to make informed decisions on the direction and growth of the Online Campus for future years.

Leigh Quadling-Miernik is building on her experience in a career of education by taking the Doctorate of Professional Practice journey. The journey, in its fourth year, is looking into professional identity development for tertiary educators. Her passion for creating learning opportunities and the motto "whatever gets to the goal with integrity" are her trusted travel companions.

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THE PEDAGOGIC PALETTE: PERSONALISING PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE

Russell Crawford

INTRODUCTION

This article is a practice-based educational work that is theory-informed and presented in two broad sections. The first establishes the pedagogic epistemology underpinning the second section, where a novel framework is outlined for the reader. Since 2018, higher education has moved largely towards a wellbeing-focused, outcomes-based approach to learning, teaching, and assessment. This approach built upon existing trends and truly crystalised just prior to the pandemic as a driver in higher education (Henning et al., 2018). Whilst the logic and global events underpinning this movement may be inferred from the previous work and the historic change of perspective post-2019, it almost chronically fails to account for a truism that hides at the very centre of modern higher education practice and that pre-dates global events by a significant margin: "Educational theory is a theory of conduct" (Chambliss, 1987a).

This truism, deceptively simple at first, becomes more meaningful through repetition because it highlights a sector trend. Superficial delivery style(s) are being considered 'educational theory' over actual pedagogic theory-informed practice, irrespective of the global focus du jour (Chambliss, 1987b). Even as recently as 2011, there is literature to support this notion that the 'how-to' aspects of learning and teaching may be more prevalent than the deeper pedagogic underpinnings of disciplinary educational practices (Geirsdóttir, 2011).

This practice-based article, and the novel framework outlined within, explore and offer a position on the timelessness of true educational theory as a way for educators to understand their discipline, frame and re-frame their expertise, and impart 'learning.' To accomplish this feat, it is necessary to work from two key assumptions:

- **Assumption 1** – That the educator has several educational theories they either knowingly or unknowingly apply in their routine practice (in other words, their pedagogic comfort zone).
- **Assumption 2** – That there will often be educational settings or goals that require more than those comfortable routine practices (by analogy: every problem looks like a nail if the only tool you have is a hammer).

Accepting these assumptions acts as the groundwork for embracing the latter part of the truism, that of a "theory of conduct" distinct from delivery style(s). A theory of conduct in this context means the conduct of the educational practitioner (facilitation as pedagogy). It encompasses their curation of any number of relevant pedagogic theories and practices to suit the needs of the learning, and is linked with work outlining flexible pedagogies (Ryan & Tilbury, 2013).

This theory is a simple idea but increasingly complex and challenging in implementation for contemporary higher education, with such diverse sets of practitioners all educating in their own way. Adding to this complexity is a described subset of educational practitioners sometimes termed 'pracademics,' defined as discipline practitioners (rather than higher education specialists), industry contributors, well-meaning amateurs, and everything in

between (Powell et al., 2018). This variable range of practices brings with it an added dimension of critical thinking on what the 'student experience' actually feels like for recipients on the ground (Dickinson et al., 2022).

Many higher education providers attempt to enforce probationary requirements and/or academic development offers to ensure teaching staff have a suitable higher education qualification. However, the reality is that the higher education sector is resource-limited (principally in time, but also in cost), and the appealing intrinsic value that industry experts often promise inevitably pulls in the opposite direction (Nurunnabi et al., 2019). Some providers opt instead for teaching-only contracts to ensure a backstop of highly-qualified pedagogic practitioners directing the learning. This means that industry experts can be brought in, pitch their specialism, and leave. Learning consolidation and comprehension is then picked up by the professional teachers to great beneficial impact. However, this combination can be expensive to offer (Okolie et al., 2020). Other providers opt for a more 'research-informed teaching' approach that attempts to link the practitioner's own research interests with their teaching practice for authenticity. This approach can work, to a degree, provided these two aspects are aligned and consistent (Dickinson et al., 2022). The model struggles when niche research interests and the wider curriculum are too far apart. Arguably, the entire undergraduate student experience, barring perhaps the final year, is not well served by this model in practice, as it still does not fundamentally ensure that professional educators are the interface points for learning, a pedagogical position that is supported by the recent literature but still open to interpretation.

Taking the central premise outlined in the earlier two assumptions and the above position, and reframing challenges as opportunities, there is an argument for enhanced pedagogic literacy as a basic competency to augment the wider educational experience for students. The work presented here offers a potential solution that is practical and highly flexible. Enter then, the Pedagogic Palette, a scaffolded tool for educators that gives structure and outline for how they might apply a flexible set of complementary evidence-informed educational practices (in other words, their theory of conduct). The intent of the palette is to allow the practitioner to efficiently select, define, and apply their personalised learning and teaching approach on the ground. It permits risk-taking by combining the familiar with the new. Educators can thereby reap the benefits of the wealth of pedagogic literature underpinning each facet of the palette without necessarily having to take the time to be an expert in each of them (Mynott & Zimmatore, 2022).

This author specifically designed the pedagogic palette based on an action research approach to curating observations or reports of interdisciplinary educational practices and presented it to be applicable in a discipline-agnostic way. The pedagogic palette presents a curated selection of pedagogic theories and approaches that the educator can self-select, self-define with, or even sample from to inform their own learning and teaching decisions in class and curricula.

With over 50 basic (one-to-one) combinations possible (potentially several hundred combinations, growing exponentially, if applying more than two palette theories), the pedagogic palette attempts to allow educators of any ilk to self-select, develop, test, and apply established educational theory through their own practice. It is intended to set the stage for consistent educational scholarship (Felten, 2013). By promoting evaluation by the educator who looks to apply the tool in their own practice, the pedagogic palette offers a diverse but defined range of praxis (in other words, the way in which learning, skills and theory are enacted) that can be used alone or in combinations to engage, assess, and challenge learners to scaffold their learning.

THE PEDAGOGIC PALETTE UP CLOSE

The pedagogic palette consists of eight pedagogic styles and seven broad pedagogic approaches, adopting a curated selection of evidence-informed educational theories and practices as follows.

Figure 1. The Pedagogic Palette (R. Crawford).

Eight styles	Seven approaches
Challenge-based Learning	Design Thinking
Problem-based Learning	Connectivism
Gamification / Playful Learning	Contextualism
Interprofessional Learning	Constructive Alignment
Workplace-based Learning	Threshold Conceptual Learning
Affirmative Appreciative Enquiry	Situated Learning (social) Pedagogies
Action Learning	5-Step Blended Model
The Creativity and Innovation Effectiveness Profile	

Figure 2. Summary of the styles and approaches that comprise the pedagogic palette.

The following subsections offer context and additional detail to expand upon the individual elements of the pedagogic palette and aid the practitioner looking to apply the palette in understanding where and how these elements apply. Many combinations of styles and approaches are possible, with many being complementary (for example, design thinking and gamification for learning). Rather than risk limiting the combinations by outlining too many here, the power in the palette is, in the author's view, through the educator experimenting themselves in the context of their own teaching.

The eight palette pedagogic styles

Challenge-based and problem-based learning: Pedagogy and practice

Challenge-based Learning (CBL) is an active, student-directed approach to learning and teaching. It is grounded in self-directed learning theory and closely linked to Problem-based (PBL) modes of learning practice (Wood, 2003). CBL and PBL are grounded in an adult learning theory epistemology, meaning that certain assumptions can be made around intrinsic and extrinsic learner motivation when engaging with either pedagogy. This grounding also gives the educator the chance to create a session template that any discipline can then adopt and adapt to their own contexts whilst being assured that the session structure is both sound and efficient in terms of pedagogy, and impactful in its approach (Colliver, 2000). The distinction between CBL and PBL comes, unsurprisingly, in the issue these similar styles are intended to explore. PBL uses a real or simulated problem to help small groups self-select the learning they need to address that problem and, in doing so, grow and consolidate both knowledge and skills. CBL changes the focus towards addressing the issue with a greater scope and a wider perspective. Both approaches essentially use the same highly structured pedagogic application to achieve their learning outcomes (Gallagher & Savage, 2023).

Gamification or playful learning

Gamification in the higher educational context has been shown to be a valuable and impactful tool. Engaging and developing learning through game-based methods has been successful in supporting small group learning, linked to concepts of andragogy in the literature (Caponetto et al., 2014). The pedagogic literature also demonstrates that play enhances a broad and useful range of skills such as communication, logistics management, interpersonal relationships, and team building (Hamari et al., 2014). The modes of implementation and styles of play are diverse, stretching across physical and digital media (Sailer & Homner, 2020). The take-home message of this approach, justifying its inclusion in the palette, is that it is inherently creative, with imagination the only limit to the application of playful learning. It leads to practitioners using their own creativity when deciding how to apply gamification to support learning. Within this pedagogy there are several fundamental questions that adopting this approach entails, with the most immediate always being the nature of the play – is it collaborative, competitive, or a hybrid? From this first decision, the gamification shapes its impact on learners and offers educators a valuable and versatile tool to apply.

Interprofessional learning

Interprofessional learning emerged as a pedagogic practice from the health and legal professions. It can, however, be applied in many educational contexts where there are multiple disciplines and professionals interacting in a team, industry, or real-world context. For the educator, it makes for an attractive option that has a strong assessment rationale for learning. The interdisciplinary nature of the pedagogy is key to that rationale (Curran et al., 2010). This pedagogic style is therefore a reliable and proven go-to for educators who are looking to link assessment with professional identity and practice.

Workplace-based learning

Linked tightly to the communities of practice and experiential learning pedagogic literature bases, workplace-based learning (WBL) in essence connects learning to and within the workplace. It has a strong element of social learning at its core, and links well with contextual learning philosophy (Scholtz, 2020). This style of learning is participative in nature, and gains its value from being applied in real-world (not simulated) environments in which productivity, established social norms, and hierarchies are experienced (Nikolova et al., 2014). Building on this contextualist pedagogic view of WBL, there is an authenticity to the work that both drives learning and places it at risk. As learners enter these environments, they (and their learning) become part of that living culture and a shared 'work' experience; however, if the educator is mindful of these risks and their curriculum design has mitigation built in for them, learners can gain a great deal of positive impact from WBL (Rhodes & Shiel, 2007).

One thing to note with WBL is that there are relatively few excellent examples of assessment related to this style of pedagogy currently in the sector (Scholtz, 2020). This might arguably be a caution, but it also represents an opportunity for pedagogues to lead the way in defining what rigorous and valid assessment looks like in the workplace environment.

Affirmative appreciative enquiry

At its core, affirmative appreciative enquiry (AAE) is a pedagogic style that can be applied to complex organisations, structures, or individuals. AAE works from the base assumption that there are observable peak performances (in knowledge, skill, productivity, impact, and so on) that may be used to identify contributory factors to positive performances for improvement planning. Pedagogues can then engage in intentional collective analysis to causatively link peak with action (Cram, 2010). Therefore, AAE is a pedagogic tool that the educator adopts or adapts when looking to explore positive practices in a systematic, evidence-informed way. A good way to think about AAE in this context is by having the educator start by asking "how to think like a(n) {insert discipline here}" and then designing their learning accordingly. AAE lends itself well to educational scholarly evaluation of 'what works,' and offers a useful and rigorous tool to articulate disciplinary teaching practices in a causative manner (Bushe, 2007).

Action learning

Action learning offers a well-defined systematic approach to introducing innovation or change and then evaluating its effectiveness from the point of view of the individual (Pedler & Burgoyne, 2008). Action learning is best applied when the educator seeks to focus inwardly on their own educational practice, being a highly reflective pedagogic approach (Rimanoczy, 2007). It is both a way of producing knowledge about learning and a powerful way of improving reflection on learning. Helpfully, most educators either knowingly or unknowingly engage in a wide range of action learning methodologies in learning how to be educators. Its inclusion in the pedagogic palette is intended to raise awareness of action learning as a specific pedagogic style, so that the educator may bolster their nascent practices though engagement with the wider literature to ensure rigour and that their evaluations are valid (Pedler, 2011).

The creativity and innovation effectiveness profile

In essence, this pedagogic style provides a framework of granular guidance on how to assess and approach 'creativity' across seven domains which the educator can map to their learning outcomes and their assessment criteria (Warner, 2002). Reviewing the seven domains of creative consciousness – levels of curiosity; pattern-breaking skills; idea-nurturing ability; willingness to experiment and take risks; courage; resilience, and energetic persistence – it is not difficult to see why this style was included in the pedagogic palette. These domains are discipline-agnostic and offer a useful framework to inform creation of learning outcomes as well as to define assessment modes or innovative ways of assessing learning (Warner, 2002).

The seven palette pedagogic approaches

Design thinking

Design thinking is a well-described educational/industrial concept that articulates the application of human-centred educational techniques to solve problems in creative and often innovative ways (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). Design thinking examples can be found through its application by leading international brands (think Apple, Samsung, or Sony). As a pedagogic approach, design thinking is deep, iterative and seeks to understand the user (or, in educational terms, the learner). It seeks to challenge assumptions while defining and redefining problems to identify solution-centric strategies (Dorst, 2011). Design thinking is a potentially powerful approach to educational thinking and working.

Connectivism

The pedagogy of connectivism is about exploring and forming meaningful connections between people, both in-person and digitally (Goldie, 2016). The reason it persists as a useful pedagogic approach is down to its evergreen positioning that avoids being time-linked to specific technologies, but instead presents itself as a useful way to cope with information overload and complexity (Downes, 2019). In the teaching and learning context, our learning environments (from virtual learning environments (VLEs) to physical libraries) are all equally regarded as 'learning networks' in this approach, which aids the educator in growing and developing their practice in connected ways. This makes a connectivist approach a highly adaptable, contemporary, and innovative pedagogic way to articulate education (Downes, 2022).

Contextualism

Predicated on the idea that the learning method is at least as important as the content, contextualism as a pedagogic approach can be considered learning in situ, meaning the learning best takes place in the environment in which that learning is to be applied or recalled (Hudson & Whisler, 2008). As an illustrative working example of this approach, Godden and Baddeley showed that scuba divers were able to recall a memorised list better under water if they learned the list under water, rather than on dry land, and vice versa (cited in Murre, 2021). In educational disciplinary terms, the contextualist approach presents the educator in a myriad of educational arenas with a novel pedagogic space to define their disciplinary contextual learning, from performance to skill competencies, in a way designed to improve the positive benefits of learning.

Constructive alignment

One of several core pedagogies in the palette, constructive alignment essentially starts with learning outcomes and positions teaching and assessment to service those outcomes, an approach sometimes summarised as "test what you teach" (Biggs, 1996). The learning outcome therefore ends up driving the learning activity, typically through suitably descriptive verbs aimed at quantifying achievement of the outcome (for instance, "explain the concept of …"). A constructive alignment approach means that learning is constructed through activities the learners perform, thereby making learning about what is done. By extension, assessment is about how well the students have achieved their intended outcomes. Outcomes can be assessed in any suitable mode so long as it allows for demonstration of knowledge or skills gains (Biggs and Tang, 2010). Constructive alignment is most impactful when packaged alongside a pedagogic taxonomy (for example, Bloom's taxonomy or SOLO (Anderson et al., 2001)) which helps the educator map levels of understanding built into their learning outcomes and aids them in creation of assessment criteria and rubrics that are directly measuring success in that context.

Threshold conceptual learning

One of the most fundamental and famous contemporary pedagogic approaches, threshold concepts are transformative by nature and can be thought of as key milestones on a learning journey, denoting progress but also change as the learner passes each milestone. Meyer and Land (2003, p. 412) suggest that "a threshold concept can be considered as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something. It represents a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress." One common analogy to illustrate threshold concepts is learning to ride a bicycle: once you know how to ride, you cannot un-know that learning which makes it, therefore, transformative. The art of an educator taking this pedagogic approach is located in understanding the thresholds in their educational design, and building the learning from there (Barradell, 2013).

Situated learning pedagogies

A situated learning pedagogic approach can be used to explain an individual's acquisition of learning skills and asks for consideration of where learning takes place through exploring the relationships between people (O'Brien & Battista, 2020). This pedagogic approach involves the learner themselves making connections with prior knowledge by authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual learning. This usually involves students taking part in collaborative activities and being challenged to use critical thinking and practical abilities. The approach is founded on a belief that what people learn and do is situated within their role as a member of a learning community and encompasses the communities of practice pedagogy (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Five-step blended model

The five-step blended model is not a pedagogy *per se*, but rather an approach to structuring learning activities (typically online activities) in a cyclical and reflective way, which is then carefully supplemented by a curated suite of digital resources (Laurrillard, 1994). As a pedagogic approach, this model offers the less experienced pedagogue a simple scaffolded approach to session design that drives learning along prescribed pathways. For educators with more experience, the model offers a starting point from which the educator can adapt the steps to suit the learning to maximise a positive learning experience (Heinze & Procter, 2004).

INNOVATION THROUGH PRACTITIONER CHOICE

With the pedagogic palette outlined above, the main reason for its conception comes to the fore. The educator is able to select bespoke combinations of pedagogic style and approach, akin to selecting complementary colours on a colour wheel, based on their educational context and/or need. In this way, the educator engaging with the palette creates a highly personalised disciplinary learning experience that is inherently evidence-informed. The added benefit of the educator exploring different combinations that could occur across dimensions of practice (Figure 3) is the opportunity for evaluation and scholarship to follow their choice as new innovative applications of reliable pedagogic forms are selected, created, and shared (Clegg, 2009).

As a worked example, Figure 3 presents combinations from the pedagogic palette at three levels of consideration:

- Micro level – for Individual sessions.
- Meso level – at Module or Course level.
- Macro level – at Departmental or Disciplinary level.

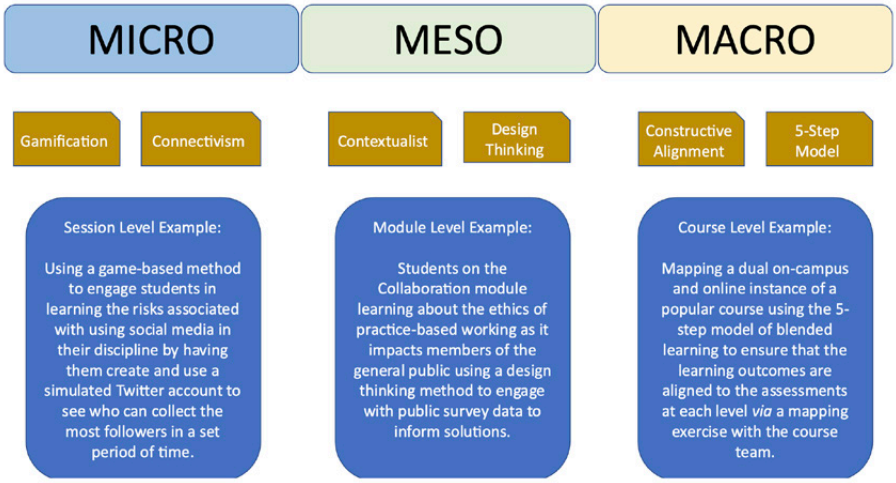

Figure 3. Worked example of prospective pedagogic palette combinations at three different levels.

As can be seen by these three different example combinations, 'colours' from the Pedagogic Palette (the gold boxes) can be selected for use at the micro, meso, or macro levels to drive educational practices by adapting and applying aspects to achieve the highest quality of practice and, by extension, student experience. Educators are therefore free to diagnose, experiment, and refine their own combinations from the palette to scaffold and tailor learning as they build curricula.

The intention is that as practitioner confidence and familiarity grows through application, so too would their ambition to combine and refine more and more. Often starting with just two 'colours' from the pedagogic palette, successive design decisions can progressively add a third or fourth to the combination allowing the educator to create a highly personalised and unique mixture conferring subtlety and educational thinking, and becoming a useful way to carefully curate designed learning experiences. With the pedagogic palette as a scaffold, and with growing experience born from its application, the reflexive practitioner or educator creates their own unique educational narrative that the palette helps them articulate for their learners, underpinning both evaluation and scholarship.

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WHAT MIGHT SUSTAINED EXCELLENCE IN TERTIARY TEACHING BE? AN ANALYSIS THROUGH 'FOUND' POETRY

Josie Crawley

POEM ONE. *My teaching lens*

Teaching is a passion:
we learn, reflect and grow.
Seek each fertile moment,
select a seed to sow.

Story with each student,
hear, engage, respond.
Value where they come from,
map journeys to beyond.

Shine a light on learning,
open many doors,
illuminate their climb
higher than before.

POEM TWO. *A collective student voice*

She
guides me with
care, **care**, *care*
I feel seen
She
takes time to
listen, **listen**, listen
I feel heard
ALWAYS
willing, involved, creative,
turns every learning experience into a positive one
ties the course together
dives to a deeper level –
makes me look at things in more than one way.

In 2020, I was invited to apply for an Ako Aotearoa Sustained Excellence in Tertiary Teaching Award. My first instinct was to turn down the offer, as I didn't think what I did was unique or special enough to apply for a national award. But after a couple of probing questions about my practice and student feedback, I committed to what became my summer break journey of self-discovery. Collecting and collating years of teaching activities, feedback from students, colleagues, and my wider communities, and revisiting key research outputs resulted in a 20,000-word thesis spanning my 27-year career. Ruthlessly pruning my submission to 6,000 words required distilling the essence of both what I do, and the impact that it has on others. I was fortunate and privileged to be awarded a sustained teaching excellence award from Ako Aotearoa in 2020.

Poetry has the potential to concentrate complex concepts or focus on specific detail. The two poems above are my poetic analysis of my application, using words and phrases uplifted from the document, reflecting the essence of what is said. This qualitative process of research poetry is introduced below.

In poem one, "My teaching lens," I mine the repeated seams that are the foundation of my practice. The scaffolding of the teaching process to student outcomes and the repetition of this process again and again across time seemed to require rhyme, to give it direction and pace like a flowing river. This poem is what excellent teaching is to me: what I have done, what I do now, and what I will do into the future. When I can no longer do this, be this – then I will stop teaching.

While critically reflecting on poem one's creation, we can unpack or distil the concentrated message to illuminate my interpretation of excellence in teaching. As a poem found from a reflective statement of experience, poem one provides a summary of personal practice. I am a professional hungry for ongoing learning from evidence and narratives, students' and colleagues' stories. I use gardening and journey metaphors where I, the teacher, encourage student growth and forward direction, helping facilitate access to light, nourishment, multiple paths,

and potential. This might look very different with individual students and in the context of learning. The language of "we" and "with" suggests this can only be accomplished in partnership with the student. Excellent teaching is not about telling, it is about coaching through meaningful listening ("hear, engage, respond").

In poem two, "A collective student voice," we hear the multiple voices of my students, across 20 years of feedback. I found the feedback had a lot of repeated concepts, with caring and listening persistent themes, across personal, clinical, and traditional teaching contexts, so I use repetition, font and space to capture these voices across time. The word "always" was used by students in multiple contexts, hence the capitals. The formatting of the first half of the poem attempts to suggest some of these different voices and contexts to the reader.

My reflections on poem two conclude that students appreciate a lecturer who consistently listens to them, hears them as an individual with a context, and shows respectful caring. The lecturer does not take responsibility for student learning, but rather guides them through a journey, offers an alternate lens through which to view experiences, and appears genuinely passionate and interested in the topic, using multiple creative strategies to also engage students. The students were generally concrete in their feedback, so the poem is mostly concrete, other than the poetic language of "tying a course together" and "diving to a deeper level." The imagery in the last half of the poem, where the lines stretch to fill the page, captures the students' perception of what is involved in excellent teaching as a scaffold of actions, building upon each other, with the last line a resultant student outcome. The lecturer actions required to achieve excellent learning opportunities are hinted at in the students' words. All are unseen activities that demolish a lecturer's time: researching levels beyond content teaching, exploring history and criticism around theory, finding published experiences, and knowing course content so well that you can make connections across theories, across courses, and from theory to student practice or lived experience. No wonder we get exhausted!

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH POETRY

The two poems above are the result of qualitative analysis by poetic inquiry, using my personal application to Ako Aotearoa as data. The poems meet the definition of 'found poems' in that they take quoted words and phrases from my source (Miller, 2019; Wiggins, 2011), a text that would not traditionally be regarded as poetic, then shape them together to create a poem. Poetic inquiry (also known as research poetry) merges the data reduction stage of qualitative analysis with the craft of writing poetry (Miller, 2019). The two genres of qualitative research and poetry have a lot in common. Both embrace diverse interpretations and attempt to portray a depth of lived experience, an emotive state interacting with environmental and temporal contexts in suggestive but meaningful ways.

Findings/poems may be concrete, use metaphor, or remain abstract. It is a very small step from Narrative Inquiry (my favoured method for qualitative research) to research poetry. Miller (2019) describes five clear steps for poetic inquiry as a research process: immersion (in the data), creation, critical reflection, ethics, and engagement. These steps provide a guide for qualitative researchers.

Poetry has many potential attributes but very few rules. Repetition, humour, rhyme, rhythm, metaphor, irony, hyperbole, sound, alliteration, textual format, and imagery may be employed; or they may not! Because of this narrative fluidity in describing what poetry is, Rosen (2016) rather discusses what poetry can do, such as: suggest things, give an impression, express a belief or culture, play, be symbolic, or be personal. It can capture a moment and can borrow voices. Poem one expresses my personal belief of what excellent teaching involves, while poem two borrows from the voices of thousands of nursing students across the decades, sharing their lens for 'good' teaching.

USING FOUND POETRY TO BUILD EXCELLENT TEACHING

Within my clinical teaching, I encourage students to create reflective responses both as formal assessed reflections (part of their clinical portfolio) and within informal journalling. Some choose poetic formats. Student poems are not part of poetic inquiry; many are reflective poems without 'found' qualities, yet some create poems 'found' from clinical practice quotes that stayed with the student. Although I have not formally researched which students most benefit from this approach, anecdotally students with diverse learning needs frequently comment positively on assessment in clinical portfolios that allows the creative flexibility of expression through poetry.

I employ poetic language techniques as the base to some classroom exercises. For example, students are asked to mine their own experience or sometimes a clinical experience to generate similes, metaphors, and beliefs around health; or key phrases that describe a client's resilience. Anonymous student generated responses are collated, and read back to the larger class – so that group feedback starts with a 'found poem.'

A different way of students creating poetry is within lectures; 'flash' poems can link theory and practice or capture student summaries of key content or personal learning. For example, in a lecture introducing grief and loss, I ask students to start by writing a three-minute acrostic reflective poem on 'grief' then, after the content, repeat the exercise again, this time 'found' from the lecture content. I often role model the first reflective poem with an off-the-cuff example – the standard does not need to be high! Such as:

Grief sucks

Really, really sucks

I think – I haven't actually experienced it myself

Ever –

For now.

I do not role model the found poem, nor require the students to share this – although I offer them the opportunity after class. For the second poem, the 'found' one, I encourage students to use words and phrases from the lecture, or describe images seen. The lecture includes a children's picture book and client testimonials resulting in diverse student poems; perhaps summarising content, reflecting on images noted or pulling key words and phrases together. Each student's two poems viewed together make personal learning visible.

Other teaching strategies rely on the student 'finding' a poem from reading. This requires close attention to the reading and can be done individually or as a group. This use of language really engages some students. Students in a formal presentation once included an unsolicited 'found' poem (no marks attached) from their preparatory readings encapsulating experiences of racism in New Zealand.

As I have said, I am a teacher committed to ongoing learning and narrative research techniques. In the future, as a narrative inquiry researcher, I intend to include poetic inquiry methods when transcribing research participant interviews as part of my own researcher fieldwork notes and as an additional qualitative analysis tool.

If you would like to privately build your poetry writing skills and your confidence, I recommend Kate Clanchy's (2023) *How to Grow Your Own Poem* and Michael Rosen's *What is Poetry?* (2016) as good starting places.

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BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND WORKING TOGETHER – A FOCUS ON ĀKONGA ENGAGEMENT

Rachel Byars and Caryn Hayes

INTRODUCTION

Building relationships with tertiary-level ākonga (learners) is an essential aspect of fostering a positive and productive learning environment, especially where ākonga navigate diverse academic challenges and personal growth. The School of Business at Otago Polytechnic comprises a small team of dedicated kaimahi (staff) teaching across programmes from Level 4 certificates to master's level. Ākonga in the School of Business are typically young adults who are pursuing higher education to prepare for their future careers; however, they may also be returning to study after challenging past experiences, re-training, or looking to pursue a career change. At the end of 2022, there was a real feeling of exhaustion from the recent disruptions caused by the global pandemic, which significantly affected the learning experience, engagement, and sense of belonging of our ākonga, and therefore focused increased attention on fostering positive relationships between educators and learners. Through the pandemic, the School of Business team was committed to providing support and pastoral care, and made concerted efforts to keep a strong connection with ākonga. However, this was difficult when teaching and learning were split between online and on-campus classes. Whilst we had good practices in place, at the start of 2023 it was time to reset and refocus our attention. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) were developed to serve as a catalyst for building and enhancing the connections with our ākonga, and to focus on practical actions and fostering beneficial connections within the tertiary learning context.

Our approach was underpinned by two cultural holistic frameworks for health and well-being. Firstly, we drew on Sir Mason Durie's (1985) Māori model of hauora (holistic well-being), known as Te Whare Tapa Whā. This model suggests that, for balanced well-being, four pou (pillars) of life are equally important: physical, spiritual, family and social, and mental and emotional well-being. Each pou relies upon the others to form structure and stability for the whare. Similar to Te Whare Tapa Whā is the Pacific-based Fonofale Model, a traditional Indigenous model in which the posts of the fale symbolise spiritual, physical and mental aspects, culture, and family (Mental Health Commission, 2001). These are the foundations of balanced and positive well-being. The need for connection is implicit within both models and therefore they can be applied as holistic tools for ākonga support and education.

For this study, we focused on ākonga from the New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5), a year-long programme, and first-year ākonga from the Bachelor of Applied Management programme at Otago Polytechnic. These ākonga are taught together for the first semester, taking core business papers and then choosing either a Leadership and Management, or Accounting, pathway. This study delves into the pivotal role that relationships play in the tertiary learning experience with a specific focus on the creation and implementation of ILPs as a means to cultivate a supportive academic environment. Martin and Bolliger (2018) assert that when learners are engaged and motivated to learn, they are likely to perform better in their studies, and through more social interaction feel more connected and have overall increased satisfaction. Relationship-building in tertiary

education extends beyond interpersonal dynamics; it is intricately linked to academic achievements, well-being, and overall personal development.

SUPPORTING LITERATURE

It is important to build meaningful relationships with tertiary-level learners by creating a supportive and welcoming atmosphere in the classroom. By valuing this atmosphere, it becomes a critical aspect of effective teaching and further supports an inclusive learning environment. Establishing positive relationships with learners can enhance their academic success (Zepke, 2013), improve their emotional well-being (Riva et al., 2020), and help them develop crucial life and work skills (Gill, 2018). These relationships can be achieved by developing a personal connection through informal conversations, sharing personal experiences, and providing guidance that is constructive and positive. Bowden et al. (2021) draw on Field (2009) to define well-being as a key outcome of student engagement, wherein the student can achieve a sense of purpose and belonging by engaging and connecting positively with peers, educators, and the wider community. Successful learning requires learners to be and feel well physically, socially, and emotionally. Bowden (2013) confirms that building relationships is fundamental to successful student engagement and well-being. While teachers and institutions are not solely responsible for student well-being, they can foster and maintain a culture that helps students keep well (Riva et al., 2020). Such a culture helps support individuals with setting clear goals and instils a belief that these goals are achievable. It offers learning opportunities that help foster these goals and enable learners to retain a sense of personal control over their learning. Belonging can be conceived of as a student's sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by both teachers and their peers, and their feeling that they are an important part of the life and activity of the classroom.

Student engagement emerges as a critical factor influencing the quality of the learning experience and overall academic outcomes. Kuh (2009, p. 683) has defined student engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities." Trowler (2010) provides a more in-depth analysis of the term by referring to engaged learners as co-constructors of learning in the classroom, while also emphasising their involvement in structure, processes, and identity-building in the wider community. Bryson and Hardy (2012) offer a framework comprising several influences on engagement. These include students feeling a sense of relevance in what they learn and a balance of choice, autonomy, risk, growth, and enjoyability. In addition, appropriate trust relationships with teachers and on-going dialogue with them are also key to strengthening engagement, along with the creation of a strong sense of purpose and social networks. Thomas (2012) highlights a sense of belonging as a key idea in research on student engagement, and aligns it closely with social and academic engagement, recognising that the "potential mismatch between a student's background and that of the institution may result in students not feeling like they belong and leaving early" (p. 12). This potential mismatch can be remedied by educators fostering a relationship with learners which can further strengthen engagement within classes (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Krause (2011) extends the notion of engagement further by arguing that learning occurs in a range of settings, developing from connections with the institution as well as building on prior learning, alongside the learning that takes place in the workplace and community settings.

The social dimension of engagement considers the bonds of identification and belonging which are formed between learners, peers, academic staff, and other key people within the learning environment (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). It is also important to note that engagement is complex, fluid, and can change over time (Trowler et al., 2022). The level of motivation of ākonga to learn is crucial, with Schunk et al. (2008) emphasising that motivation levels can be viewed as the student's desire and willingness to deploy effort toward, and to persist in, a learning task. This view is supported by Fredricks et al. (2004) who confirm that that students must invest cognitively, emotionally, and actively in learning before they succeed.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PLANS

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are gaining traction as a strategy for promoting learners' education and career readiness. ILPs represent both a process and a tool to document goal setting, which can assist in fuelling students' learning-to-learn skills, such as a sense of agency, intrinsic motivation, and capacity to manage their own learning (Zeiser, 2018). They can be student-directed or lecturer-led plans which are developed in collaboration.

For School of Business ākonga, the ILP was designed to help the learner set goals and achieve academic and professional success while prioritising personal wellness. The tool was also an opportunity to engage and connect with learners face to face, and to understand what their individual needs and goals were. At the start of the ILP meeting, learners were asked details of their course, where they lived (halls of residence, home, or flatting), their commitments outside of study (work, voluntary work, sports, family), as well as any learning support they might require. Understanding why they enrolled on the course provided background to their motivation and also past learning experiences. The second part of the ILP looked at goal setting, both academically for the upcoming semester as well as for specific study or career goals. In addition to establishing objectives, there was a conversation about the necessary steps to attain those goals and any additional assistance that might be required. This stage also highlighted any obstacles to achieving the goals and the availability of support. This platform effectively guides less confident learners to the necessary support teams such as Student Success or Accessibility. This was especially effective for some learners who had not disclosed that they were neurodiverse or had a disability and now felt comfortable in disclosing this, and discussing a plan of support to assist them with their studies. Within the printed ILP, some strategies for success were shared around time management, communication, study strategies, and health and well-being. Dependent on the ILP meeting, actions and further arrangements were discussed and included with any follow-up requirements.

INITIATIVES

In addition to the ILP process, activity initiatives were introduced to build relationships across ākonga year groups and School of Business kaimahi, starting with a full-school orientation. This provided a great opportunity to acknowledge the start of the year and recognise top students from our previous year, along with ākonga participating in the School of Business Great Race with teams made up of year one, two, and three ākonga. As part of the activity initiatives, we also asked the learners what type of activities or events they would like to see during the year, which included a quiz night, sports day, shared lunches, lunchtime board games, and study groups.

METHOD

To assess the impact and understanding of the Individual Learning Plan, 50 first-year students were invited to participate in an online survey using Qualtrics. Having gained Category A ethics approval, a link to the survey was sent out via a gatekeeper. The survey consisted of 12 questions, and ākonga were asked to provide insights into their initial experiences of study, their ILP meetings, and activity initiatives. At the end of the survey, there was also an option to express interest in participation in an interview or focus group.

RESULTS

Of the 50 students approached, 21 completed the online survey. While seven ākonga stated they were interested in participating in an interview, only two actually participated in the semi-structured interview process.

To enhance the meeting and the ILP's implementation, students were given the opportunity to partially complete the ILP before the scheduled meeting, with 11 students indicating they had initiated this process. The majority

found the ILP document comprehensive and easy to complete. Students were asked how useful aspects of the ILP meeting were. Notably, the survey results (Figure 1) indicate a positive reception of the one-to-one ILP meetings, with students emphasising the significance of "understanding available support," "being able to ask questions," and the "discussion and action of setting individual goals" as extremely useful.

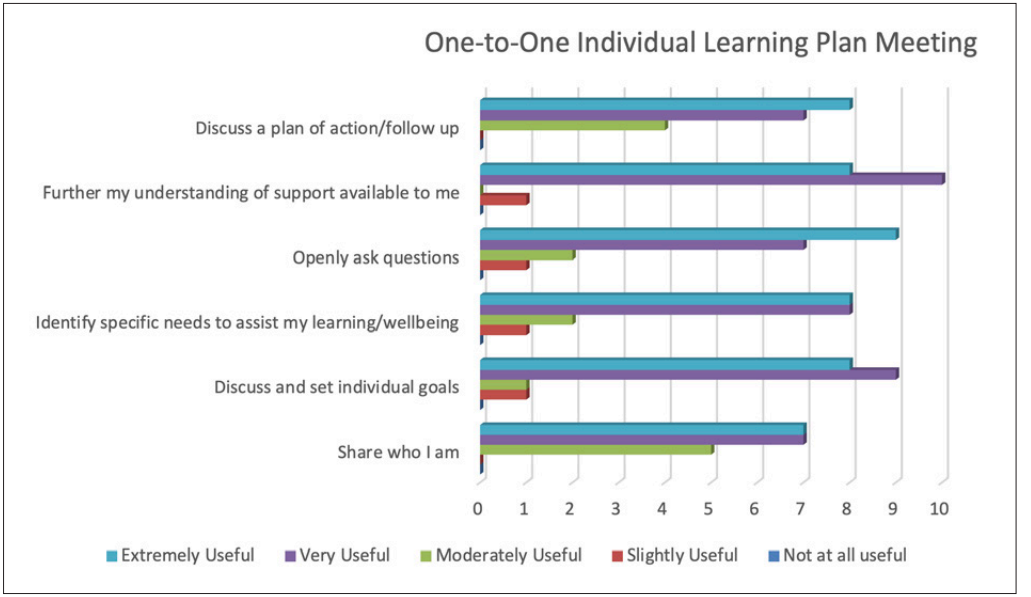

Figure 1. Survey results: Usefulness of ILP meeting.

During the initial eight weeks of the course, weekly study sessions were introduced to support first-year students in academic writing, referencing, and general study skills. Following this, students formed their own study groups, both on and off-campus. Of the 21 survey respondents, nine attended the weekly sessions, and three engaged in student-led study groups. Reasons for non-attendance were primarily related to scheduling conflicts rather than a lack of interest.

The interviews provided an opportunity to delve further into the ILP. The two interview participants focused on the key themes of confidence, relationships, self-awareness, and support. The one-to-one meetings with lecturers were cited as instrumental in building a relationship with a member of the team. The interviews revealed an increase in self-belief arising from the identification of personal strengths and weaknesses. Students demonstrated an enhanced awareness of taking ownership of their learning, emphasising the importance of accountability in achieving academic goals. Both participants noted that their confidence was bolstered by participating in School of Business activities as it provided an opportunity to facilitate connections with peers.

One interviewee emphasised the ILP's role in planning the balance between home and study commitments, positively impacting goal-setting and future focus. Moreover, the ILP meetings provided valuable insights into the broader support services offered by Otago Polytechnic. Participants expressed that being well-informed about available support resources and how to access them empowered them to proactively address challenges. They emphasised the importance of preventative measures and building their 'toolbox,' rather than support services being the metaphorical ambulance at the bottom of the cliff.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Overall, our research validated the pivotal role of building relationships and fostering connections in developing a successful learning journey. It is evident from our findings that robust interpersonal connections significantly contribute to a positive educational experience. Ākonga felt more comfortable approaching kaimahi with their academic and personal concerns, based on their initial ILP contact, enhancing trust and support and strengthening the connection beyond the formality of the ILP. This sense of belonging and trust is essential in both a Fonofale approach and Te Whare Tapa Whā model where it is encouraged that ākonga build a rapport and be a part of a collective that is nurturing and considerate of their values and beliefs (Simati-Kumar Chand, 2020).

Providing ākonga with the tools and guidance needed to enhance their study skills can empower them to navigate the challenges of study with confidence and resilience. The development of a strong sense of belonging within the school can be seen as a factor of student success. Ākonga who feel a genuine connection to their academic community are more likely to engage actively in their studies, participate in extracurricular activities, and contribute positively to the overall learning environment, which fosters a supportive community where students feel encouraged to succeed (Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023; Viola, 2021).

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Based on initial results, to broaden the impact of the ILP the initiative should be extended to encompass all incoming School of Business ākonga across all programmes. Furthermore, the process should allow for re-evaluation of the ILP as ākonga progress through successive years of study, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness throughout their academic journey as well as promoting a culture of continuous improvement and a sense of belonging and connection with the school. As ākonga progress, further self-development will be encouraged, along with mentoring of new ākonga by more senior ākonga.

Additional shared lunches and collaborative activities involving both students and staff should be introduced. These events should be designed to create a sense of belonging and connection, and an environment that facilitates meaningful interactions between peers and kaimahi. By encouraging a sense of community, these gatherings aim to strengthen the bonds with the school and enhance the overall student experience.

As a team, the collaborative sharing of insights will aim to promote a culture of knowledge exchange and encourage the adoption of successful practices. This will foster a sense of community and enhance the overall learning experience for ākonga within the School of Business.

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Article

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PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE MENTORS: THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTIC EXCELLENCE

Martin Andrew

INTRODUCTION

Seven years on from the commencement of Otago Polytechnic's Doctor of Professional Practice programme, there is a need to identify how 'excellence' manifests itself as the outcome of the collaboration of mentors and learners – if, indeed, it is present at all. Such an enquiry is necessary for the reputation, sustainability, and quality assurance feedback loops of the programme. I argue such an enquiry needs to be foregrounded by, firstly, an examination of the culture of the programme; and, secondly, a critical interrogation of the less-than-neutral term 'excellence.' Skelton (2005, p. 4), for instance, argues 'excellence' is a "contested, value-laden concept," variously defined according to different stakeholders: mentors, learners, managers, and organisations (Goode, 2021). Clearly, a multi-vocal study would generate evidence of a 360-degree understanding of 'excellence,' with top-down and bottom-up views and other voices in between. The current study examines a small group of mentors developing experiential understandings of mentoring excellence, and points to 'authenticity' as a feature of excellence.

This article pivots on my continuing to wonder what aspects of the work of a postgraduate mentor contribute positively to authentic excellence in a postgraduate professional practice learning journey. The word 'authentic' is there because excellence may look different from various positions of power: how authorities figure it may differ from the conceptions of mentors and, indeed, the experiences of learners. I suggest 'authentic' excellence is a bottom-up, affective quality related closely to "teaching well" (Brookfield et al., 2023) and figured by how graduate supervisors, more specifically mentors, feel about their experiences. In contrast, a less authentic form of excellence might involve quality as a top-down instrumentalist quantity defined by, for instance, timeliness and merely generating enough evidence to pass, as demonstrated in the discussion of inauthentic excellence below.

Teaching well

An appropriate bottom-up space to begin an enquiry into mentors' perceptions of how they strive for excellence is considering the 2023 book, *Teaching Well* (Brookfield et al., 2023), couched broadly in tertiary education contexts. The book's authors posit that affective traits, such as possessing empathy and recognising the psychosocial need to belong, are as crucial to teaching well as reflective and critical abilities. These traits are necessary both to communicate, orally and via feedback, and to enter into the learning worlds of the mentees. Andrew et al. (2020) show that the response to COVID-19 revealed compassion and care, qualities that repersonalise the individual, repurpose shared enterprise, and revalidate community.

Goode (2023), a graduate of the Otago Polytechnic doctoral programme, writes of excellent educators as "rebels, rogues, and risk-takers." Trying new approaches suggested by how student projects needed to proceed involved risk-taking, but taking risks grounded in experience. As Brookfield et al. (2023, p. ix) write: "the only way to improve our teaching is by experimenting and taking calculated risks, while constantly receiving student (and

ideally peer) feedback through our ongoing classroom research." As applied reflective practitioners, mentors chart and critically examine their practice, sharing and debriefing in a secure community of practice.

Teaching Well also indicates the importance of educators scaffolding the learning journey (Brookfield et al., 2023). Instead of bombarding learners with readings, selecting pieces for which a learner is ready is a learned mentoring strategy to ensure gradual progress towards a learner's desired direction of enquiry. With *Teaching Well* as a fresh resource, my study delves into what mentors do in their quest to mentor well. This opens out my own quest to explore how mentors strive for excellence in the context of professional practice doctorates.

In the next two sections, I first examine individuating aspects of the cultures of professional practice, and the programme itself, in Aotearoa New Zealand. I then move on to consider conceptions of excellence in critiques of tertiary educational practice, using a critical lens which views authenticity as its horizon. Before curating the mentor voices and presenting short thematic narratives, I consider the study's methodological approach and the need for ethics of care in curating such voices. Let us begin with the programme culture.

THE CULTURE OF THE DOCTORATE OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Model of excellent mentoring

In examining 'excellence,' Grifoll (2016, p. 96) views it "as a link between innovation and the aim of moving up to better societies." This connection of new work-based research and transformative, even activist, change, fits with what is distinctive about the mission of the Otago Polytechnic doctorate of professional practice. Grifoll's words point to the programme's transformative agenda to improve individuals, organisations, and communities. Further, they start to suggest features of authentic excellence in mentoring. The quote crystallises a drive for freshness, distinctiveness, and innovativeness, and a social imperative to make the world a better place. By extension, I see a possibility of supporting the mentee to become both their best researcher self and a thought leader in their contexts of endeavour. Within both organisation and programme, such ideas are key elements of the programme's aims and outcomes.

Ker (2017), in a study of the facilitative nature of mentoring, argues a key skill lies in knowing *when* to be *what* (for instance, a professor, coach, or pastor). She indicates the importance of remaining fluid and nimble and thinking on one's feet. In this model, learners and facilitators form a partnership of learning where there is genuine and mutual respect. Ker (2017) maintains that the manner in which they co-travel becomes a dynamic goal-oriented process, with critical reflection as the focus. Within the Doctor of Professional Practice, the self-determined learning is heutagogical in orientation (Carpenter & Ker, 2017; Hase & Kenyon, 2013), drawing on the capacities of the coach (Goleman et al., 2013).

Achieving these collectivist and individual goals, with the mentor aiming for excellence while drawing on their own authentic learning journeys, requires the exercise of compassion and empathy as coaching strategies. Mentors' capacities for such qualities may be innate but can be understood as an echo of experience, as any mentor has significant knowledge about what their mentees are experiencing. This is, of course, because they were once in that position and have lived experience of what is being faced (Megginsson & Clutterbuck, 2005). Correlative of empathy are mutual trust and regard, which manifest as an understanding of learner needs at a given moment. Brookfield et al. (2023, p. 19) note that trust results from being seen as credible and authentic, and confirm trust is crucial to teaching well in a bottom-up view of teaching excellence. The model of excellent mentoring outlined here can be seen as ideal and pertinent to all doctoral professional practice cultures, but in the local context the excellence of mentors is enhanced by the best practice of tikanga-led mentoring.

Tikanga-led mentoring

In addition to the ideal teaching and learning context of a professional practice programme, mentors need to consider key implications of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the legally ratified foundation document of Aotearoa New Zealand. Rather than excavating those legalities, I want to move into applying tikanga (rituals, principles, protocols, ways of doing and being) meaningfully, and exploring how they might play out in the activity of mentoring and contribute to excellence. Ideally, if a learner is Māori, they will be supported by Māori on the mentoring team. However, regardless of ethnicity, all learners are embraced by core aspects of tikanga. Two primary concepts in the model of mentoring are aroha (empathy, compassion) and ako, which affirms the value of the trusting two-way journey between mentor and mentee. Ako also confers on learners the status or mana of a knowledgeable person. This is important as it is the learner who is the expert in this programme, and a mentor's excellence lies in their ability to support learners to achieve their leadership and applied learning goals.

Although tikanga-led heutagogy is critical, it does not involve the class suicide Freire (1970) identified as necessary for authentic educators in indigenous contexts. Such teachers, Freire noted, may be *in* the system yet not *of* it. Ako-led aroha is appropriate in professional practice where the learner is the expert in their area of endeavour, and the mentor's mahi (job, work) is to consolidate this expertise and make it rigorous for entry into a future community characterised by the achievement of doctorateness. In other words, candidates' enquiries have their own set of norms and practices (Lester & Costley, 2010). To return to Freire, the mentor may be in the system, but is also of the culture.

This model draws on the work of Pihama et al. (2019), which foregrounds, among other tikanga principles, the following four pou (pillars, principles). First, there is a need to understand the mentor (tuakana): mentee (teina) relationship through ongoing whanaungatanga (conversation or kōrero grounded in our lives and those of whānau/family). Second, high value is attributed to nurturing āwhinatanga, the quality of caring critical friendship. Third, a core aspect of tikanga on this programme is cherishing manaakitanga (generous regard for respect) and learners' mana (prestige, identities as learners full of potential). A fourth pillar focuses on providing safe and agreed parameters for kotahitanga (solidarity, unity; faith in the shared enterprise of the learning journey). At the heart of tikanga-led heutagogy is the shared understanding of tuakana and teina on their journeys together.

While this model nurtures all learners, Pihama et al. (2019, p. 59) emphasise of Māori learners: "it is fundamental that their culture is supported, nourished and celebrated at every step of the doctoral and academic journey." Esteeming culture is, I believe, a mark of authenticity.

Tikanga-based heutagogy impacts both mentoring and assessment practices, and I think contributes to the authenticity of the excellence the programme aims to achieve. The next section considers aspects of 'excellence' which I construe as less authentic.

INAUTHENTIC EXCELLENCE

For an understanding of authentic excellence, we need to consider less authentic conceptions. These include those in the literature of the neoliberalised or measured university with their Chief Executive Officers from the business world and importation of audit culture and surveillance (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2009, 2019; Katz, 2015; Shore, 2010). In this literature, Henri Giroux's voice is the most critical of all: "the appeal to excellence by university CEOs now functions like a corporate logo, hyping efficiency while denuding critical thought and scholarship of any intellectual, civic, and political substance" (Giroux, 2009, p. 673). Without bottom-up authenticity, excellence becomes an object of audit, measurement, and control; an object of "Corpspeak" (Katz, 2015).

Measured inauthenticity

Saunders and Ramírez (2017) remark, "since excellence is a measure of a thing, and since everything in post-secondary education is committed to excellence, everything must be measured" (p. 399), but need it be measured quantitatively and thus arbitrarily? With measurement comes inauthenticity because excellence becomes a *performance* of a corporate self; not an authentic action of a passionate educator, but rather of a governmentalised educator, variously *homo oeconomicus* or the zombie (Katz, 2023). Ball (2003) considers the governmentalised subject as "performative worker," "a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence" (p. 215).

Educator identity in the corporate game

Such excellence excludes the agency of the educator and the learner, and turns passion into playing the corporate game, a game Cheek (2017, p. 221) associates with the "ratings rodeo." In such a game, the academic is figured, according to Skea (2021), as Foucault's (1982) *homo oeconomicus* ('economic man'). Roberts (2007) reports the presence of an inauthentically excellent but corporately 'ideal' academic in Aotearoa New Zealand: "The ideal citizen … is a sophisticated, competitive, innovative and enthusiastic participant in the global economy, ever ready to apply what he or she knows … to the goal of creating … a 'prosperous and confident nation'" (p. 363).

In a forced Faustian bargain (Ball, 2003), the educator's soul is 'sucked dry' by performativity as Helen of Troy drains Dr Faustus. Under audit regimes, there is an impetus for "practitioners to organize [our]selves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations" (Ball, 2003, p. 215), enacting the process of sucking dry. The educator has no agency; it is a forced and actually one-way bargain.

Inauthentic because zombified

Zombie theory is used frequently in the literature to figure both the inauthentically excellent academic and the ones embracing counterintuitive corporate briefs out of economic necessity or fear. The analogy between the hegemonic impetus of the zombie and the zombification of institutions has been used by many scholars (Barker, 2017; Ginsberg, 2011; Katz, 2023; Ryan, 2012; Smythe, 2017). It is a mark of the non-critical application of the neoliberal growth imperative as the sole measure of success (Katz, 2023); a common theme in the recent discourse around the dissolution of Te Pūkenga and one at complete odds with any critical understanding of 'excellence' beyond its Zombielingo denotation, plundered "to promote and sell 'product'" (Katz, 2023, p. 5).

In this literature, the top-down audit culture spread by neoliberalism is imagined as a toxin (Fleming, 2021; Smythe, 2017) or a global 'variant' of that disease, capitalism (McBride, 2022). In a similarly pathological vein, the neoliberalised university is figured as "schizophrenic" (Shore, 2010), meaning, in its 2010 context, partially inauthentic because dis-eased. Yet the vested inauthenticity of *homo oeconomicus* is presented as desirably measurable, but only among the neoliberalist citizenry (Skea, 2021). Like Roberts (2007), Fleming (2021) is scathing of the ideal citizen and their "academic star complex" born of "narcissism, insecurity, envy" (p. 116). The conflict of fighting values points to all-out war (Giroux, 2019): performing zombies against authentic educators – the veritable zombie apocalypse (Ginsberg, 2011).

Performed, or fake, excellence

Performed excellence is, then, inauthentic, but there are voices in the literature hopeful for the necessary return of authentic excellence. Tregear et al. (2022, p. 45) write of additional authentic academic values at threat: "Values that an academic might seek routinely to profess to uphold in one's work such as a commitment to reason, objectivity, public responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge are routinely compromised, thwarted,

trivialised, or dismissed by those above them." Tregear et al. (2022) speak of the lost agency and authenticity of the academic as critical educator. A corporate, sloganised excellence has replaced the educator, mentor or learner's authentic sense of excellence. Grifol (2016) offers a technocratic definition:

> excellence can be (a) a certain combination of inputs (quality of the programme, quality of the teachers, quality of the learners, etc.) and outputs (even measured in quantities), (b) a culture in the use of inputs and cyclical progress for better outputs (ethos), or (c) a list of expected targets (achieved or not). (p. 96)

The use of 'excellence' as a business-oriented euphemism belongs to the vested discourse I argue is a form of imaginative, ideological and ethical constraint. Clearly, as Brusoni et al. (2014, p. 20) clarify, defining 'excellence' "depends on the person defining the term and their motivation for doing so." The inauthentic excellence of the corporate and the authentic learner-centred, mana-enhancing excellence mentors aspire to are at odds.

METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography and narrative enquiry

What I write here derives unapologetically from my professional practice journey in mentoring and its methodological essence is evocative autoethnography (Sparkes, 2018). In evocative and indeed collaborative autoethnographies, a single identity unites the roles of author, researcher-explorer, and curator of others' voices, a common feature of work-based methods (Costley et al., 2010). What I have observed, learned, and reflected on can only inform my study with experiential authenticity. While there is no one-size-fits-all model for the complexity of learners' approaches to understanding the world and constructing their contributions to scholarship (Costley et al., 2010), there are common threads. Even though I may call on formal modes of evidence such as mentor kōrero (conversations, interviews), and solicited writing, I draw the threads together within autoethnography.

The study is qualitative, naturalistic, interpretative, and uses thematic narratives as a mode of curating the authentic voices, making it narrative enquiry, exploring experiences and stories (Reissman, 2008). Reissman argues stories are co-produced in a "complex geography," "in spaces between teller and listener, speaker and setting, text and reader, history and culture" (2008, p. 105).

Ethics

The study started with a broadly heuristic phenomenology of the reported needs of new mentors, together with a study of whether learners felt their needs were met (Ethics approval, Otago Polytechnic HRE15-173). Because my daily practice involved textual exchanges with mentors, all shared and reported experiences fed into my emerging sense of what is seen as authentic about quality in mentoring. Relational ethics, requiring researchers to "act from our hearts and minds, to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and to initiate and maintain conversations" (Carey, 2008, p. 7) and Ellis's (2007) 'ethic of care' came into play. Running with Ellis's (2007) term, Andrew and Le Rossignol (2017) advise autoethnographers to "write for the greater good; remember you do not own your own story; expect the unexpected" (p. 235).

Participants

For the purposes of this short article, I draw on the voices of five mentors (four female, one male). Their average mentoring experience was six years, with two having 20 years' experience, and three being relative beginners. As I admit of myself above, they carry within them the experiences of learners. These five mentor participants collectively function as a representative sample.

By way of limitation, I assert that within a broader construct of autoethnography, with myself as a sixth (but not directly quoted) mentor, I curate representative mentor narratives, weaving through a discussion that pinpoints cogent themes.

FINDINGS

The components of mentoring

I open this section with a guiding quote from a mentor. I position it here because it mentions core themes that resonate in the evidence sample, and which accord with my own perceptions. They state that the components of excellence in mentoring are embodied in the dispositions of the individual facilitator, and constitute a careful balance of judgement, intuition, compassion, and expertise:

> Judgement refers to supporting the learner by careful guidance – meeting the milestones, signposting and referring the learner [to the most appropriate sources] when they meet the roadblocks of over-reading, underwriting or misdirection. Intuition relies on the core skills of listening and observing and checking in on the learner in terms of how they are feeling about their learner experience and progress. Compassion is the demonstration of support and empathy for the learner at moments of challenge, overload and stress. Expertise is the deployment of subject matter expertise for mutual benefit within the facilitation relationship. (Mentor 2)

Asked to nominate the elements of successful mentoring in a professional practice doctorate setting, Mentor 3 spoke independently but in thematic alignment with Mentor 2. They stated that mentoring is:

> a recognition that the 'mentee' is developing in their critical analysis of a certain topic/area. The most important aspect is whanaungatanga – the relationship between the mentor and learner. The reciprocity of respect from both is also key. A good mentor shows empathy and keeps the space for whatever comes out. While it sounds a bit like therapy, the time in 'session' is *like* academic therapy. (Mentor 3)

The affective and relational aspects of mentoring are foregrounded in the evidence set, with a sense of mutual sharing of life's moments (whanaungatanga) setting the scene for building trust, and empathy characterising the developing interactional relationship. Mentor 4 echoes these themes:

> The mentor needs to understand the psychology of their student, and to find a way of communicating with the students that motivates them and brings out the best in them:
>
> - Build relations based on mutual respect and trust.
> - Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the students (and your own).
> - Enjoy the process.

Whanaungatanga functions to light the way to feeling the learner's psychological state and hence their needs at the outset of a session. A mentor may kōrero (converse) with a learner fortnightly or monthly, for instance, and will encounter a range of moods and states. Acknowledging how a learner is feeling is fundamental to a constructive conversation that both feeds back, acknowledges the present challenges, and makes way for future mahi. Creating spaces where it is possible to enjoy the journey is a key function of the mentor in the space of empathy. Mentor 4 paraphrases her learner, who believed: "Mentoring of any note develops over time, it's a relationship."

In addition to relational engagement, fostering researcher autonomy is also central. This process is figured by Mentor 4 in terms of promoting opportunities for critical decision-making:

> I'm conscious of holding the space for the learner to make their own decisions about the directions they take in their inquiry. At the same time consistently reviewing the parameters of the requirements for the artefact, to provide guidance. I've learned that meeting progress deadlines allows the learner, and me as a mentor, time to review the work done, and to make changes or additions if needed to strengthen the work.

The more instrumental factor of keeping to time, in this text, becomes part of the mutual relationship of the mentor and mentee, so that the accountability loop is almost invisible within the close relational pact. Within those parameters, the mentor functions as a guide and advisor, feeding back on work reviewed and prospecting that needing to follow. Ensuring the learner retains responsibility for their pace of work and area of future endeavour is characteristic of mentors who promote the agency of research learners.

Mentor 5 lists the attributes of excellent mentors, reflecting on her own mentoring journey and reflecting on her co-mentors:

- Having a wide skill set from experience and knowing which skills to draw on, to suit different scenarios;
- Understanding different communication styles and learning styles and adapting to the students;
- Being clear on timelines for the project and to also manage one's own time;
- Building a deep trust bond over time;
- Staying in a learning space alongside the student;
- Staying forwards-focused on what can be done now, in place of what might happen.

There is considerable accord in the details offered by the mentors, possibly because they all share the discourse of a mentoring community of practice, but also because the mentor group shares practice in a way that pairs experienced with less experienced mentors, so that a culture of shared practice, discourse, and enterprise is formed.

CONCLUSION

Authentic excellence exists in the space of excellent teaching Goode (2023) identifies as occupied by rebels, rogues, and risk-takers. My call for the exercise of authentic excellence comes at a crucial juncture in the history of postgraduate education where authentic excellence is under fire. Saad-Filho (2021, p. 186) calls for "a politics of humanity and hope, organised around … equality, collectivity, and economic and political democracy, against (a, by now, clearly zombie form of) neoliberalism." Extending the zombification metaphor, Hil et al. (2022, p. 3) write that polytechnics and universities "do not have to undergo a living death. They … must contribute to the health and wellbeing of society, ensuring that students are prepared for jobs but also with a critical awareness of the changing world around them." The aspirational authentic excellence explored in this study works into this space, aligning with the programme's culture, as described throughout.

In this space and this time, a student-centred and person-focused model of mentoring that moves beyond problematic power differentials (Manathunga, 2007) is required. Since the context of the study is Aotearoa New Zealand, an emerging tikanga-led framework of doing mentor mahi has been proposed, inspired by Pihama et al. (2019).

The curated narratives of this study indicate that the features of an authentic mentor in a professional practice space include but are not limited to the following.

Firstly, listening and responding with empathy not only builds trust but also takes the mentor deeply into the world of the mentee's enquiry, enabling a more embodied understanding and fostering capacity for critical reflection.

Secondly, learners value effective communication in regard to issues of academic literacy (issues of structure, organisation, and referencing, for example) because these strategies make them proficient in the language of the discourse communities they wish to belong to through their professional doctorate journeys.

Thirdly, when mentors share insights and resources from their own communities of belonging, this enables learners to imagine themselves as able to network in similar professional communities.

Further, having a vision of the successful self is continually motivating, even in times of personal difficulty and moments when the Zeitgeist seems black, as for many during COVID-19.

Finally, tailoring support for individuals rather than applying a one-size-fits-all, institutionally-mandated, model of mentoring enables learners who think in non-traditional, creative, and subversive ways (or who may be neurodiverse) to develop authentic researcher identities and to utilise technology responsibly. Within this support and the reciprocity it implies, the instrumental factors of goal-setting and accountability become functions of care rather than process tick-boxes.

In *Teaching Well,* Brookfield et al. (2023, p. 193) conclude: "researching your context is the key to teaching well." Getting to know your learners and their journeys from the inside is crucial for professional practice doctoral mentors in pursuit of authentic excellence. This resonates well with the tikanga-led approach. Indeed, "unless you know how the people that you're dealing with are experiencing their learning, then you're severely hampered in your efforts to help them" (Brookfield et al., 2023, p. 193).

Authentic excellence starts with whanaungatanga, exchange, reciprocity, compassion, and empathy, and develops into embodied immersion in the learner's world.

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MĀ TE MĀTAURANGA MĀORI, KA HĀRO TE MANU, KA MANUKURA: A JOURNEY OF INDIGENOUS RECLAMATION AND CELEBRATION IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

Kay-Lee Jones and Rahera Cowie

INTRODUCTION

Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu, is a well-known Māori proverb meaning "Adorned with feathers, the bird is able to fly." As Indigenous educators, we know our pre-service teachers come to us already adorned with beautiful feathers, grown out of whānau (family) and cultural knowledge and passed down through the generations. We as teacher educators are merely adding another layer of feathers to support their flight towards high-quality, culturally empowering teaching of future generations. Co-author of this article Rahera Cowie has elevated this whakataukī (proverb) as follows: Mā te mātauranga Māori, ka hāro te manu, ka manukura, meaning "Through acquiring Māori knowledge, the bird will soar (in its own unique beauty), readying itself to lead others."

This year has seen the establishment of a new Mātauranga Māori teaching qualification at the University of Canterbury. The establishment of a Mātauranga Māori Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme in Te Waipounamu (the South Island of New Zealand), founded on Indigenous Māori knowledges, kaupapa Māori perspectives (Māori approaches), and Māori language, supports culturally imbued teaching and normalisation of place-based education.

Nurturing our ITE pre-service teachers through prioritising Indigenous Māori knowledge is long overdue in our takiwā (area). It brings forth the questions: what might teaching excellence look like, sound like, and feel like when privileging mātauranga Māori? And how can these insights gained from mātauranga Māori enhance ITE and tertiary education more widely?

This reflective piece aims to address the questions above whilst delving into the marginalisation of Māori knowledge systems in tertiary education. The text specifically explores our Mātauranga Māori ITE endorsement, a programme designed to grow the pool of quality Māori teachers and Māori-speaking teachers in the region. The authors of this piece are both teachers in the programme and have provided insight into course design. Their roles as teachers within the programme, however, inherently introduce limitations. Consequently, this work represents an opinion piece grounded in their perceptions and observations, rendering it evaluative in nature.

In 2020, the lead author, Kay-Lee Jones, was a recipient of an Ako Aotearoa Teaching Excellence Award in the Kaupapa Māori category. The Ako Aotearoa Tertiary Teaching Kaupapa Māori Excellence Awards criteria (Ratima et al., 2022) are used in this reflective piece as a framework to unpack the attributes of the Mātauranga Māori ITE programme. The criteria for the Kaupapa Māori Excellence award were also foundational to *Ngā Hau e Whā o Tāwhirimātea: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning for the Tertiary Sector* (Ratima et al., 2022), a practical guide to culturally empowering practice in the tertiary sector.

Mātauranga Māori, the knowledge system of the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, embodies a profound interconnectedness to the land, its people (past and present), and the creation of all things. Grounded

in oral tradition and thorough observation and interaction with the natural environment, mātauranga Māori encompasses a rich fabric of wisdom that can support the way we live and learn today. Here, we explore the necessity of place-based learning in ITE, and how Indigenous knowledge(s) in a traditional and contemporary sense can enhance tertiary learning. By embracing place-based education and affirming te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (Māori language and protocols), we highlight the perceptiveness of our ancestors and cultivate a more inclusive and sustainable future, one that honours the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

MĀTAURANGA MĀORI

Mātauranga Māori is a contemporary term; the knowledge that sits under the umbrella of mātauranga Māori is both historical and modern (Mead, 2017; Royal, 2009). Mātauranga Māori is a deep consciousness, pertaining to connections between us as humans and te aotūroa (the natural world). "Indigenous knowledge of, and connection to land and marine environments, which is transmitted intergenerationally, offers deep temporal and spatial insights" (McAllister et al., 2020, p. 2). The interconnectedness extends to animals, insects, and birds as well as to spiritual realms and atua Māori (Māori deities). Hutchings (cited in Rauika Māngai, 2020, p. 14) states that "the survival and expansion of mātauranga Māori will be determined by our ability as Māori, whānau, hapū and iwi to contribute to its continuing development as a living, vibrant and dynamic knowledge system that shapes our lives."

The transfer of endemic traditional knowledge occurred through oral means, both formal and informal. This was in the form of pūrākau (narratives), waiata (song) and chants as well as non-oral forms including tukutuku (woven lattice) panels, carvings, and other artforms (Lee-Morgan, 2009). Worldview and cultural codes are also part of mātauranga Māori (Lee-Morgan, 2009). Oral transmission of knowledge is evident in many Indigenous cultures across the globe.

Place-based learning is normalised in Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion schooling) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori traditional practices and te ao Māori (Māori world) values are also embedded in these Māori immersion settings (Tocker, 2012). Central to mātauranga Māori is the concept of whakapapa (ancestry), and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Place-based, experiential learning experiences are also foundational to Hawaiian culture-based schools, and these have proven positive impacts on holistic learner wellbeing (Alencastre, 2015). Manning (2016) asserts the importance of educators not merely being 'passive observers' in regard to place-based education, but rather strongly familiarising themselves with local whānau and iwi narratives, and creatively integrating these into teaching and learning experiences.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, our colonial history included assimilationist parliamentary Acts that worked to eradicate Māori ways of being and knowing in education and society (Jones, 2022). Western forms of schooling have been central to the demise of Māori language and culture, and the marginalisation of accompanying knowledge systems (Simon, 1998; Simon & Smith, 2001). Indigenous communities globally experienced colonial schooling systems purposely imposed on Indigenous peoples in their own lands (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). Our current education system was founded on racist policies (Hetaraka, 2022; Jones, 2022).

At the heart of mātauranga Māori lies te reo Māori, the Māori language, which serves as a vessel for preserving and transmitting knowledge. Royal (2019) explains that mātauranga Māori, including te reo Māori, is in a state of rejuvenation; although many aspects of Indigenous knowledge were lost, and mere fragments remain today, those that do remain are in a new and innovative period.

"Kaitiakitanga is mātauranga Māori, which is taonga tuku iho [ancestral knowledge passed down through generations], replete with mana [authority; prestige] and rangatiratanga [chiefly autonomy; right to exercise authority] and distinct from any other body of knowledge" (Beverland, 2022, p. 213). Kaitiakitanga is often these days connected to themes of sustainability, and land and resource care and protection, although its roots are

deeper and integrate themes of guardianship and nurture. An Indigenous Māori understanding of kaitiakitanga has hapū and iwi (subtribal and tribal) affiliations, and a non-Māori version of kaitiakitanga may be understood quite differently (Beverland, 2022).

OUR MĀTAURANGA MĀORI ITE PROGRAMME

> Kaitiakitanga is not an obligation which we choose to adopt or to ignore; it is an inherited commitment that links mana atua, mana tangata and mana whenua, the spiritual realm with the human world and both of those with the earth and all that is on it. (Selby et al., 2010, p. 11)

As stated in the previous section, kaitiakitanga is mātauranga Māori. In the paragraph above from Selby and colleagues, mana atua, mana tangata, and mana whenua describe the deep-set connection between the physical and metaphysical realms. The notions of mana atua, mana tangata, and mana whenua are also present in Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017). In this curriculum, mana atua refers to wellbeing, mana whenua relates to belonging, and mana tangata is contribution. The additional strands in this early childhood curriculum are mana reo (communication) and mana aotūroa (exploration). In the development and design phase of our programme, we engaged with kaiako (teachers), tumuaki (principals), kaiārahi (leaders), kaumātua (elders), and representatives from iwi and the community. Although our programme was always envisaged to be a dual-sector ITE degree, where graduates could teach in either early childhood or primary settings, it was the bicultural foundation of Te Whāriki (2017) that greatly influenced the programme design and structure. In fact, a Māori immersion primary school kaiako involved in the consultation phase explained that the bicultural, bilingual nature of Te Whāriki (2017) is good for all teaching and learning sectors, and should be the founding curriculum for our tohu (qualification). Ultimately, four ITE courses within our Mātauranga Māori teaching degree were named Mana Whenua, Mana Tangata, Mana Atua, and Mana Reo. There were other, additional courses. We will concentrate on the courses Mana Whenua and Mana Atua in sharing some reflections pertaining to the unique intricacies of our programme. First, however, an introduction to our programme will follow.

We are based in Te Waipounamu, the South Island of New Zealand, and our students come with a multitude of connections to our wider community of kura (schools), marae (a place where formal gatherings and discussions occur), and hapū (subtribes). Many of our students have been engaged with Kotahi Mano Kāika (KMK), the Kāi Tahu (South Island tribe) strategy for language revitalisation. KMK provides resources and wānanga (learning sessions) that many of our students have participated in. Some of our students have grown up in te reo Māori speaking homes, with some now teaching Te Ahu o te Reo which is designed to improve te reo Māori teacher competency across the education sector. The students are walking the talk of tuākana-tēina, in which the older and more capable teach the younger and less capable and vice versa, by teaching the teachers and senior staff of local schools in the community Māori language. It is not uncommon to see the men from the pre-service teacher cohort called on to speak on the paepae (orators' bench) for our local marae.

Reclamation and acquisition of te reo Māori is integral to our approach as we seek support students' success. Being responsive to student needs means also providing te reo Māori lessons that are appropriate for tēina, at the beginning of their language journey, and tuākana lessons for those that are able to operate in a rumaki (immersive) setting. Local pūrākau, whakataukī, and history are highlighted. As staff, kaupapa (initiatives) such as kura reo (total immersion language seminars for beginner to advanced speakers of te reo Māori), help to develop our own language proficiency. Kura Reo Kāi Tahu and Kura Reo Te Wai Pounamu (immersion classes for advanced te reo Māori learners/speakers) also help us to connect with the wider Māori language speaking community. As teacher educators, and almost all second language learners ourselves, we need to make ongoing improvements in our own language competency to keep pace with the graduates of kura kaupapa Māori and other language learning environments who come to us as students.

In the South Island of New Zealand, there is a dire need to increase the number of Māori-speaking teachers and teachers who have whakapapa Māori (Māori ancestry). The teacher shortage extends to English-medium education and across the whole of Aotearoa New Zealand (Dunn, 2024). Across the country, 12 percent of teachers have Māori ancestry, and a mere four percent have ancestry from the Pacific (Ministry of Education, 2024). Our cohort is different: we have one student of Greek ancestry, one of Tongan-Māori ancestry, four Samoan students, and the remainder of our cohort of 24 are Māori. Our demographic is unique, and in every way we aim to celebrate their uniqueness and empower them through cultural identity and whakapapa.

Mana Atua, underpinned by cultural empowerment, is taught every year of our three-year programme. Themes of holistic well-being are interwoven through Mana Atua, founded on the dimensions of Durie's (1984) Te Whare Tapa Whā. Mana Atua Tipuranga Tamaiti is the full name of the course, and it explores pēpi (baby) and tamaiti (child) development through a kaupapa Māori lens. Atua Māori (Māori deities) and tūpuna (ancestors) of students in our class are linked to students' own pūmanawa (talents and attributes) to emphasise a sense of belonging and whanaungatanga (relationships).

Mana Whenua explores knowledge systems that stem from the taiao (environment), connected to the whenua (land) and wai (waterways). Mahinga kai (traditional food gathering and cultivation) practices, māra kai (gardening), Maramataka (the Māori lunar calendar), Indigenous food sources, and tikanga Māori are researched, explored, and enacted in this paper. Through our Mana Whenua course, pre-service teachers are engaged in place-based learning, following the trails of our tūpuna, as well as learning the cultural narratives that connect us to the land and waterways. The traditional knowledge(s) of our tūpuna give guidance towards a sustainable future for our tamariki and mokopuna (children and grandchildren). Both the Mana Atua and Mana Whenua courses are taught bilingually, with the aim of full-immersion delivery and assessment.

AKO AOTEAROA KAUPAPA MĀORI TEACHING EXCELLENCE CRITERIA

Ako Aotearoa are a body who support the tertiary sector towards improved learner success through professional learning and development. They developed criteria to measure tertiary teaching excellence within a kaupapa Māori paradigm (Ratima et al., 2022). Due to our country's bicultural origins, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi being foundational to Aotearoa New Zealand's education system, we believe these criteria are appropriate for all tertiary teachers and teaching environments. The criteria are included in *Ngā Hau e Whā o Tāwhirimātea: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning for the Tertiary Sector* (Ratima et al., 2022). They are based on traditional Māori pedagogies (Hemara, 2000) and also contemporary ways of teaching and learning founded on Māori values and principles.

1. Ako – Teaching and Learning. Teaching and learning are based on reciprocity. Teacher-to-student relationships are strong, and learners' prior knowledge is welcome in the learning environment.
2. Wānangatanga – Knowledge. Teaching includes and promotes Māori- and/or iwi-centred knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews, including mātauranga Māori.
3. Ngā Uara – Values. Whakamanatanga and whakarangatiratanga are means to empower learners/learning and communities, teaching by creating a student-centred environment.
4. Whanaungatanga – Relationships. Teaching develops and maintains strong relationships with learners, colleagues, whānau, hapū, iwi, and community.
5. Manatanga – Leadership. Leadership in teaching is expressed through contribution to te ao Māori, to New Zealand society or to the international Indigenous-knowledge context.
6. Mātaki | Taunaki – Evaluation of Excellence in Teaching and Learning.
   Teaching incorporates a cycle of reflective practice drawing on peer review, awareness of evidence-based best practice, self-reflection, student feedback, formal internal and external systems of evaluation, and institutional review, to develop and improve on practice (Ratima et al., 2022, p. 13).

These criteria are used as a framework to consider what teaching excellence might look like, sound like, and feel like when Mātauranga Māori is privileged, and how these insights might enhance ITE and tertiary education more widely. Our reflections on the criteria follow below.

NGĀ WHAKAARO HOU | REFLECTIONS

Ako –Teaching and learning are based on reciprocity, and Wānangatanga – Knowledge. Teaching includes and promotes Māori- and/or iwi-centred knowledge

The Mana Whenua course delivery ensures we walk the paths of our tūpuna and take time to breathe in the taiao. Pūrākau are a powerful way to deepen student awareness of mātauranga Māori, and, through pūrākau, the whakapapa of native birds and indigenous plants can been explored. It is our role as teacher educators to connect this ancestral knowledge to current curriculum documents. The physical activity of climbing mountains and walking tracks in the Waitaha (Canterbury) region pushed our tauira (students) out of their comfort zones. This was a good experience for our pre-service teachers; we ask our tamariki to step out of their comfort zones regularly and take risks. As our pre-service teachers became more familiar with place-based stories, histories, and genealogies of flora and fauna, they too were expected to lead the learning, and teach their peers. Utu, or the notion of reciprocity and balance, is prevalent within te ao Māori, and is also enacted and encouraged in teaching and learning environments across the sector.

Ngā Uara – Values. Whakamanatanga and whakarangatiratanga (empowering learners and communities)

Kā Huru Manu (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2023) is a Ngāi Tahu Indigenous online cultural mapping atlas. It is a resource that provides traditional names and histories associated with place names across the Kāi Tahu region, which lies dominantly in the South Island of New Zealand. This is an invaluable resource for educators, learners, and everyone. Its collection is a window into the huge work of the local people to prioritise intergenerational iwi-specific knowledge. As lecturers, we endeavour to embed these kōrero (conversations/discussions) into our courses and to attend iwi-specific wānanga to continue to develop our own mātauranga. We as a teaching team are continually trying to grow, develop, and build our own knowledge and create culturally empowering and localised content that our pre-service teachers can connect to, and adapt to teach their ākonga (learners). Through sharing histories of place and people, we are empowering local iwi and hapū narratives and keeping these alive. Our students consider ways in which to create contemporary learning experiences, integrating different subject areas, from traditional stories that have relevance today. Due to our programme being situated in Te Waipounamu, and being the only Mātauranga Māori teaching programme in the South Island, many of our students have ancestral links to Kāi Tahu. Therefore, the histories we embed in the programme empower our own pre-service teachers, as they can culturally locate themselves in our space.

Whanaungatanga – Relationships, and Manatanga – Leadership

Teaching and learning in and through waiata and haka (Māori posture dance) promote Māori language revitalisation and holistic wellbeing."Kapa haka (Māori performing arts) … can be an ultimate healing pathway ... And it's the ultimate way to re-indigenise our lives" (Tamihere-Waititi, cited in Leatinu'u, 2023). Kapa haka is an area where students have demonstrated teaching excellence, through tutoring kura (school) performances, writing waiata and, in the case of many students, successfully performing in regional senior kapa haka competitions. Three students helped their teams qualify for the national competition and hope to represent Waitaha (Canterbury) in 2025. Learning and practising waiata form the foundation of whanaungatanga (relationship building) in our wānanga (learning sessions) and on noho marae (marae stay experiences). It is important that we are familiar with the Kāi Tahu anthems, waiata Hamoa (Samoan waiata), and other well-known, go-to iwi songs, to have a

repertoire of waiata for formal occasions. Students know they can pick up the guitar and sing their hearts out in our lessons, which can enhance the learning and contribute to the well-being of students and staff. This was evident at a recent tangihanga (funeral) that our staff and students attended, where they performed a kapa haka bracket.

In an English medium (predominantly English speaking), mainstream setting, one might wonder, how is this teaching excellence or leadership? Students took the time to attend the tangihanga of their own accord in the term break. They organised koha (a gift of money or other gift); they organised a set of appropriate waiata to acknowledge the whānau pani (family of the deceased), and more than one of the male students used formal te reo Māori oratory to acknowledge and uplift the grieving family. Waiata were sung in a way that showed aroha (love, empathy) and manaaki (respect and care). We believe the group's understanding of tikanga Māori, through their own knowledge and through their immersion in te ao Māori through the ITE programme, enhanced their leadership in this space. We believe the enactment of waiata and kapa haka will enhance their ability to become excellent teachers for their future ākonga, through their growth in confidence and knowledge within te ao Māori. Kapa haka provides a space to be culturally confident, and to celebrate being Māori. It is a culturally connected activity that supports academic success (Leatinu'u, 2023; Whitinui, 2008).

Mātaki | Taunaki – Evaluation of excellence in teaching and learning

All but one of our current Mātauranga Māori cohort work as kaiāwhina, in a teaching assistant role, or kaiārahi i te reo, leading te reo Māori me ōna tikanga in classrooms, or are LATs (teaching staff who have a Limited Authority to Teach). This is a unique and beneficial feature of our programme. Most ākonga came into the programme while in their current teaching or teaching support roles, and some have become LATs or kaiāwhina during the course of their degree. This speaks to the fact that these kaiako are extremely sought after: having strong proficiency in te reo Māori me ōna tikanga is a highly valued skill in education. According to some anecdotal associate teacher and mentor teacher feedback, the expertise, confidence, and skill with which some of these kaiako whakangungu (teacher trainees) enter our programme surpass those of other teachers. They are already confident in their role, and their teacher presence is somewhat instilled from the outset. In terms of reflective and evaluative practice, our kaiako whakangungu are able to learn collaboratively through wānanga (traditional forum for discussion and learning) for one full day per week, and in a noho marae experience twice per year. They can potentially take the learning from the wānanga straight into the early learning centre or classroom. This is a cyclical process where pre-service teachers can learn, reflect, trial, evaluate; learn, reflect, trial, and evaluate. Reflection is ongoing, and happens repeatedly.

The lead author has taught in the tertiary sector for around 15 years, and has taught more widely across sectors from early 2000. She is of Māori ancestry, and has whakapapa from Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga a Māhaki, and Te Whānau a Kai. She writes:

> I have seen an increased acceptance from our pre-service teachers over the years to learn te reo Māori. There has been an attitude shift, from something 'we have to do' to a genuine interest and even passion. What has taken longer is understanding the history of our whenua, the inequities that sit at the heart of our education system, and how colonial systems and prejudice filter through to today. Mātauranga Māori derives here; it is a treasure, to be celebrated and to be elevated. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case in all tertiary settings. Mātauranga Māori is not an extra add-on, or after-thought; it needs to be foundational. Te reo Māori me ōna tikanga is mātauranga Māori, and mātauranga Māori is found in kupu (words), phrases, environmental terms, whakataukī, and narratives; te reo Māori can teach us about our natural environment and how to look after it and connect to it better. Mātauranga Māori is not popping a karakia at the beginning of a lesson, and/or adding a whakataukī at the top of a newsletter. Those things are misleading window dressing. Mātauranga Māori is not adding the odd Māori word into a text,

or singing the odd waiata and thinking that is enough. It involves every dimension of Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1984), with te taha wairua (a sense of spiritual connection and belonging) understood and prioritised. Mātauranga Māori in the tertiary sector, particularly in English-medium institutions, is ongoing traditional learning, and navigation. It takes everyone valuing this knowledge system, and putting this knowledge at the forefront.

NGĀ ĀHEITANGA | OPPORTUNITIES

Many tertiary institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand embed Māori values or concepts into vision statements or graduate profiles, and this notion extends to the compulsory education sector. How well all staff understand and live Māori values and concepts is unknown. How committed all teaching staff are to the explicit teaching and enactment of these in every facet of every programme is also unknown. Whanaungatanga is linked to 'relationships,' which is correct, but it means far more than that. Whanaungatanga is creating an atmosphere that can be likened to that of a whānau (family); one built upon shared responsibility and shared commitment. It involves notions of 'belonging' and 'connectedness' that go beyond the four walls of the classroom. Whanaungatanga is the safe space you create, that feels like being 'home.' This is what we endeavour to create in our Mātauranga Māori ITE programme, particularly in an institution where, we know, Māori and Pacific students have not always felt safe or connected. Whanaungatanga is closely connected to whakapapa, and how this is embodied in educational settings across our tertiary sector deserves further investigation. "Whakapapa can and should also be used as a verb as well as a noun so that it allows Māori to engage with connecting to environmental change as part of a 'bigger' family connection that connects people to the environment e.g., coastal people with the ocean" (Heke, 2014. p. 5).

It may and will take genuine authenticity, effort, openness, and humility for non-Māori to fully immerse themselves in environments that are founded on Māori values and understand them from the heart. It is different for Māori, and it is different again for Māori who are reclaiming ancestral knowledge(s), and who have elements of disconnection in their own whakapapa or identity. Mātauranga Māori is a vehicle towards Indigenous reconnection, reclamation, and re-indigenisation. Mead (2012) stresses the importance of privileging Māori knowledge systems in academic and societal discourse, challenging Western paradigms.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this piece, we return to the questions that were asked earlier. What does teaching excellence look like, sound like, and feel like when privileging Māori knowledge(s)? How can these insights enhance ITE and tertiary teaching more widely? Teaching excellence looks like the rejuvenation of traditional knowledge systems, and normalising these in a contemporary context. Teaching excellence sounds like joyous voices, chanting and reclaiming histories and traditional practices that possess moral codes that are important in today's society. Teaching excellence feels like ihi (essential force, excitement) and wehi (awe); it is wana (thrilling). When we embed the concepts ako (reciprocal teaching and learning) and wānangatanga (Māori and/or iwi-centred knowledge transfer) into our teaching environments, a culturally centred learning space will emerge, and the goal of Māori achieving as Māori may be realised. If we empower learners and their communities through cultural identity and place-based knowledges, progression and development may transpire differently, or more authentically. Whanaungatanga and creating authentic relationships and connections with the learner within the context of their whānau are key to engagement. What does 'teaching excellence' look like? It is learner engagement and learner enjoyment.

Mātauranga Māori, when taught with authenticity, humility, and ongoing investigation, can open a whole new world: te ao mārama (the world of light), which can be engaging and enjoyable. Te ao mārama signifies an enlightened approach; mātauranga Māori can offer such an enlightened approach to teaching and learning. Here,

we leave the last word to Sir Hirini Moko Mead: "What exactly was it that Māori students entering classrooms possessed that took so long for the education system to recognise? The answer was 'mātauranga Māori', which is Māori knowledge complete with its values and attitudes" (Mead, 2022).

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FACILITATING SUCCESSFUL LEARNING: PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Glenys Ker and Rachel van Gorp

INTRODUCTION

In today's educational landscapes, acknowledging neurodiversity is crucial for fostering inclusive learning environments. This article delves into the journey of two educators, Rachel and Glenys, whose collaborative exploration intertwines personal experiences, transformative learning, and the subtle art of effective facilitation for neurodiverse learners. Neurodiversity, a concept recognising and celebrating neurological differences, forms the backdrop for Rachel's profound personal journey. As we navigate Rachel's discovery of her neurodiverse challenges, her recognition of her gifts ('work-arounds'), and her pursuit of a master's entitled "Neurodiversity in Vocational Education: Facilitating Success," we unfold the narrative of two educators committed to understanding and enhancing the educational experience for neurodiverse learners. This article aims to distil the collective insights gained from their journey, emphasising the significance of effective facilitation strategies in empowering neurodiverse learners to succeed.

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY

Neurodiversity views human brain function and mental health conditions from a different perspective (Clouder et al., 2020). It understands that differences in how people think are normal. Some conditions, usually seen as disorders, are just variations, not necessarily something wrong. Neurocognitive differences are considered natural. Shifting away from deficit-focused thinking, neurodiversity acknowledges that each person's mind may have unique strengths and challenges, encompassing conditions such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and others. Neurodiversity challenges the one-size-fits-all approach, emphasising that understanding and supporting each learner's unique style is essential for a more inclusive and effective educational system (Clouder et al., 2020; Mirfin-Veitch et al., 2020).

CHALLENGES FACED BY NEURODIVERSE LEARNERS

Neurodivergent learners often face challenges in traditional educational settings due to differences in processing information and interacting with their environment. For instance, learners with autism may struggle with social communication and sensory sensitivities, while those with ADHD may have difficulty with attention and impulse control (Clouder et al., 2020; Jansen et al., 2017; Mirfin-Veitch et al., 2020).

Individuals with autism may also have difficulties understanding the perspectives and intentions of others, impacting their social interactions, and individuals with ADHD may struggle with organisation, planning, and self-regulation, affecting their ability to focus and complete tasks. Neurodivergent learners may encounter barriers such as rigid teaching methods that do not accommodate diverse learning styles, social expectations that are challenging to meet, and sensory environments that can be overwhelming. These challenges can lead to feelings of frustration, isolation, and academic underachievement.

As van Gorp (2022) suggests, addressing these challenges requires adopting inclusive practices that provide individualised support and accommodation. This may include modifying teaching strategies, providing sensory-friendly environments, promoting self-regulation skills, and fostering understanding and acceptance among peers. By embracing and implementing inclusive approaches, educational settings can better support the diverse needs of neurodiverse learners.

FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

Glenys has an extensive background as an educator, not only in the classroom but in guiding the learning journeys of experienced adults in professional settings. She utilises valuable insights acquired from feedback given by over 170 learners as well as ongoing feedback through a variety of mechanisms. Themes that have emerged include delving into the independent learner journey, perspectives on new learning, the facilitator's role, and the elements contributing to educational success. This comprehensive feedback guided Glenys in formulating a Model of Effective Education (Ker, 2017), crafted from the invaluable perspectives of both learners and facilitators. This incorporation of feedback was a crucial component of her doctoral studies.

This comprehensive model for effective facilitation of learning, particularly in the context of the Independent Learning Pathway (ILP) approach, features four key principles for effective facilitation, based on learner feedback and effective practices observed across various contexts.

Principle 1: Fit – Establishing alignment

It is crucial that there is a close fit between the learner and facilitator. Feedback underscores the effectiveness of the learning process when a noticeable fit exists between the facilitator and the learner. Discovering commonalities, shared understandings, and hobbies enhances the overall relationship.

Principle 2: Relationship – Building mutual respect

The relationship between facilitator and learner should be characterised by mutual respect, trust, and empathy. Facilitators must quickly gain insights into their learners by familiarising themselves with their CVs, self-assessment results, and other provided information. A strong rapport is established when facilitators demonstrate care, understanding, and the ability to 'walk in the learner's shoes.'

Principle 3: Skills, knowledge, attitudes – Facilitator competence

Facilitators must possess a range of skills and attributes, including passion, energy, empathy, and the ability to be an effective role model. Learners value accessible, available, and responsive facilitators who provide timely feedback. The facilitator's competence in understanding adult learning theories, reflective practice, subject-specific knowledge, and workplace practices is essential.

Principle 4: Learners first – Prioritising learner needs

Effective facilitators prioritise learners by being responsive and available, and always acting in the learner's best interest. This involves flexibility in working hours, acknowledging that learners often study in the evenings and weekends. Facilitators need to embrace this flexibility for successful facilitation, aligning with the professional nature of the role.

Related concept: Āta

Incorporating the Māori concept of "āta" (proceeding slowly and with purpose) into the learner-facilitator relationship emphasises the importance of relational behaviours, respect for values and traditions, and a willingness to invest time in resolving matters.

Professional role of facilitators

Viewing facilitation not merely as a technical skill set but as a professional activity aligns with the notion that facilitators are experts in the field of teaching and learning. They need expertise in adult learning theories and the ability to apply them. Facilitators also recognise the importance of cultural competence, and the model emphasises the need for them to effectively work with learners from different cultural backgrounds, particularly highlighting the relevance of Māori values. Adding to the skill base of facilitators, Rachel believes that they need to be well-equipped to work with all learners who present with a range of challenges and characteristics, including those who are neurodiverse.

Learner characteristics

Recognising the unique characteristics of learners who are professionally experienced but lack academic experience, the model addresses the need for support and scaffolding in the reflective process. For classroom teaching, Rachel believes that recognising the unique characteristics of every learner is crucial to the learning environment; therefore, teaching needs to be tailored to a range of learning styles and challenges.

Some of the key themes in Ker's (2017) study, which still hold well today, suggest that the role of the facilitator is crucial to successful outcomes for learners. Key insights that learners shared include the observation that one facilitator was "knowledgeable, encouraging and [a] highly skilled communicator, she provided me with challenges/stretch, and it pushed me to do great rather than just good." Another learner said of their facilitator that "his people skills were excellent – he was always available – questioning was always underlined by his knowledge of adult learning."

There were many paradoxical comments, with seemingly contradictory attributes seen as important; for example, patient yet persistent. "Empathetic, understanding, bossy, kept pushing me," was one comment. This suggests that the facilitator needs good judgment as to when to assume different roles in relation to the learner. Acting in the best interests of the learner requires a facilitator who cares yet is willing to hold the learner to account to make progress and keep to deadlines.

Other facilitators identified in Ker's (2017) study were caring, passionate, had a sense of humour, and were trusting. This latter quality meant believing that the learner could and would succeed:

> She had so much passion and energy that she poured into the whole process and me, and I always felt like I was the most important person in her day, that this is the most important thing on her agenda, but when I actually talked to other learners, they all felt the same.
>
> I guess it is how a facilitator actually can get inside your head, and I truly think that I could have had another facilitator, and I would not have done so well ... her emotional intelligence, understanding, and listening and hearing and seeing the little flags I put up and understanding it from another person's perspective … she always challenged me.

In the exploration of qualities that define an effective facilitator, participants not only identified common beliefs but also revealed unique, individualised factors. The key factors deemed significant by facilitators include:

- Possessing knowledge of teaching and learning theories, particularly those related to adult learning, such as experiential learning and recognition of prior learning.
- Demonstrating a passion and drive for the educator role.
- Sharing common beliefs and outlooks with the learners.
- Maintaining regular contact with learners while establishing clear boundaries and parameters from the outset.

- Holding a fundamental interest in understanding people.
- Exemplifying trustworthiness, openness, and honesty.
- Having the ability to monitor and track learners' progress and keep them on the right path.
- Exhibiting the skills to motivate and mentor learners effectively.
- Balancing the ability to challenge learners with understanding the boundaries for such challenges, preventing the undermining of learner confidence.

The above snapshot of the facilitation study outlines the principles and values that contribute to a holistic understanding of effective facilitation in an ILP setting. The incorporation of cultural values and the emphasis on professionalism add depth to the model. As with all models, there is a need to constantly refine and add value as learning expands and learners provide further feedback.

NEURODIVERSITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

To update the model, it became timely to acknowledge Rachel's work, particularly the tools and strategies informed by feedback from both learners and staff in the neurodiverse environment. Unified in their belief that learners play a pivotal role in their learning journey, Rachel and Glenys expanded the model to incorporate expectations for learners (van Gorp, 2022). This collaborative initiative sought to develop a more inclusive framework, considering not only the facilitator's role but also empowering learners to actively engage in and contribute to their learning journey.

The themes uncovered in van Gorp's (2022) master's study resonate with Ker's (2017) insights, particularly regarding the relationship between facilitators and neurodivergent learners and the supportive role this connection plays in the learner's experience.

Learners, as indicated by some key insights, emphasise the pivotal role of a positive relationship with their facilitators in ensuring successful outcomes throughout their learning journey. For instance, one learner expressed the sentiment that "once the facilitator knows I'm neurodivergent, they should come to me to build that relationship."

All learners stressed the importance of fostering an open relationship with their facilitator. As articulated by one learner, this approach led to the realisation that an open dialogue and normalisation were conducive to producing their best work: "they soon realised that that was how they got the best work from me."

For others, it translated to a more welcoming environment, enabling them to "open that dialogue, keep the conversation going, just normalise it." Another learner said, "I've spoken to my facilitator, and I said I've got dyslexia ... [they] were really good about it." The same learner expressed satisfaction with the understanding demonstrated by the facilitator, noting "they're very patient."

These responses from learners underscore the evident significance of establishing a strong rapport with facilitators for effective support throughout the learning journey. An integral aspect of this process involves providing learners with opportunities to leverage their skills and strengths to attain their learning goals.

As facilitators become increasingly acquainted with neurodiverse learners, the ability to adjust teaching methods grows, resulting in a more personalised learning experience. This continuous dialogue between neurodiverse learners and facilitators represents a positive stride forward. Experts emphasise that building relationships with neurodivergent learners and comprehending their unique needs are paramount to their success. New concepts are gaining prominence, such as the availability of someone who understands the neurodivergent learner experience and can adapt teaching approaches for optimal learning outcomes.

Encouraging learners to take responsibility for their challenges and actively engage with facilitators is essential for fostering autonomy, a core principle of Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. Facilitators play a pivotal role in empowering learners by inviting them to contribute ideas and solutions, which fosters a collaborative environment that accommodates neurodiverse learners through personalised teaching methods. By prioritising ongoing dialogue and relationship-building, facilitators gain valuable insights into diverse perspectives and learning styles, enabling a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This shared responsibility not only enhances learners' autonomy but also ensures that all learners can thrive academically and reach their full potential (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Jansen et al., 2017; Mirfin-Veitch et al., 2020).

In Rachel's classroom, this involves employing various methods to cater to the diverse needs of all her learners. As an illustration, Rachel has developed a valuable 'tool' (Figure 1) intended for use by fellow educators, showcasing her commitment to personalised education within the broader educational context.

As an educator, you can use these suggestions to aid and support your learning and teaching environment for the neurodivergent learner. These are also suggestions for improving your effectiveness as a facilitator.	
N	**Note** to discuss **neurodiversity** with the class so they can feel empowered to engage with the facilitator early.
E	**Engage** with learners about their learning styles.
U	**Undertake** to find a range of ways each class likes to learn: for example, PowerPoints, notes in a handout, project-based learning in groups.
R	**Read** the information to the class so that they will clearly understand and hear the critical pieces.
O	**Observe** your learners and how they interact in class.
D	**Diversify** your practice and constantly come up with new ways for learners to engage with understanding information and share ideas.
I	**Inclusion** in teaching and learning is the term used to describe the goal of treating everyone equitably.
V	**Value**-added measures that individual facilitators can apply so learners learn through dignity, truthfulness, fairness, and independent thinking.
E	**Enhance** and engage with the learners using multiple teaching methods.
R	**Rapport** is key to building a relationship with your learners: learning something about them, their interests, hobbies, and aspirations. Learn to call your learners by their names.
S	**Safe** learning and teaching environment. Ensure a classroom is safe. Dim the lights and have some fidget toys or stress releasers available for learners.
I	**Independent** study provides learners with opportunities to test out their learning. Some neurodiverse learners prefer not to work in large groups.
T	**Try**, where possible, to work with the positives of neurodiverse learners: their strengths, strategies, and skills.
Y	**You** bring your whole self to the learning and teaching environment. Engage with learners, tell them a little about yourself and encourage them to do the same. Build a learning and teaching environment that cares about everyone.

Figure 1. Effectiveness in the learning and teaching environment (van Gorp, 2022).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the exploration of qualities that define an effective facilitator, feedback from learners, colleagues, experts in neurodiverse learning, and student support, key factors were identified and deemed significant for successful learning. These factors include:

Possessing knowledge of teaching and learning theories: Proficient facilitators grasp teaching and learning theories, emphasising adult learning concepts like experiential learning and recognition of prior learning.

Cultural competence and clear expectations: Facilitators are expected to actively integrate cultural competence, understanding cultural subtleties, and establishing clear expectations for creating an inclusive space that celebrates differences. This ensures effective engagement with learners from diverse backgrounds, fostering inclusivity.

Importance of neurodiversity: The model highlights understanding neurodiversity, urging facilitators to enhance practices for various cognitive styles. This inclusivity reinforces the model's commitment to creating an accessible learning atmosphere for all participants.

Demonstrating passion and drive: Successful facilitators exhibit a genuine passion and drive for the facilitator role, showing enthusiasm for the learning process and fostering a positive learning environment.

Sharing common beliefs and outlook: Establishing a connection with learners is crucial. Effective facilitators find common beliefs and outlooks with their learners, fostering a sense of connection and understanding.

Maintaining regular contact with learners: Regular communication is key. Facilitators maintain consistent contact with learners while establishing clear boundaries and parameters from the outset to create a supportive learning environment.

Interest in understanding people: Effective facilitators possess a fundamental interest in understanding people, contributing to a compassionate and empathetic approach.

Exemplifying trustworthiness, openness, and honesty: Trust is foundational. Facilitators embody trustworthiness, openness, and honesty, creating an atmosphere where learners feel secure and encouraged to share openly.

Monitoring and tracking learners' progress: Facilitators should monitor and track learners' progress, ensuring they stay on the right path and receive the necessary support for their learning journey.

Motivating and mentoring skills: Effective facilitators exhibit the skills to motivate and mentor learners effectively, providing guidance and encouragement to enhance the learning experience.

Balancing challenge and confidence: Striking the right balance is essential. Facilitators challenge learners to stimulate growth but are mindful of boundaries to prevent undermining learner confidence.

These factors collectively contribute to the effectiveness of a facilitator in supporting the diverse needs of learners and creating a conducive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

This article explores the personal journey of the authors, intertwining experiences, transformative learning, and effective facilitation for neurodiverse learners. It emphasises the importance of understanding and incorporating neurodiversity in educational settings and presents a model for effective facilitation, in both the Independent Learning Pathway approach and in classroom settings. Rachel introduces the concept of neurodiversity, emphasising individual neurological differences and the need for personalised approaches, which she draws from her master's study. Ker's (2017) Model of Effective Facilitation, derived from her doctoral research, emphasises principles like fit, relationship, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and putting learners first. Acknowledging the Māori concept of āta in the learner-facilitator relationship stresses relational behaviours and respect for values. This

article recognises the complexity of facilitation, highlighting professional qualities, adherence to standards, and continuous self-assessment and improvement. It discusses Rachel's contributions in incorporating tools and strategies for neurodiverse learners and empowering learners to actively engage in their learning journey. The article underscores the critical role of effective facilitation in supporting neurodiverse learners, presenting a holistic model informed by personal experiences, learner insights, and professional expertise.

Rachel van Gorp is an accomplished Principal Lecturer with a wide-ranging background, including experience in banking, personal training, massage therapy, business ownership, mentorship, and volunteering. As a member of the Otago Polytechnic School of Business, Rachel brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to her undergraduate teaching programmes. Rachel is a dedicated advocate for neurodiverse individuals in vocational education and serves as the chair of the Neurodiversity Community of Practice. She is committed to promoting inclusion and equal opportunities for individuals with diverse learning abilities. Her recent Master of Professional Practice reflects her focus on the essential topic of "Neurodiversity in Vocational Education: Facilitating Success." With her unique combination of experience, Rachel is able to bring a practical perspective to her teaching, engaging students in real-world scenarios and helping them to develop the skills they need to succeed in their future careers. Her dedication to the field of vocational education has made her a highly respected member of the academic community, and her commitment to promoting neurodiversity is making a significant impact on the lives of her learners and the wider community.

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Glenys Ker is a highly experienced work-based learning and professional practice facilitator and assessor, drawing on an extensive and highly successful background as a teacher and career practitioner in both university and polytechnic settings, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She is also an active researcher in the field of work-based learning, integrating her research into the development of facilitators of independent learning. Glenys is the primary architect of the independent learning pathway (ILP) approach to qualifications offered through Capable NZ, Otago Polytechnic's work-based and practice-based learning school. Glenys is an experienced leadership and management practitioner, again in multiple educational contexts, including academic and service departments and leadership of independent learning programmes. In her 19 years' experience in this field, she has worked with and supported many neurodiverse learners – something she is hugely grateful for and has learned so much from. Glenys has co-authored with her colleague Dr Heather Carpenter a book on her work: *Facilitating Independent Learning in Tertiary Education – New Pathways to Achievement.*

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NURTURING PASIFIKA LEARNERS THROUGH EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY: A STUDY OF A PROGRAMME AT UNITEC

Ali Rasheed

INTRODUCTION

There exists a longstanding disparity in the academic success of Pasifika students within tertiary education institutions across New Zealand. Addressing this issue is crucial for the wellbeing of Pasifika communities living in New Zealand and fostering the academic success of Pasifika students enrolled in tertiary institutions. The Pasifika community comprises more than eight percent of New Zealand's population, primarily consisting of people whose ethnicities hail from Pacific Islands such as Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, and Tuvalu. These communities face unique challenges in navigating the complexities of higher education, including socio-economic disparities, and the gap in equity continues to widen. To tackle these challenges, educational institutions have increasingly emphasised the implementation of various pedagogical methods targeted at Pasifika learners. In this context, the New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing Level 4 programme, taught at Unitec, serves as an exemplar of achieving educational success for Pasifika students by utilising culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and holistic support services.

Background

The New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing Level 4 programme at Unitec is tailored to individuals interested in or already engaged in careers within the mental health and addiction sector, including peer support, in the health and social services fields. Rooted in principles of holistic wellbeing and cultural responsiveness, the programme aims to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of mental health and addiction issues, along with essential skills for engaging with individuals, whānau groups, and communities, including Pasifika populations.

With a curriculum that integrates theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience, the programme prioritises kindness, care, and compassion, while respecting the unique identities and experiences of individuals when working with vulnerable communities in society. Through a blend of classroom instruction and practical learning opportunities, the programme emphasises the significance of cultural competence, relational teaching, and community engagement in advancing positive health outcomes and social equity.

As such, the programme serves as a testament to Unitec's dedication to nurturing inclusive educational practices that acknowledge and honour the cultural identities, languages, and lived experiences of Pasifika learners.

Significance of the study

This research aims to evaluate the pedagogical approaches, community partnerships, and support services employed in the New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing Level 4 programme at Unitec to enhance the success of Pasifika learners. By examining a case study of this programme, we seek to analyse the strategies and practices that have contributed to Pasifika learners' educational experiences and outcomes at Unitec.

Moreover, this study contributes to a broader understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy, community engagement, and support services that can aid in improving the educational success of Pasifika learners. Ultimately, this research endeavours to contribute to achieving equity and social justice for Pasifika communities in New Zealand.

Research questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What pedagogical approaches are employed in the New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing Level 4 programme at Unitec to enhance Pasifika learners' academic achievement?
2. How do the community partnership strategies employed by the programme support Pasifika learners in improving their outcomes?
3. What support services are available to Pasifika learners at Unitec, specifically within the programme, and how do these services contribute to their academic achievement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges faced by Pasifika learners in tertiary education

Pasifika learners, comprising mainly seven ethnicities in New Zealand, face numerous challenges in tertiary education, resulting in widening gaps in educational outcomes compared to national averages. Previous research has identified socio-economic factors, cultural differences, language barriers, and lack of representation as major hurdles for Pasifika communities. Socio-economic disparities often lead to financial difficulties, including limited access to resources and support services (Scull & Cuthill, 2010).

Moreover, there is a cultural disconnect between Pasifika learners and Western learning models, which can result in feelings of alienation and disengagement (Brighouse, 2020). The use of English as the language of instruction further exacerbates these challenges, hindering effective communication and comprehension in academic contexts for learners whose first language is not English, such as Pasifika learners (Fletcher et al., 2009). Additionally, the underrepresentation of Pasifika perspectives and lived experiences in curricula and among teaching staff intensifies feelings of marginalisation for Pasifika learners (Fisi'iahi, 2023).

Culturally responsive pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) emerges as a teaching style that acknowledges that all students learn differently. To address the learning style of Pasifika learners, CRP connects students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with their tertiary studies. CRP emphasises the importance of centering students' cultural references and lived experiences in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Central to CRP is the concept of 'relational teaching,' which prioritises the creation of a positive and engaging learning environment. This environment is built upon meaningful connections between educators and students, based on mutual respect and understanding (Vaioleti & Morrison, 2014). CRP also emphasises the incorporation of culturally relevant teaching practices and content that relate to Pasifika learners' cultural frames of reference (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). By acknowledging and validating Pasifika cultural knowledge, CRP creates a sense of belonging and empowerment for Pasifika learners, helping them to engage and achieve (Caingcoy, 2023).

Community engagement in education

Community engagement plays an important role in Pasifika learners' educational success by establishing partnerships with parents, whānau, hapū, and iwi to garner their support and ensure effective collaboration between educational institutions, Pasifika communities, and other stakeholders. Pasifika communities are rich in culture, providing networks that can effectively complement formal education systems (Reynolds, 2017).

Collaborative partnerships enable educational institutions and community organisations to provide tailored services to meet the needs of Pasifika learners (Kolbe et al., 2015). Moreover, involving the community in educational decision-making fosters complementary roles in children's education characterised by reciprocity, trust, and respect (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). By bridging the gap between formal education and community contexts, community engagement initiatives contribute to Pasifika learners' sense of cultural continuity and identity affirmation, thereby enhancing their educational experiences and outcomes.

Support services

The success of Pasifika learners in tertiary education depends on effective support services that scaffold their educational journey. These support services encompass a range of interventions, including academic mentoring, cultural workshops, language support, and financial assistance. To ensure the achievement of Pasifika learners, it is crucial to value their cultural heritage (Fowler, 2023).

By deploying these services and aiming to support Pasifika learners, educational institutions can mitigate barriers to their educational success. Tertiary institutions need to understand Pasifika learning pedagogy to help Pasifika learners to succeed in tertiary institutions (Leenen-Young, 2020). Moreover, it is essential to employ culturally competent support staff who understand Pasifika learners' strengths and challenges. This understanding helps in building trust and rapport while providing support services, thereby enhancing their retention rates (Fowler, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study utilises a qualitative research design to investigate the effectiveness of a specific programme based on the pedagogical practices employed by Unitec to support Pasifika learners. The research aims to document evidence of the initiatives, objectives, pedagogical approaches, and models of learning employed within the programme, fostering a deeper understanding of its efficacy in nurturing Pasifika learners.

Document analysis

Document analysis is a methodological approach gaining prominence in empirical research for evaluating various documents to extract meaningful insights. The study analysed the following documents:

Curriculum materials: Examination of curriculum documents to identify objectives and pedagogical approaches supporting culturally diverse learners.

Teaching guides: Review of teaching guides and lesson plans to understand instructional methods used by educators.

Learning resources: Analysis of learning resources such as texts, worksheets, and teaching materials to identify models of learning embedded within the programme.

Student feedback: Student feedback was reviewed from sources such as student course surveys and graduate destination surveys.

Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis is employed to distil raw data into themes that reflect the initiatives, objectives, pedagogical approaches, and learning models utilised in the programme. This approach ensures a robust understanding through valid inference and interpretation. Additionally, quantitative techniques are used to analyse the frequency and distribution of occurrences within the documents, providing further insights into the implementation and impact of pedagogical practices (Mayring, 2000).

Ethical considerations

The findings of the research were used in a respectful and responsible manner to ensure they were not used to harm or stigmatise participants or groups. Confidentiality of the programme documents was maintained throughout the research process.

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance throughout this study to protect the rights and privacy of all involved parties. The analysis was exclusively focused on curriculum materials and aggregated learner feedback, which included graduate destination surveys. The study ensured that all feedback and examples cited were anonymised to uphold participant confidentiality. Consequently, the study did not require ethics approval as per the guidelines of Unitec Human Research Ethics. This approach was in alignment with established ethical guidelines to prevent any potential harm or stigma to participants or groups.

Limitations

Availability of programme documents may be limited, which could affect the analysis of the data. The analysis of programme documents is not free from interpretation bias, as there could be a tendency to seek, interpret, and favour data based on the researcher's beliefs, assumptions, or hypotheses, in coding and categorisation of data (Sloman, 1996).

FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy within the Level 4 New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing programme at Unitec has had a positive impact on student learning experiences and outcomes.

Culturally responsive pedagogy

The adoption of culturally responsive pedagogy within the programme has fostered an inclusive learning environment, where students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Pasifika students, feel included and accepted. By acknowledging and incorporating students' cultural identities, backgrounds, and perspectives into programme delivery, the programme has demonstrated that cultural inclusivity is embedded within its framework.

The use of inclusive pedagogical approaches that acknowledge and celebrate Pasifika cultural diversity is evident in the programme's teaching materials. Teachers incorporate culturally relevant examples and perspectives into their lessons, increasing student engagement by making the programme content more relevant and relatable to students' lived experiences. The case studies used in the programme are drawn from students' lived experiences, leading to greater interest and participation in learning.

The use of CRP has also resulted in improved learning outcomes for students. By educators incorporating culturally-relevant teaching methods and materials, students have demonstrated a deeper understanding of

programme content and have been able to apply their learning effectively using real-life examples. This is evidenced by the increase in successful outcomes for Pasifika students over time.

The programme utilises activities to facilitate the development of cultural competency among students. Guest speakers, who are cultural experts, are invited to address the students, providing diverse perspectives. Through engagement with these perspectives and exposure to cultural experts, students develop a greater understanding and appreciation of different cultural practices, beliefs, and worldviews. Assessments are designed to be culturally sensitive, allowing Pasifika learners to utilise their knowledge and skills effectively.

Overall, student feedback indicates high levels of satisfaction with the programme due to the implementation of CRP. Many students report feeling more connected to the programme and their peers as a result of the inclusive learning environment.

Community Engagement Initiatives

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant impact of Community Engagement Initiatives within the Level 4 New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing programme at Unitec. Pasifika students enrolled in the programme benefit from participating in Community Engagement Initiatives, supporting their professional development. The programme has established partnerships with local Pasifika community organisations to provide placement opportunities and resources for Pasifika learners. These organisations offer mentoring, tutoring, and cultural enrichment activities. Community Engagement Initiatives provide students with valuable opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, primarily through the 200-hour placement requirement of the programme. Placements are organised in organisations that are culturally responsive to students' needs, allowing them to develop practical skills essential for their future careers in the health and wellbeing sector.

These initiatives play a crucial role in enhancing students' learning experiences and outcomes by providing opportunities for the real-world application of knowledge and skills. The programme encourages and extends opportunities for family and community involvement in the learning process. Events such as Pasifika cultural days and family workshops are organised to engage families in their children's education.

Engagement with community initiatives, such as placements, increases students' awareness of social issues and inequalities facing Pasifika and minority communities. By working directly in these organisations during placements, students gain a deeper understanding of the social determinants of health and how to address these issues to improve health outcomes for communities.

Community Engagement Initiatives, along with the programme content, help students develop strong communication and interpersonal skills. Therefore, during practicum placements, students learn to effectively communicate with diverse populations and develop empathy and cultural sensitivity.

Feedback from students indicates that their involvement in community initiatives through work placements has helped them build valuable connections, enhancing their employability in the sector. This was possible because they gained opportunities for networking, mentorship, and skill development through work placements in the community.

Feedback received from students, including from sources such as graduate destination surveys, also suggests that Community Engagement Initiatives have a positive impact on students' learning experiences and outcomes. Moving forward, it is recommended that these initiatives continue to be integrated and expanded within the programme curriculum to further enhance students' practical skills, social awareness, and professional development.

Support services impact

There is documented evidence showing that student support services (including academic, personal, and culturally responsive support) play a significant role in supporting students throughout their academic journey, ensuring that their learning experiences contribute to their academic success.

Academic support services

The role of the student academic support service is to support Pasifika learners, contributing significantly to their academic success and overall wellbeing. Academic support services, encompassing tutoring, study groups, and academic workshops, have been pivotal in scaffolding students, particularly in challenging subjects. These services are tailored to address specific academic needs, ensuring that students receive targeted assistance where they need it most.

Personal support services

Alongside academic support, personal support services such as counseling, mentoring, and wellbeing services play a complementary role in helping students manage stress, overcome personal challenges, and maintain their overall wellbeing. This dual approach ensures that students are not only academically supported but also emotionally and mentally equipped to thrive in their studies.

Financial challenges often pose significant obstacles to student success. Recognising this, Unitec offers a range of financial support services, including scholarships, grants, and financial counseling, to alleviate financial burdens and enable students to focus on their studies without distraction. This proactive support not only addresses immediate financial needs but also contributes to higher retention rates and improved academic outcomes among students who utilise these services.

Culturally responsive support services

Unitec's Pacific Centre exemplifies the institution's commitment to providing culturally responsive support. Here, Pasifika students receive comprehensive assistance ranging from academic support and career guidance to financial advice and personal mentoring. This holistic approach acknowledges and respects cultural diversity, thereby fostering a supportive environment where students feel valued and empowered to succeed.

Overall, the availability of tailored support services at Unitec has demonstrably enhanced student success and retention within the Pasifika student community. By addressing both academic and personal needs, these services play a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive learning environment where all students can achieve their full potential.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Findings from the student perspective indicate a positive reception of the Level 4 New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing programme at Unitec. Student survey results showed a high level of engagement with the programme content, particularly its relevance to their personal and professional lives. Many students expressed that the programme provided them with valuable insights into health and wellbeing practices that they could apply both in their future careers and personal lives.

Pasifika learners in particular value the inclusive and supportive learning environment created by the programme. They appreciate the opportunity to learn in a culturally responsive setting that celebrates their identity and heritage. They were satisfied with the opportunity to engage with their peers and learn from their experiences. The interactive nature of the programme, including group activities and practical exercises, was highly rated.

While students appreciated the programme design and its interactive elements, they also suggested areas for improvement to further enhance engagement and relevance to their personal and professional lives. These suggestions included providing additional one-to-one learning support, increasing the number of interactive workshops, inviting guest lectures from industry professionals, and providing additional online resources.

Overall, the findings from the student perspective highlight the effectiveness of the programme in providing students with relevant knowledge and skills in the field of health and wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

Implications of culturally responsive pedagogy

The findings of this research emphasise how culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) has contributed to the academic success of Pasifika learners within the programme at Unitec. By valuing Pasifika learners' cultural identities, languages, and lived experiences, CRP fosters a sense of belonging and empowerment, which are essential foundations for meaningful engagement and learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Pasifika learners have been empowered by incorporating culturally relevant content, teaching strategies, and assessment methods into their curriculum and teaching (Bishop & Berryman, 2010). Moreover, CRP has also helped in building positive teacher-student relationships based on mutual respect and understanding, creating supportive learning environments where Pasifika learners feel valued, respected, and motivated (Vaioleti & Morrison, 2014). The implications of CRP in institutional practices have not only addressed inequities within the institution but have also helped to advance educational equity for Pasifika learners.

Community engagement

The study's findings underscore the role of community engagement as a pivotal element in fostering the educational success of Pasifika learners within the programme. Insights gleaned from the study further highlight the significant impact of community engagement on the educational experiences and outcomes of Pasifika students. Successful partnerships have been established with Pasifika community leaders, local organisations, and cultural experts, all of whom offer invaluable insights and support to both educators and students (Brighouse, 2020).

Inclusive community services, such as academic tutoring, mentorship programmes, and cultural counseling, have been tailored to assist students in navigating both academic and personal challenges (Reynolds, 2017). Community engagement has afforded Pasifika students with practical learning opportunities that involve families and communities (Vaioleti & Morrison, 2014).

The findings of this study emphasise the importance of community engagement as a key component of effective pedagogy for Pasifika learners. They offer valuable insights that can contribute to enhancing equity and social justice within the programme

Importance of support services

The study demonstrates that the comprehensive support services offered within the New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing programme at Unitec were instrumental in the academic and personal success of Pasifika learners. These services, grounded in cultural competence and a holistic approach, cater to the diverse needs of Pasifika students, thereby creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

As corroborated by other studies, culturally appropriate services, including academic mentoring, workshops, language support, and financial assistance, play a significant role in overcoming barriers to educational success.

Comprehensive support services that prioritise cultural responsiveness and holistic wellbeing contribute to learners' academic success, cultural pride, and overall sense of belonging. This makes them more resilient in navigating tertiary studies (Mafile'o et al., 2019; Reynolds, 2017).

The study further underscores the importance of these support services in enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes of Pasifika students. It offers valuable insights for other educational institutions aiming to promote equity and success among Pasifika learners.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this research provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of pedagogical practices for Pasifika learners within the Unitec programme, several limitations and avenues for future research merit consideration.

Firstly, it is important to note that the findings are specific to the context of the Unitec programme and may not be readily generalisable to other educational settings or Pasifika communities. Secondly, the reliance on qualiitative data in this study may have constrained the depth and breadth of analysis. Future research could benefit from employing quantitative and mixed-method approaches to triangulate findings and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Pasifika learners' experiences in educational settings.

Furthermore, future studies should delve into specific pedagogical practices, support services, and community engagement initiatives to explore their impact on Pasifika learners' academic achievement, retention rates, and overall wellbeing. Additionally, there is a need for research that examines the role of Pasifika learners in shaping educational policies, practices, and curriculum development within tertiary education settings. Such investigations can contribute to promoting educational equity and social justice.

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