Striving for *Excellence* –

A guide for tertiary teachers

Volume 2
Tertiary Teaching
Excellence in Practice

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AKO
AOTEAROA
academy
OF TERTIARY TEACHING
EXCELLENCE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

The Ako Aotearoa Academy of Tertiary Teaching Excellence comprises all the past winners of National Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards. The Academy is New Zealand's body of nationally recognised excellent tertiary teachers and has a mission to provide advice and support on tertiary education and policy from a practice perspective.

This second volume of extracts from 30 awardee portfolios focusses on the practice of excellent tertiary teaching. This is about achieving flexibility and variety in the classroom and other teaching environments with a view to ensuring that each learner has the best opportunity to remain engaged and succeed.

Without compromising their expectations, excellent teachers recognise and appreciate student diversity and go out of their way to connect with each learner. They identify students' individual strengths and build on them. They are deliberately inclusive and, where the curriculum permits, allow a considerable level of democracy and choice within their classrooms. Considerable attention is paid to ensuring that assessment strategies are authentic and support learning.

Excellent tertiary teachers are seldom satisfied with the status quo. They revel in the fact that each class is different and are not afraid to experiment with new approaches. At the same time they have a great sense of what is working and what is not working and are prepared to change tack as they go.

Once again, thank you to Dawn Garbett, Rachel Williams and Marc Wilson for all their hard work putting this together. Thanks especially to the 30 members of the Ako Aotearoa Academy who so generously shared their portfolios about their teaching practice.

A final and special thank you must go to the Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards Committee that has selected the national awardees each year since 2002. In particular I would like to acknowledge and thank Emeritus Professor Noeline Alcorn, chair of the Awards Committee from 2009-2013 who brought to this role huge experience, wisdom and inclusivity in the selection process. Noeline peer reviewed both these volumes.

Peter Coolbear
Director Ako Aotearoa

INTRODUCTION:
Tertiary Teaching Excellence in Practice

What is excellent teaching and how do you demonstrate and sustain being an excellent teacher in the tertiary sector? These are two fundamental questions that all recipients of the Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards grapple with on an ongoing basis.

In this two-volume set, excerpts from the portfolios of more than 30 national Tertiary Teaching Excellence Award winners (awardees) paint a picture of what excellence in tertiary teaching and learning means to them. It sheds light on the different ways in which these tertiary teachers make sense of their practice and find joy in their everyday work. It is our hope that the comments will resonate with you and inspire you to achieve excellence in your own practice.

These excerpts came from portfolios that were submitted by members of the Ako Aotearoa Academy of Tertiary Teaching Excellence (The Academy), teaching at institutes of technology and polytechnics, private training establishments, adult and community learning centres, universities and wānanga. These teachers come from a wide range of backgrounds and everyone has their own unique story to tell. We have woven their comments together to capture the essence and diversity of the individual portfolios.

The two companion volumes have been arranged as:

Volume 1
Striving for excellence in tertiary teaching
1. The personal philosophy and vision of excellent tertiary teachers
2. The personal and professional development of excellent tertiary teachers
3. The attributes of an excellent tertiary teacher
4. The goals and rewards of excellent tertiary teaching.

Volume 2
Tertiary Teaching Excellence in Practice
5. The foundations of excellent tertiary teaching
6. Assessment as a tool for excellent tertiary teachers
7. The site(s) of excellent tertiary teaching extend beyond the classroom
8. Working with diversity.

Each theme is introduced by guiding questions, which we hope you will keep in mind as you read the comments.

Kāore he mutunga o te ako
There is no ending to learning

The Foundations of Excellent Tertiary Teaching

Tentative definition: The design and delivery of high–quality learning environments

Guiding questions:

1. What strategies and systems do these teachers routinely use in their practice?
2. What common techniques are used by these teachers to deliver content?
3. How do they prepare for upcoming courses?

There are some key ideas that emerge as excellent tertiary teachers write about their everyday, but extraordinary, practices. One is the preparation and forethought that accompanies successful courses to ensure they are relevant and authentic for the students. Another is the attention paid to delivering the content in ways that make it accessible and engaging. The overarching aim is to provide the best possible learning outcomes for all students, as epitomised in the following excerpt.

"Don't think about a course in terms of what you will do, think about it in terms of what the students will do. What is their background coming in? What will motivate them and engage them? What is the best use of their time? What resources and opportunities will you need to provide to help them maximise their learning?"

Preparation of courses is detailed, with special care taken to sequence lessons and align assessment tasks to the intended learning outcomes long before the students arrive for their first class.

"Effective teaching starts before the students and teachers meet in the classroom for the first time. Courses should display integration and consistency (across lectures, laboratories and assessment), and this is particularly important in team-taught courses to maintain coherence."

"My teaching for each semester starts long before the students arrive. The structure and outlines of the various courses have been carefully considered and planned; assessment tasks have been reviewed and modified, and activities and resources prepared…Every year I redesign or modify the courses I teach to better prepare student teachers to meet the expectations of the profession."

The importance of taking such a scholarly, thoughtful approach to teaching is identified in the following excerpt.

"I keep abreast of orthodox education theory and approaches to inform my own course design and teaching strategies and delivery. I believe very strongly that good teaching in higher education must be evidence-based and theoretically anchored, and I take the same scholarly approach to my teaching at tertiary level as I take to my research endeavours."

Excellent teachers use feedback from their students to improve their courses.

"Effective teaching is the outcome of a combination of ongoing self-reflection and a range of activities that take place over a long period of time, activities that include detailed research, careful planning and preparation, consultation, feedback and review."

"I apply what I discover: I've reorganised a Stage 1 course this year so concepts and films are taught thematically rather than chronologically, as the tolerance of first-year students for historical material is decreasing. The important black-and-white films are still there – but they're in the mix rather than taught in one block."

Excellent tertiary teachers have a wide range of approaches and activities at their fingertips; they are well organised but still flexible enough to take advantage of "teachable moments".

"One advantage of attention to course organisation and contingency planning is, ironically, that it allows flexibility if opportunities arise for diverging from the planned course structure. A well-designed course isn't a straitjacket, but a vehicle for flexible teaching. This flexibility is vital, particularly when something goes wrong!"

"Many times I have turned up with a lesson plan ready to go and relinquished it as the group was keen to pursue a different path. A relevant learning need can be met by me being open to a 'teachable moment' from a conversation overheard or a side track taken in a session. I have no hesitation to move from the prepared lesson plan to meet this need."

"People talk of the move from the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide on the side' and this approach is similar to what I have always practised. As a teacher, I move between the two roles as I sense what is needed for today's topic or how the class is reacting to it."

Fostering autonomy and engaging students actively in learning are key to many teaching portfolios, as the following excerpts illustrate.

"Active participation in learning is what really turned me on to science, and can only help my own students to become 'deep' learners… It also helps them to find ways of linking new concepts with those they already know."

"Most of what I teach is novel to students, so I draw on the experience they bring to the classroom to illustrate my teaching, in effect hanging new material on the coat hooks of existing knowledge. Research on effective teaching supports the use of students' prior knowledge, while acknowledging that students may not share the same experience. Prior knowledge may also include misconceptions that might need to be addressed."

"To increase student participation, autonomy and independence, I modified the sessions to become 'station-based' as a series of tasks to be conducted as small groups (three to five students). This gave the advantages of small group teaching within a larger group. Not only did this new format benefit the students, as it was

more interactive and less didactic, it also meant that I could act as a facilitator for their learning and not simply a 'knowledge dispenser'."

"I vary the learning dynamics of the group by designing activities for pairs, small group, whole group and individual work. This provides opportunities for learners to make sense of problems, practise new strategies and reinforce learning."

"I use discussion-based learning in my designs for face-to-face and for distance teaching. Discussion with peers and teachers can help build connections by presenting different experiences and ways of thinking. Discussion helps students see that knowledge is not static or fixed, that some is tenuous or opinion-based."

"I recognise that my students have a variety of learning styles and attempt to cover as many of these as possible to allow students to create meaning for themselves. I use blended learning and try to foster autonomy in study for my students."

"Learning to respectfully challenge deeply held assumptions taught me the value of good targeted questions and spontaneous agility in the classroom."

Many of the teachers described the variety of approaches they incorporate into their teaching.

"I have experimented with a variety of formal teaching methods involving small-group discussions, class-conducted tutorial sessions, formal and informal tests, quizzes, take-home assignments, class-time assignments and projects."

"I routinely challenge students to think actively during lectures through interactive questioning and thought exercises that require the students to use logic and/or mathematical approaches to biological problems constructed for them in lectures. My third-year field exercise in pigeon navigation is a problem that has no 'right' answer that can be easily written up in a scientific report. Typically 25–30% of the students accept the challenge of looking for ways to explore the data over and above the standard techniques provided to them."

"A characteristic feature of my teaching is that I often tell stories to humanise concepts. I see information as the 'bones' of my presentation and the stories as the breath that gives life to the bones."

"Having activated the intellectual energy in the room with a discussion of the thought experiment, I make a special effort to sustain the pace by changing the rhythm every ten minutes. I use:
• brain storming
• hypothetical dilemmas
• case studies
• debates
• experiments
• film clips
• business games
• simulations."

This list expands as teachers cater for students from a wide variety of backgrounds. For example:

"Hands-on activities; investigations; small group work; group discussion; class discussions; guest speakers; teacher talk; role plays; co-operative exercises such as graffiti sheets and freeze-frames; DVDs and videos; website use, whiteboard explanations, and use of mind maps."

"I write most material on the board, rather than showing and explaining it from OHP or PowerPoint slides, for two reasons:
• The act of writing paces my own delivery. I am not in danger of going too fast, and the class can keep up.
• Many ideas, circuits, plots and diagrams are best presented progressively. It's important for students to see where to start a construction, and the order in which later elements are added. Completed, text-book diagrams showing only the final result give no information about this, and frequently mystify students."

The creativity of teachers to engage their students in novel ways was also evidenced. It is clear that awardees actively seek ways to improve their teaching and the learning of their students.

"I keep the class on their toes by running a competitive error-spotting competition in every lecture. If a class member correctly identifies a mistake in what I've said or written, the class gets a point. If it's not an error, but the class has misunderstood, I get a point. I keep a written table on a side blackboard. If the class gets to 5, the lecture stops, because the lecturer, today, has been incompetent. If I get to 5, everybody gets one mark taken off their next assignment result. It is remarkable

how animated and attentive a class gets when their count gets to 4 – as I cunningly contrive from time to time."

"An adapted approach of the Six Thinking Hats (de Bono, 1987) is used in designing many of my lesson formats. For example, students are encouraged to think about why offenders behave in criminal ways, what victims experience, the role of the government in preventing and dealing with crime, and to think about future issues and crime solving in New Zealand. For our Treaty of Waitangi unit I have students participate in a classroom debate where they are given a role either as a new settler coming to New Zealand in the 1820s or as a Māori of that time dealing with their arrival. It is a great way for them to have to look at another perspective of British influences and the impact on the Māori traditional lifestyle."

The use of technology to enhance student engagement is increasing.

"One of the most difficult aspects of a large lecture class (I would consider 50+ students as large and I often have up to 400 at a time) is engagement with individuals. For a number of years now I have used an Audience Response System (aka "clickers") in order to engage students in the classroom environment. Students do find this an enjoyable activity in class (at both

first-year and postgraduate level in fact!) but enjoyment is not the same as learning. However, I am willing to take a punt that a more engaged student is a more successful one."

Many of these tertiary teachers recognise that learners base their new understanding on what they already know.

"A learner reconstructs their own knowledge by connecting new experiences to their existing understanding. It is important that a teacher appreciates the range of students' pre-existing ideas in order to provide appropriate learning experiences that will challenge and direct their new understanding towards accepted ideas, many of which are counter-intuitive. Unless a student is challenged to rethink their naïve view, the construction of new knowledge becomes increasingly difficult and confusing."

"Pedagogically, I have found learners to more deeply engage when they become aware of their own beliefs and knowledge. To encourage awareness of prior knowledge I use a wide range of formative assessment tasks."

"I challenge my students to examine some of their own misconceptions in science through carefully planned activities and

exercises and then help them seek answers and explanations to deepen their knowledge of the subject matter."

"By getting students to articulate their ideas and experiences before they have learned about the topic or read the textbooks, I can begin where they're at. Another advantage of thought experiments is that students tend to synthesise other concepts of the course during the experiment. Insights emerge and all students have to do is daydream."

Some awardees detail the importance of illustrating how members of the discipline actually DO their work.

"In order for young people to 'become', they need to be shown how principles work, why certain techniques are used in certain circumstances, and why other ways of completing a process or task can also be used. As a teacher, it is important to show the ways in which we make judgement calls more visible to the learner."

"I believe that you cannot ask someone to do something that you would not do. It is a wonderful experience for our students to understand what their patients have to go through (and this experience also facilitates their learning)."

"I work with each learner to break their goals down into smaller steps using mind-maps to create SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) goals. Learners establish realistic goals and identify how they will achieve these goals and what they need to do, within stated time frames."

Most of the awardees reported that they ensure their teaching is relevant and authentic, giving many examples.

"I centre activities around real-life scenarios because I want my teaching to be relevant and authentic."

"I orient my teaching around case material, giving an authenticity and connection to the student's own experience by using examples from my own practice."

"As an example of making the first-year experience more hands-on, I introduced an exercise in the new first-year paper in which students physically extract DNA from cells and conducted a polymerase chain reaction in their labs. Despite the logistics of dealing with over a thousand students, a hands-on approach is a much more valuable learning experience than a computer simulation."

"To introduce the skills used in applying statutes, I lay out a fact scenario I encountered in professional practice."

"For education to have an impact it has to be relevant to the life of the learner. Theories and hypothetical case studies have their place in learning about ethics and responsibility but an over-reliance on these can easily fail to engage the whole person. If the effects of good and bad values-in-action can be connected to the life of the learner, they become inherently interesting, and learning gains traction as it is anchored in personal experience and validated by it."

"Students particularly enjoy the application of their learning to problems they care about."

"We all relate better to things we already understand or have experienced so let's speak to the experience of the students. Relating to their lives and what they care about will provide the hook on which their learning can be attached."

"I use authentic student experiences. For example, in teaching speech writing, I ask students to share their favourite piece of music and identify the feelings this piece of music evokes in them. Then they analyse how their choice of music gives them clues about the effect they want to evoke in audiences when writing speeches."

"I introduce a topic and brainstorm with students what they already know, what they think they need to know, and how the topic is relevant to their future careers."

"I focus on material of genuine importance to students in their later careers, and spark student interest by using topical focuses for legal analysis (e.g. censorship of violent video games in Civil Liberties, All Black contract negotiations in Negotiation, and actual trials and media statements by lawyers in Ethics)."

"I use videoed recordings or TV programmes to stimulate discussion about police roles. This media presents a public reality of the police role that my students are going to
go into."

"We also connect our learning to the contents of the newspaper to show how applicable what we discuss is to the unfolding nature of contemporary affairs. Articles from both local and global media are posted on a regular basis as are websites, blogs and wikis relating to our discussions."

"Using situations to which the community will easily relate: e.g. rights of arrest, duties as drivers, family breakdown and state intervention, recognition of Māori values, degrees of culpability in the criminal law, consumer rights."

"I ask students to share experiences they have had listening to or telling stories. I share exemplars from my practice where children have told, drawn, danced and written stories that have enhanced literacy development."

As with other deliberate aspects of the teaching persona, humour is explicitly justified – one doesn't just try to be funny without reason.

"Students enjoy classrooms where humour is present. Fun in my classroom does not overshadow content but students will return to a classroom where the environment, people and energy make them feel good. Students' evaluations often refer to the fun we have in class as being a major factor of how they enjoy the programme."

"My classes are very well attended. Students routinely tell me that they want to come to class. At first, I suspect, this is because they find my lectures amusing. …Students are much more likely to be motivated to learn effectively if their interest is captured by material that they believe is relevant and useful, and if their learning is a pleasurable experience. Students like hearing about movie stars and rock bands, even dead ones that the younger among them may never have heard of. But students don't just attend my classes for their amusement value. They also view my classes as a self-conscious attempt, on my part, to provide a quality educational experience for each and every one of them."

"I often use humour – it fosters this sense of community."

"Even my use of humour in classes, though it seems spontaneous, is designed to address specific teaching goals such as illustrating a point, breaking the tension or routine, or as a cue for later recall."

"While I never begin a lecture without a communication plan and set of take-home points, I seek to capture students' attention through spontaneous humour and anecdote. Taking a course in Theatresports was a personal turning point; an epiphany that endorsed the importance of being comfortable in one's own skin, being willing to embrace the unexpected, and recognising that good humour can oil the wheels of insight."

It is important that tertiary teachers have the confidence to acknowledge their mistakes and take advantage of the learning that can come from doing this.

"In class I model that it's okay to improvise, make mistakes and laugh at ourselves and that it's okay to ask questions. With me participating in their activities, students learn that everyone makes mistakes and that mistakes are great learning opportunities. I demonstrate humility and they see me laugh at myself."

Concluding thoughts: The everyday practice of excellent tertiary teachers illustrates extraordinary attention to planning, preparation and delivery. The range of strategies and the varying approaches that these teachers use to ensure that there are rich learning opportunities afforded to all students is what sets these teachers apart. They strive to ensure that each session is relevant.

More importantly, they see that their students need to be actively engaged in their learning. Think for a moment about the old adage that 'Teaching is more than telling and learning is more than listening'. How does your own practice measure up?

Assessment as a Tool for Excellent Tertiary Teachers

Tentative definition: The tools and practices that tertiary teachers use to measure and support the degree of learning that has occurred.

Guiding questions:

1. What role do assessments play in the teaching practices of excellent tertiary teachers?
2. How do they design assessments of and for learning?

Awardees described paying as much attention to methods of assessment as they do to other aspects of teaching. Assessment is seen not as something separate from teaching and learning but as an integral part of the process. They acknowledge and take advantage of diversity, describing variety in their approaches to assessment. In articulating the importance of authenticity of teaching 'content', they also seek to provide authentic and fair assessment opportunities.

"As all of us involved in education know, assessment often drives student learning. For this reason, assessment should be 'authentic' in that it encourages them to focus on their professional life. Our assessment MUST reflect the standards we expect in practice! Many of us have heard the phrase 'Cs get degrees', and there is an element of truth that in most courses a 50 per cent pass mark is acceptable. But in many situations it is simply NOT acceptable to only get it right half of the time, because the consequences can be disastrous."

"Assessments, formative or summative, need to be fair to all students and allow students with different abilities to find opportunities to use their skills to good effect. Assessments should, therefore, be varied and should test a range of learning attributes."

This sentiment was echoed by numerous awardees, who use a variety of tools and strategies for assessing student learning.

"I use a wide variety of formats in assessing students, including less common options such as self-reflective journals, student presentations in class, peer critiques, written submissions and oral arguments. I often give students choices such as whether to undertake an optional research assignment. This assignment (available in all my classes) is a good example of formative assessment. Students learn by doing independent research and are more actively involved with their own learning than when listening to a lecture on the same material."

"I have received assignments in the form of movies, electronic scrapbooks, Google Earth projects, interactive PowerPoints, journals, photo albums and reports: all legitimate ways to record and disseminate 'local knowledge'."

"I use a wide range of approaches to the assessment of student learning to create learning opportunities, motivation and a platform to give feedback as well as grading. These include oral and written tests, written assignments, presentations, reflective journals, self-directed studies and research-based activities of many types."

In three excerpts, individuals describe particularly varied and interesting approaches to the practice of assessment. In the first, the teacher uses drama to assess student understanding in an astronomy unit.

"For example, at the completion of an astronomy unit I wanted to involve the class in a different form of assessment to show them that pen-and-paper assessments are only one of many forms of assessment. The approach I adopted used situated narrative drama to consolidate and revise the students' understanding of Galileo's theory of the heliocentric model of the solar system. The students presented very convincing and well-reasoned arguments in Galileo's defence, but to no avail: he was tried by the Roman Inquisition, found 'suspect of heresy' and remained imprisoned."

In the second and third excerpts, the individuals use fun, action-packed and interactive assessment practices to stimulate student involvement in assessment tasks.

"Overall, I try to enthuse students through their own progress and by real-world immediacy and fun in assessment tasks.

The approach seems to appeal to most students, including the brightest and the mainstream."

"I try to make my assignments interactive and adventure-packed, blending comic fictional examples with immediate real-life examples, and creating an atmosphere of fun by pitting myself against the students. Will I be able to catch you cheating? Can you spot the liar? Guess which dog belongs to which of my friends?"

Irrespective of the style of assessment chosen, it appears that TTEA awardees feel strongly about the importance of making the assessment process (whatever it may be) as transparent as possible…

"All this fits within papers with a clear outline of their structure and content, so that students are aware from the start of the material they will be covering. They know how – and why – the course will be assessed."

"I believe in testing what students are taught, and that design of assessments is directly related to the learning objectives of the paper."

…and as closely aligned with student interest as they can.

"To encourage independence and acknowledge the experience of my students, I design assessments which align with student interests. One example involves them writing, and publishing online, a reflective report about a program they have written. They are free to choose the topic and the scope of their program, in line with their interests and capabilities."

This concept of student choice within the assessment process was echoed by another award recipient:

"I allow students to choose whether their simulation marks will count towards their final mark for the paper, and to what extent (up to 25 per cent). Once students make this choice midway through the paper, they do exercises only with those making a similar choice."

Not only do many teachers attempt to align their assessments with students' interests but many also engage students in the assessment process.

"The learner and I develop criteria around what they wish assessed. As the emphasis is on the progress of the student against their specific goals, assessment is authentic and relevant to the learning and adapted to the individual's contexts and purposes. This ensures the assessment is meaningful to the learner."

"Assessment is integral to programme planning and built into each learning session. Assessment results, together with learner goals, directly influence the construction of the learning programme. It is a collaborative and reflective process, not something 'I do' to the learner."

According to two awardees, it is in this collaboration that students learn to view assessment as relevant and practical:

"I believe that assessment is an integral component of the learning process. Assessment needs to go beyond assessment of learning and include assessment for learning. Students need to see the relevance and purpose of assessment to encourage them to learn 'far beyond zebra'."

"Assessment should enhance competence, confidence and learning in the present and for the future, and should be fair and varied to allow students to display their understanding in different ways."

Further, through regular assessment students are expected to learn a great deal about the subject at hand.

"I introduced weekly assignments to my undergraduate courses. Regular assessments contribute to learning."

"Assessment drives behaviour and learning. What is assessed is more likely to make it up the list in terms of importance. So we should structure assessment so that students are guided into the behaviours that enhance learning."

"These ten quizzes were really learning exercises and formative feedback but they were worth credit to provide the incentive for students to do them (remember assessment drives learning!). The quizzes were structured to encourage students to keep trying and keep learning. A common comment from students in evaluations was that the quizzes help their learning."

In each of the previous excerpts, the tertiary teachers present their view of the relationship between assessment and learning. Most refer to the assessment of/for learning content knowledge or 'hard skills'. In the following paragraph, an awardee discusses the challenges associated with measuring or assessing the 'soft skills':

"I believe assessment of feelings and confidence is equally as important as progress made. Some funding bodies see these as 'soft outcomes', but those of us working on the coalface know that without growth in these areas learners are unlikely to put themselves into situations that might produce 'failure'. Feelings and confidence are difficult to measure in a definitive, comparative way."

Concluding thoughts:
The maxim that "not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted" must ring true for many of these tertiary teachers. They use assessment as a carrot to drive learning, rather than a stick to measure how far they have come. These teachers provide students with multiple opportunities and different ways to demonstrate mastery of content, process and skills. The tasks are aligned closely to the learning outcomes. Feedback to the students clearly signals whether they have achieved their goals and what the next steps are.

Consider the different forms of assessment and evaluation that you could use in your courses and ask yourself whether you are giving your students adequate feedback to improve their learning.

The Site(s) of Excellent Teaching Extend Beyond the Classroom

Tentative definition: The physical and virtual location(s) in which teachers provide learning opportunities to their students

Guiding questions:

1. What opportunities are provided for students to learn beyond the traditional classroom?

2. How have teaching experiences outside the classroom contributed to student learning?

3. How do these teachers incorporate technology into their courses?

In almost all of the portfolios, awardees commented on the physical space in which they taught. For some, teaching and learning occur in a traditional, lecture-style classroom. For others, it does not.

"I have worked in a range of venues: lunch rooms, community houses, draughty halls, board rooms, libraries, learning rooms, to name a few."

"I strive to create a mana-enhancing teaching environment and a comfortable and healthy learning environment, treating all tauira equally and fairly."

"Our learning context is predominantly in small groups with learners facing each other around a large table. I am conscious of my placement, knowing that should I sit at the head of the table my action has spoken louder than words, 'claiming' certain status and authority. I am there to facilitate the knowledge already within the group rather than being the 'font of all knowledge'."

The importance of the teaching environment as being more than "just" a physical space is expanded in the following comment:

"Basing the [diploma programme] on marae (urban and rural, traditional and modern) promotes a culturally safe learning environment for the students of this course. It encourages their access to a Māori paradigm, to Māori language, customs and traditions, to Māori ways of knowing; in short, tikanga Māori – the Māori world view, which includes traditions, customs, values and beliefs. Basing the qualification on marae permits understandings about teaching and learning to be appraised and compared to tikanga Māori and evaluated from a position of control and strength."

The portfolios discuss the importance of including fieldwork, particularly in research-intensive programmes. According to one awardee, the field is the most fundamental of all learning spaces as it anchors theory in practice.

"The dynamics of the lecture theatre must always be complemented by interactions in a more fundamental learning environment: the field. Fieldwork is the glue that cements relationships between learners and the research journey."

While others do not describe fieldwork in quite the same manner (i.e. as a glue), they do acknowledge that learning occurs outside of the traditional classroom, and can reinforce what happened inside it.

"Experiences such as Shakespeare tutorials held in a lecturer's office and accompanied by his dog Portia and freshly brewed coffee, or geography staff and students roughing it together for a week in a motor camp while on fieldwork, affirmed that the lecture theatre is only one context within the learning journey."

"Teaching and learning is not restricted to the formal classroom…Over the last decade I have been actively involved in general public education via the web, media and in person."

"We go on 'geographical expeditions', in which students organise themselves into small groups to undertake fieldwork on a theme in the local urban landscape (for example, how the privatised space of a shopping mall is constructed or how a gated community functions). The point is to encourage students to see the familiar through more exotic eyes."

"I involve students (where appropriate) in my commercial and research contract activities. This provides real world validation (confidence, context) and useful income for them."

Increasingly, tertiary teachers facilitate this sharing of knowledge in new and innovative ways. Many use various technological resources to foster learning beyond the classroom walls.

"Because I recognise the importance of keeping my practice up to date, in the last two years I have embraced the use of technology in my teaching practice, for example Moodle."

"I like to use the online environment creatively to produce activities for students to explore complexity and see 'what happens if…'."

"For many students entering university today, using the web to access information is second nature. They are familiar with the value of user-generated content, the lifeblood of Web 2.0. They watch videos on YouTube, and use social networking tools such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook. As an extension of my philosophy, I have developed an online learning tool, PeerWise, which aims to exploit the familiarity students have with digital…"

"After exploring several types of speech analysis software, I discovered PRAAT. PRAAT provides sound spectrograms, i.e. visual images of sounds. This software allows students to see and practise rhythms and therefore to develop the sensitivity required for speech writing."

Some use technology specifically to broadcast lectures, a practice which is becoming widespread with good reason.

"Lectures are recorded so a student can rehearse again the process of problem solving in a particular legislative context... While much of my pre-2000 work in digital teaching had 'pathfinder status', I am now simply a member of a much larger community for whom this is integral to good practice."

"Make full lectures, including animations and worked answers, available online for students to access at their own pace."

"To ensure accessibility of the face-to-face workshops I introduced innovative live webcasting to the MVM so that students can attend remotely. We are able to bring the lecturer, classroom and remote students together to share presentations and discussions in a truly interactive fashion. Sessions are recorded so that students can revisit them."

"I asked how lecture recordings could be made available more readily to students via an online delivery. It made a big difference to students. Statistics from the viewings of the files indicated several thousand hits but many were only for around 10 minutes of viewing. This indicated that students were not only using the recordings to watch entire lectures they had missed but also see parts they had not quite understood. This was particularly useful for students from non-English speaking backgrounds."

Others use modern technological tools to aid learning inside the classroom.

"I use instant messaging technology in my courses, for the students to comment on aspects of the content being taught. All the students' comments are displayed 'live' on the data screen and also stored so they can be revisited out of lecture time. Students can upload YouTube videos, graphics and other videos as they choose – and they do so. This year I will be trialing iPads instead of laptops."

A few of the awardees discuss the ways in which they incorporated technology into their feedback and assessment practices:

"An example of this is that over a number of papers, students requested more feedback on their progress during the course and not just at the summative assessments. Doing this in small groups and tutorials is relatively easy, but with large classes, it gets harder. Initially I created a series of formative assessments around each lecture and delivered them through web pages, creating them with Macromedia's Coursebuilder software. More recently I have used AUTOnline to provide personalised feedback."

"To introduce such concepts, I find a context that is familiar and of interest to students. In this case, I invite the class to take a digital picture of something they are interested in."

Regardless of the chosen location and associated rationale, it appears that most awardees view both the classroom and wider community as sites of important learning. They believe in the value of mixing media and they choose to provide students with multiple opportunities to learn and reinforce that learning. Many are reflective as they consider how best to design and deliver their lessons.

"I am not the expert – just an informed person who can generate an environment conducive to taking on new knowledge."

"The temptation is to focus on lectures, but students spend only a couple of hours a week in your classroom! They spend much more course-related time in the labs, using the online resources, or on their own study. Think about the information and the resources that they need, and deliver a course that is a coherent whole, not just a bunch of lectures."

Many of the tertiary teachers take responsibility to foster learning outside of the narrow confines of their own courses and or classes. Also important is developing a positive, nurturing learning environment that promotes networks and enables students to learn from one another.

"Almost without exception, students arrive at the start of a semester fresh with the optimism of the young. They have high hopes and a desire to do well, even if they have previously done poorly. Some of them, however, feel insecure and are worried by earlier failures, and need encouragement and positive reinforcement. I cope with these by:

- ensuring that their course choice is suitable, and within their capabilities
- introducing them to the lecturers who will be teaching them, who can assure them that help will be available whenever they need it
- introducing them to other students who I know to be confident and outgoing, and who can befriend them (very few highly achieving students turn down the chance to be a helping hand to someone less able)
- always greeting them personally in the corridors, inquiring concerning their progress, and giving encouragement as needed."

"Enabling learners to feel more able to move outside of their comfort zones is vital to learning and I remind them, 'Making mistakes is part of learning'."

An important consideration in many of these portfolios is the impact that a successful learner has going forward.

"I try to replicate a community of learning in which, regardless of where my students come from, they have an opportunity to engage in these concepts and frameworks so that they in turn may become the leaders of their worlds in the future. I work to create a community that shares knowledge, cares for one another, supports one another and teaches one another."

Concluding thoughts: Excellent tertiary teaching extends beyond the four walls of the classroom or lecture theatre, and beyond the allotted face-to-face contact time. These teachers use networks, communities and geographical locations to support the learning that is taking place.

Increasingly, technology is being used in ways which take advantage of the capacity to build learning networks that are not focused on, or dependent upon, the teacher. Technology does not drive these teachers' pedagogical practices but many have harnessed it to enhance the learning that takes place within and beyond the four walls. Has technology enhanced your own learning? Can it enhance your teaching?

Working with Diversity

Tentative definition: The way in which excellent tertiary teachers identify and respond to difference in their students' cultures, understandings and/or perspectives

Guiding questions:

1. How do these tertiary teachers define, understand and respond to diversity?
2. How does this understanding enhance their teaching?

Excellent tertiary teachers recognise that each student has individual expectations and attributes.

"Each year brings a different cohort of students, each with their own history, experience and family. This is what makes the teaching so exciting, as no year is ever the same."

"I am always cognisant that students and colleagues all come from their own respective communities and bring myriad whānau, life experiences and expectations with them regardless of where they are from."

"I know that every class will be different and each student unique. In previous years, I have discovered that one science graduate has had years of experience as a zoo keeper and has an extensive collection of rare carnivorous plants. Another has introduced herself just minutes before the first session to tell me that she was profoundly deaf but that she didn't want a note-taker or signing help – she would lip-read. A grandmother has confessed, shame-faced, that she doesn't remember ever having studied science at all."

"I have never believed that 'one size fits all' in tertiary education. Clinging to conventional

practice should not be a long-term goal. As our student intake changes subtly but constantly – their qualifications, language skills and cultural backgrounds – our courses also have to change their pitch. It is important for teachers to recognise that a diverse body of students will take many different routes to achieve in learning."

Often excellent teachers' appreciation of "difference" stems from being different themselves.

"I didn't fit. I found school boring and irrelevant and consequently a place where I experienced an overwhelming sense of failure. Most academics are successes of the school system; I am not, and this difference contributes significantly to the personal drive I have to reach every single learner in my class."

"My own experiences as a child at school make using different forms of assessment particularly important. To me as a child, testing was the only measure of a child's achievement. This narrow approach often failed to allow creative thinkers and kinesthetic learners, like me, to display their full understanding and competency."

These teachers also appreciate that society has become increasingly diverse and that the student population has changed. They recognise the need to teach in ways that accommodate difference.

"[Tertiary] study is a more achievable goal, for more people, than when I studied. Students come from a wider range of backgrounds, have different educational experiences, and there's a wider age range in the classroom as well. Educators like me have to adapt our techniques to ensure that what we have to offer is accessible to all those who are just beginning their own tertiary learning journey."

"Adult literacy learners eligible to be enrolled in our programmes speak Māori or English as a first language and have left school with no qualifications. Their learning experiences have generally been negative and they commonly come to us due to a crisis or some other pivotal factor in their lives. They are usually vulnerable and reluctant learners."

"Students come to the classroom with different backgrounds, and have different expectations, dependent upon their unique experiences and the materials and methods used to teach them at secondary schools. Providing the best learning environment requires an understanding of this diversity as well as other aspects of the students' experience[s]."

"My teaching is underpinned by a belief that learning is highly individual. While in essence the learning process may be the same, differences in background, prior knowledge, motivation and interests will impact on the sense that each individual makes of new experiences."

"Our society has become increasingly diverse. Therefore, teacher education students should come from an increasing range of social and cultural backgrounds in order to cater for a varied student population. To teach effectively in a changing university environment, teaching styles must change from the traditional transmission approach. Students need a wider range of opportunities to learn."

Many of the teachers felt a particular responsibility to enhance the educational opportunities for Māori students.

"Māori students overcome numerous obstacles to get to university, and may need more mentoring into the system. They often also arrive with a specific agenda, sometimes formed by their whānau or hapū, and thus don't have the luxury of exploring knowledge for its own sake. They will often

come expecting material of direct practical relevance to them."

"The improvement in the way tauira perceive and rate my attitude towards them is gratifying to see, and comes as a result of my 'always learning' approach, which welcomes the knowledge tauira bring to the classroom."

"I am careful to monitor students who are having difficulty. I either provide support myself or refer students to study skills or Māori mentor tutors dependent on their need."

"My goal is to support Māori student retention, engagement and achievement through an 'imagination-firing' intervention, rather than a remedial one."

"It can be hard to teach kaupapa Māori in a way that engages, rather than alienates, non-Māori Studies students. This is a challenge I warm to, however, as it allows me the privilege of facilitating tauira on a journey of 'decolonisation'."

The awardees recognise that incorporating approaches that are inclusive of Māori students can also enhance the learning experiences for others.

"I have come to learn that Māori pedagogy is not only for Māori, but is effective for many cultures."

"Each student needs to feel connected to the rest of the class and the teacher. Connections help provide support, motivation and the sharing of a wider range of experience and opinion while supporting challenge."

"Our students have significant diversity in their personal, cultural and religious beliefs, knowledge and understanding. My main strategy here is to create a respectful, honest, trusting learning environment. This is particularly important in allowing our students to grow their confidence and autonomy. I enable my students to listen and respect the differing perspectives, by creating situations where students feel safe discussing areas that may be difficult. … One aim of my teaching is to increase the awareness of the diversity of our students (and patients) and actually embrace it, rather than ignoring it."

"I believe it is important to cultivate a community of learners where risk taking is encouraged, diversity is treasured and prior knowledge valued."

"I believe that the many are always stronger than one and this is something that is at

the core not only of my teaching (in which I always encourage students to work together, learning from one another) but also of my attitude to my colleagues (both within and outside of the University). I always strive for inclusive and collegial relationships, believing that problems can almost always be overcome where everyone is prepared to help out."

Respect for one another is a common theme in the portfolios.

"In my class students are encouraged to respect each other, to support each other, and to acknowledge that everyone has a family and a history that they bring with them to class, so it's important that we have an awareness of all of these."

"The relationship between myself and learners is based on respect, respecting world views, respecting differences, respecting beliefs. It is important to me that within the group learners are able to share their beliefs, their self-doubt, their philosophies, their opinions, their values and their life experiences and reflect on these and become open to new and different thoughts and beliefs."

"Many times learners have been known by a name because it is 'easier to say'. I always ask the learner what name they wish to be known by and encourage the learner

to correct my pronunciation so that I am giving them and their name the respect they deserve."

Respect extends to colleagues as well as students.

"I believe that my relationships with colleagues and students are firmly based on respect, honesty and an acceptance of students' different cultural and personal perspectives."

Many of the excellent tertiary teachers who shared their portfolios recognise that tertiary classrooms have become international melting pots.

"New Zealand is a multicultural society and my classes include students who are Polynesian, Māori, Pākehā and new immigrants from India, Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines. ...As their tutor, and also as a New Zealand European, it's important that I am aware of cultural differences and preferences amongst traditional learning styles. I read material that helps inform me about cultural diversity in education and instruction."

Because of this internationalisation, incorporating inclusive practices acknowledges different cultures beyond Aotearoa and the Pacific Islands.

"I actively seek out examples from Asian countries to use in class – recent examples include stories from Chinese and Malaysian folklore, as well as serious examples such as kidney stones in Chinese babies."

"I try to develop a positive classroom culture by valuing the students' diversity and the unique expertise that each person brings. For example, I have asked students to read children's books to the class in their first language. Student contributions revealed unique expertise."

There can be unexpected outcomes from making practice more inclusive.

"I designed the course with our small male student cohort and my own media research in mind. Students attend a sports game, which receives outside broadcast coverage, and then analyse their experience of the game and compare it with its television packaging. The avid consumers of sport – both male and female – couldn't believe their luck. What I didn't expect was the high enrolment of Asian students, for whom studying the puzzles of cricket, rugby and netball is a way 'in' to understanding New Zealand culture."

Excellent tertiary teachers provide opportunities for students for whom English is a second or third language to become more proficient.

"Students from non-English-speaking (EAL) backgrounds have their own particular needs. I started reading widely and attending workshops about how to help this group of students."

"In my classes I noticed that students who speak English as a second language often seem reluctant to participate in group discussions although their topic knowledge is very good. I initiated polytechnic conversational English lunchtime groups to assist such students. They meet, converse and learn colloquial language in a relaxed, non-threatening environment."

Technology can provide a forum in which students feel more confident to participate.

"Web-based teaching provides more anonymity than you get in a classroom: students are able to make careful, well-thought out comments in their own time, rather than feeling pressured for an immediate response. This may be particularly important for EAL students, who ask far more questions via our e-learning system than they do in normal tutorials."

One awardee uses technology to bring alternative perspectives into their classroom from the other side of the world.

"It's impossible to talk about Indigenous knowledge without gaining a perspective from another indigenous person. Videoconferencing and virtual exchanges are ways to bring overseas lecturers and other indigenous students to the classroom."

Many of the awardees recognise the diversity of ability within a cohort and aim to challenge exceptional students while maintaining the interest and engagement of others.

"Exceptionally able students often find the formal teaching laboratory experiments straightforward and not very interesting. Frequently, near the end of their required laboratory course they will have completed all the relevant ones anyway. Instead of asking them to undertake further 'standard' experiments, I take the more confident ones to a research group in their course area and request the group leader to set up a simple project, which the student can do as an 'experiment', write up, and present as part of the laboratory course. Being much more open-ended, students find this challenging and interesting. We often get marvellous write-ups."

"To extend the very top students in class, I organise engaging, voluntary programming competitions. An example is the Battleships competition. These students developed the artificial intelligence for a computer player, and their algorithms competed against each other in a round-robin-style tournament."

"Each generation of students has a higher level of technical skill than the last, so I have to be continually ahead of the game. I assess their skill level, and design my teaching and assessment strategies to still provide an introduction to those who need it while shoving back the boundaries for those who are further down the track."

"If I wish to build a landscape of concepts inside student minds, I must accommodate all the other things going on in those same minds at the same time. I have two major challenges in my classes: diversity in culture and diversity in mathematical aptitude. About 70 per cent of my students are from Asian countries, themselves with a vast cultural diversity. A few of my students are specialist mathematicians, while many are maths-phobes."

Overall, diversity is embraced and celebrated by excellent tertiary teachers.

"The challenge to be able to teach a variety of learners helps to keep me passionate, delivering a programme I have taught 24 times!"

"Everyone has the ability to learn, but it is our job as teachers to develop and nurture that ability within our students and to ignite in them a passion for learning."

Concluding thoughts: Excellent tertiary teachers accept the challenges of teaching students with diverse backgrounds, expectations and abilities. To them, students are individuals and yet it is their responsibility to develop a positive, inclusive learning environment that caters for all. These excellent tertiary teachers take steps to identify and appreciate differences and use these to maximise learning for all students.

In sharing their ideas and reflections with a wider audience, we hope that you have been excited by the endless possibilities that these excellent tertiary teachers see to create rich, inclusive learning opportunities for their students. Very few, if any, of these teachers think that they know all there is to know about teaching at this level. While they might have a clear idea of where they wanted to be, none of these teachers feel as though they have nothing more to learn. As stated in the introduction:

Kāore he mutunga o te ako – There is no ending to learning.

See also: Volume 1 - Striving for excellence in tertiary teaching
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