

# Northern Regional Hub-funded project

Final Report



## Effective learning for Māori students on the Certificate in Fitness Programme

How ITP/Polytechnic teachers can create  
better graduate outcomes for Māori learners

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## Executive Summary

Disparity between Māori and non-Māori is evident when comparing tertiary qualification outcomes in Aotearoa, New Zealand. There have been numerous studies on what effective teaching for Māori looks like within the primary and secondary school system, established Wānanga have proven to meet the tertiary learning needs of Māori, and, there is limited literature within the University context. A lack of wider research suggests that Māori achievement in the mainstream Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP) environment has been neglected.

The purpose of this research is to understand teacher influence on qualification outcomes for Māori students within the Tauranga Certificate in Fitness (Cert4fitness) programme at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology. What aspects of practice, pedagogy or other may be shared and applied by adult educators within the ITP environment to improve qualification outcomes for Māori? How can teachers and teaching do better for Māori students at tertiary level?

This project draws on advice from Māori graduates of the Cert4fitness programme offered by Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, formerly Bay of Plenty Polytechnic. This programme has demonstrated consistent qualification success for Māori within the mainstream tertiary sector since 2002. This project is built around kaupapa Māori and pūrākau methodologies and values.

An advisory group of nine Māori graduate students met and discussed meeting guidelines for nine succeeding focus groups. Each focus group consisted of four Māori graduates to represent their year of study, with groups representing their respective cohorts from 2010–2018. Each group separately met and shared their experiences and thoughts around the research topic: What does an effective teacher within the mainstream ITP environment look like? Through their experiences, how can a teacher within the ITP environment better cultivate positive academic outcomes for Māori learners?

Conversation and data gathered from shared stories was placed into five themes. Gathered perspectives from pūrākau are discussed aligning with each of the five themes or Pou in striving to unlock the teaching and learning techniques that have produced high achievement rates for Māori in this programme:

**A tikanga Māori foundation:** An integrated tikanga and kaupapa Māori approach is the essence of the programme and the foundation that all else stands upon. Core values and principles of the Cert4fitness programme such as whānaungatanga, manaakitanga, ako and kotahitanga provide a home away from home for Māori learners. Each value is openly expressed and interwoven throughout the curriculum, daily activity and every aspect of course life. Non-Māori students appear to embrace this approach and a safe and mana-enhancing learning environment evolves.

**Cert4fitness as a course:** Graduate commentary expresses a passion and pride of their journey within “the course”. A combination of learning experiences, memories and positive personal growth appears to create an affinity between learner and programme and creates a feeling of whakapapa between cohort years, of graduates connected to a bigger “fitness family” as a result of the course. Graduates portrayed a sense of tūrangawaewae while traveling the journey the course offers. Students assume the role of kaitiaki to protect and nurture the programme in the same way the programme develops them.

**Classmate influence on learning:** Pou three acknowledges and signifies the importance of what is referred to as kaupapa whānau to Māori students. Graduates expressed the positive influence a collective approach to learning had on their

academic experiences and achievement. Initiated and sustained through tikanga Māori foundations, this pou develops significant strength from sustenance of the other pou. Experiences of vulnerability, unity, challenges and course life appear to create a heart of powerful togetherness.

**The teacher:** Conversation about “the teacher” was central in all focus group discussion. Who the teacher is as a person and how that transpires to students in the education environment was regarded as essential in qualification completion and learning experiences. Based upon core values such as respect, care, belief, approachability and compassion, the way a teacher holds themselves and role models expectations was key.

**The teaching:** Pou five is the way the teacher teaches. Participants reported that the teaching encouraged opportunities to enhance a strong kaupapa whānau feeling that provides learning much deeper than a Eurocentric curriculum could provide. Over time teaching factors maintain the health and mana of the Cert4fitness programme. It is the teacher that must initiate, guide, follow, lead and live the learning experience with their students. Effective teaching can only be measured by effective learning, with graduates sharing a number of significant methods they experienced in their Cert4fitness study. Key to successful teaching is a teacher who understands how the learner learns best and acts to meet that need.

These pou interact throughout the life of the programme. For example, the teaching and teaching methods are inextricably intertwined. The tikanga Māori foundation underpins all other aspects. An approach of ako is important where the teacher and student guide and learn from each other along the way. This knowledge then transpires to a teacher who creates engaging and culturally responsive learning experiences placing the student at the centre of the educational journey. When unpacking this process, participants described effective teaching pedagogies and the way learning was delivered as influential. They also presented the positive impact of field trips and the effect of a safe learning environment on their educational journey. As with the other, Pou five contributes to the strength of the collective while also relying on them for life.

The project has also identified gaps in the context of adult learning within the tertiary environment. Findings may assist in better understanding of what constitutes effective teaching processes and practices for Māori, positively influencing qualification outcomes. This is of significant value to learners, whānau, iwi, community and the New Zealand economy (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2009).

## Background

The level four Cert4fitness is a full-time one-year academic programme, first delivered at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic in 2007. This programme was created to expand on the previously offered level three National Certificate in Fitness (since 2002) to meet the needs of stakeholders. The course was created to align with community expectations and to simulate employment requirements with a programme philosophy for students to learn within a whānau environment (Bay of Plenty Polytechnic, Certificate in Fitness Programme Curriculum Document, 2013). Even though the programme has seen academic changes throughout its eighteen-year legacy, the essence and kaupapa has remained the same.

The programme is targeted at people who want to pursue a career in the sport, exercise and recreation industries or create life changes for themselves and their whānau. Students learn how to work with groups, advise on exercise and lifestyle choices, design exercise programmes and understand the influence of nutrition through a series of structured activities, both practical and theoretical. The programme supports the national Māori health strategy where students learn healthy and active lifestyles for themselves as well as skills to pass this information on to others.

The Programme's Curriculum Document (2013) notes that this programme is based on "learning by doing", with courses interwoven throughout the programme to:

- reinforce a safe environment,
- provide opportunity for self-discovery,
- strengthen a sense of togetherness, and
- gift experiences for students to pass on to whānau (p. 4)

The tutors "have the biggest role in creating that special environment that promotes pride of identity, leadership, support and motivation that each intake enjoys. There is a strong tradition within this programme and a real sense of pride. Each year's students learn about and respect who has gone before them and endeavour to contribute to the custom of the course. This is real – not just a plastic token" (Programme Curriculum Document, 2013, p. 4).

Since 2002 the Cert4fitness programme has consisted of high Māori representation for a mainstream class, with qualification outcomes higher than the national average (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010). Over the nine-year focus of this research, 422 students enrolled on the Cert4fitness programme with 386 graduating, producing a 91 percent qualification completion result. Of those students who enrolled in the programme, 163 identified as Māori, 39 percent of all learners. Of these Māori learners, 90 percent or 147 successfully completed the qualification. In comparison over the same time period, 92 percent of non-Māori completed the qualification illustrating parity in results not commonly seen within the New Zealand tertiary environment.

Qualification outcome statistics from across the ITP sub-sector are significantly lower than those seen in the Cert4fitness (Department of Labour, 2008). To explore and learn what it is within this programme that produces positive outcomes through Māori eyes is a taaonga (treasure) that needs to be shared. The inequality between Māori and non-Māori in tertiary qualification achievement suggests there is something within this programme that works for the learner (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010). Findings will draw upon knowledge of all participants, representing their respective cohorts and whānau, with the potential to guide teachers towards more effective practice for Māori learners.

Programme statistics illustrate a story of equality and high academic achievement. In contrast to the general tertiary story in New Zealand, the following table states two significant indicators related to the Cert4fitness programme:

1. The number of Māori students graduating from this programme is high compared to national statistics;
2. Although percentages fluctuate year on year, over a nine-year timeframe there is just a one percent disparity between Māori and non-Māori.

Year	Total Enrolled	Total Graduated		Māori Enrolled		Māori Graduated		Non- Māori Enrolled		Non- Māori Graduated	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
<b>2010</b>	42	34	81%	20	48%	20	100%	22	52%	14	64%
<b>2011</b>	43	37	86%	16	37%	14	88%	27	63%	23	85%
<b>2012</b>	44	42	95%	24	55%	22	92%	20	45%	20	100%
<b>2013</b>	41	37	90%	17	41%	15	88%	24	59%	22	91%
<b>2014</b>	49	45	92%	17	35%	14	82%	32	65%	31	97%
<b>2015</b>	52	49	94%	19	37%	16	84%	33	63%	33	100%
<b>2016</b>	49	48	98%	15	31%	15	100%	34	69%	33	97%
<b>2017</b>	51	48	94%	15	29%	15	100%	36	71%	33	92%
<b>2018</b>	51	46	90%	20	39%	16	80%	31	61%	30	97%
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>92%</b>

*Figure 1: Cert4Fitness statistics 2010-2018 (Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, 2018)*

## Research Aims

The aim of the project was to document the learning, experiences and perspectives of Māori students who have graduated from the Cert4fitness programme over a nine-year period (2010–2018). In doing so, it sought to unlock the teaching and learning techniques that have produced high success rates for Māori in this programme. This may offer enhanced teaching practice or structures to duplicate, that might in turn raise the outcomes for Māori (and indeed, for all students).

## Research Methodology

Pūrākau and Kaupapa Māori methodologies act as the central heart of this research. Linda Smith (2012) explains a strong methodology is important as it leads question formation, guides investigation and shapes analysis. This project is principally qualitative in nature. It does, however, use a mixed methods approach, including quantitative data from teacher evaluations and the use of a confidential on-line questionnaire.

It is important for the research methodologies to share the true story on behalf of the story tellers. The objective was to directly hear the stories from the people who matter, the students. To use their thoughts, feelings and the power of their words to capture the mana and knowledge that is gifted by each person was crucial.

Following a strategy set by the advisory group, nine separate hui (meetings) of each graduate focus group took place over the period of December 2018 and January 2019. The nine groups represented respective Cert4fitness cohorts from 2010–2018. It was planned that each group of four participants would be mixed in gender and age where possible. For many of the graduates it was the first time they had met in several years. The fact that they already knew each other was an advantage in that they could relate to each other's stories while being comfortable enough to disagree on discussion or perspective.

Research was able to draw upon anonymous teaching evaluations that had been completed on the same two teachers over this nine-year time period. These are student comments that had been captured at the moment, at the time of study in a way that was safe for them to share their feelings on various aspects of what they considered to be effective teaching and learning.

After all groups had met, it was decided to create an anonymous online survey to be presented to participants. This was facilitated using SurveyMonkey as a tool. Within three days there had been a one hundred percent response rate. The additional information provided an increased understanding of participant profile and provided participants with opportunity to expand on current contributions or share aspects they may have not been comfortable to share in a group setting.

## Pedagogical Framework

Five pou were identified in this research and form the basis of the data analysis. This section will deal with each of these pou in turn.

### Tikanga Māori Foundation

When participants in this study were surveyed, 81 percent identified that tikanga Māori embedded within the programme had a “great deal”, or “a lot” of influence on them graduating the programme. Graduate feeling reinforces the influence a tikanga Māori foundation has provided. Comments that reflect this included:

*The fact that not many teachers in the world share an open space in their classroom to be Māori makes me happy that my tutors allowed for that to happen in our classroom. In fact, they intertwined Māori values with their teaching like manaakitanga, whānaungatanga. Two main concepts in my culture that proved to work well with Māori and non-Māori students. (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

*It made me proud to be a Māori female. To see people highly engage the culture not be rude about it and really made Māori feel welcomed always (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

Within the programme there seems to be a tikanga that has been created over several years, a legacy of “this is how we do things”.

Meyer et al (2010) identify several principles required to support this approach that have been evidenced by graduate discussion. These include shared power between individual students and staff (rangatiratanga); a respect and desire of the importance of culture (taonga tuku iho); an interactive and reciprocated approach to learning (ako); a connection and commitment between participants (whānaungatanga); and a common kaupapa of what constitutes educational excellence (kotahitanga).

For most Māori learners, this approach is their normal, their everyday life at home with whānau, iwi and hapū. For many non-Māori learners, this is a new experience. Graduates identified an attitude that valued the combining of cultures, of non-Māori students embracing a kaupapa Māori approach within the learning environment.

*Māori knowledge is often ridiculed, but as we look more into depths of the knowledge of our ancestors, we keep finding that they were far more advanced thinkers than we may think. That being said, the knowledge and protocols like karakia, haka, whānau and te reo were well preserved and worked for us Māori for thousands of years. And when you get your tutors also upholding these values you can't describe the completeness you get when these values are shared in your class with all peoples (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

*It was like other people would fit in with us. You feel part of something bigger. I think our Māori styles helps everybody regardless of where they came from (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*Like the Pākehās become one of us at the end. They have no disagreement on the way it's being run like whānau. It's that thing of culture aye, it's like a culture can be so powerful. It's just awesome that they don't disagree with the way it's being run we just all become one whānau and we are all the same going on the same path (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).*

I like it how Māori values are fitted right through the whole course; it makes it an easier environment to be in and be myself. They sell it in a cool way like even you would hear Pākehā say whānau instead of family. All the Pākehā people buy into it as well which makes it really cool. Even like before our bus trips doing karakia before we leave and get back, like others wouldn't do that (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).

*Bishop and Glynn (2000) suggest the importance of interweaving cultural connection with learning as vital in creating a foundation for success in learning for Māori. Māori students need to be encouraged and supported to bring to class who they are and where they are from. Students can maintain their mana and are empowered in a safe space of self-determination.*

It comes down to those pillars like being supporting of the culture, being supporting of the mental side like emotional and stuff like that, the physical side in the spiritual side of everything. The whole course is about Te Whare Tapa Whā, it's kind of like weaving a whāriki, putting everything in there, taha tinana, taha whānau, taha wairua and taha hinengaro, they do it really well (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).

Airini et al. (2011) describe the importance of practices that are culturally appropriate. The view of Māori students is that academic success is influenced by facilitated learning experiences that interweave culture with study. Education is a vehicle that can be used in growing a sense of identity and self-esteem for students. Bruner (1996) explains that by students having a feel for their history and own cultural stories they will cultivate an increased sense of themselves.

Webber (2012) maintains the “underpinning assertion is that a positive sense of Māori identity, experienced as cultural competence, cultural efficiency and racial ethnic group pride, may help to improve the educational outcomes of Māori” (p.21). McKinley (2005) reinforces the importance of te reo Māori as a vehicle to enhanced understanding and connection of history, identity and knowledge.

For Māori students, fundamental features include study that incorporates cultural beliefs, attitudes and values; teachers who support and value Māori culture and cultural diversity; and teaching that understands and applies culturally preferred ways of learning. It is evident the underlying tikanga Māori foundation to Cert4fitness positively influences qualification outcomes. Words, knowledge and stories shared by participants contribute to robust pillars on which the programme is built.

### **Cert4fitness as a Course**

A collective theme shared throughout focus group hui was that “Cert4fitness” is a programme regarded as special. Graduate words reflected a learning journey comprised of multiple layers that describe “a life changing experience” for many. Participants described feelings for the programme as if it was a living, breathing organism that developed into a distinctive part of their lives. Comments that shared this feeling included:

*Watching graduation the other day you could see the massive difference between Cert4fitness to everyone else that was graduating. You could just see the whānaungatanga, wairua, the connection. The wairua is where we are going wrong with our Māori students. They have got to connect with their wairua (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

*Gaining the qualification itself and the reputation that came with this course and the mana of passing meant lots to me. (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*Just having a passion for the course and to come every day. The course made us want to come every day when things got hard at home (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*This course was definitely a turning point for my life, definitely. I don't know, if I didn't come here I don't know what I would be doing (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

Graduate stories through pūrākau offered several factors that could explain this feeling of wairua, mana and a sense of being part of something special. Founded upon a tikanga Māori base, values such as whānaungatanga and manaakitanga appear to create a powerful kaupapa that is culturally robust. It seems the Cert4fitness course is powered by a beating heart that can be identified as culture. Through Māori worldview this process is mana-enhancing for both the learner and the programme of study.

Graduate discussion presents a viewpoint of programme loyalty, perhaps established through a sense of belonging and social connectedness (Webber and Macfarlane, 2018). Participant commentary shares a feeling of commitment to attendance and the impact of being away:

*If you couldn't come I would feel like I missed out on something, it was always like that. Even if you are sick you would still want to come in because you didn't want to miss out on anything (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*I think I only missed one or two days because you used to want to come here because it was better for me here than being at home. It's one of those things that even when you're when you're injured or sick you still come here (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

*You didn't have to try to get motivated to come, because you just wanted to, you wanted to be here (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

Throughout graduate findings commentary reflects on the influence of class culture and how values such as whānaungatanga and manaakitanga impacted positively on learning. Graduates within a given cohort reflect with an attitude that sees their class as whānau rather than just classmates. Durie (2009) explains this perspective is known as “kaupapa whānau”, where members are not related through biological connection but united through a common purpose.

Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1997) identifies that kaupapa whānau is a fundamental requirement in a kaupapa Māori approach to learning. He describes that within this context, students cooperate on a daily basis while supporting each other through “economic and social disparities”. With whānau described as the “building block of Māori society” (Ministry of Health, 2002), it is evident through graduate story this is how they viewed their year of study.

Focus group discussion captured that participants extended this outlook by stating that they felt part of a community of Cert4fitness graduates, an extended family. They described being part of a “fitness whakapapa” comprised of years of graduates who had walked a shared and common journey. Cheung (2008) defines that whakapapa unites and provides a foundation of connectedness to our past through those in the present. This is how graduates appear to view themselves as part of the Cert4fitness story and is illustrated in comments such as:

*Being connected, that is the biggest thing. Because through the years you meet someone and it's like oh you did Cert4fitness? And you have this connection there, even though you don't know the person it's just on a deeper level. It's because we have vulnerability, we share our stories and it's safe (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

There were also examples of genealogical whānau within the discussion – students who had been part of a family where more than one member had experienced the Cert4fitness journey:

*My mum and brother-in-law did the course aye, and I just trusted their word that it would be the best thing I have ever done aye, and it was (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

*Wasn't just a course but a lifestyle change for myself and my whanau. My son did this course the following year, who told me that he was encouraged seeing me learn and live what I was learning (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

It appears the experience of travelling the Cert4fitness journey continues to influence graduates after the course finishes. Comments share the on-going influence that learning and motivation had on their lives:

*As soon as you go through the course it makes you want to carry on looking after yourself. And how the bros have all gone our own ways with course, studies, work and families and that it gives you sustainable health for life. You realise it is a lifestyle thing. You don't really need a purpose to train but just to be happy, to look after yourself (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

*If it wasn't for this course, I'd still be working at the meat works, which was alright, but I didn't enjoy it. It made me just go off and change the life that I really want and what I really wanted to. Like once you're finished fitness you think shit, I can do anything. I think you kind of realise what it's like to be happy all of the time, or to be doing something that you love every day and it makes you want that again I think. So, you don't just settle for a job just for a job if you know what I mean (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

*They taught me life skills that I later carried on in life. The type of skills you hardly learn at school, like turning up every day, communication, teamwork, respect. They were good at letting us know that obstacles are always gonna come, it's how you react is what matters (2010 focus group, Tupuā-rangi).*

Clift and Evertson (1992) describe the phenomenon that seems to occur within the Cert4fitness course by stating that when a class is a social group it does not end on a given day and will always have a connection when members disband. That “viewed in this way, life in the classroom is holistic for members. Class is a living entity and not merely a setting” (p.86).

### **Classmate Influence on Learning**

When positive relationships with classmates are cultivated, Māori students develop a sense of belonging, increased confidence and enhanced learning. This influences academic achievement (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Gorinski and Abernethy, 2003; Hill and Hawk, 2000).

Gorinski and Abernethy (2007) describe that interpersonal relationships between classmates have a substantial impact on Māori student retention and achievement. They share problems, discuss solutions, support each other through adversity and celebrate successes.

It is evident that classmate influence positively impacted qualification outcomes for Māori students within the Cert4fitness programme. All but one graduate identified that their classmates had “a great deal” or “a lot” of influence on passing the programme.

Macfarlane et al. (2014) propose Māori students view class friendships as being important to academic success and wellbeing. By surrounding themselves with

learners who follow a common kaupapa numerous benefits are achieved. Traits such as self-esteem, academic understanding and learning confidence improve, problems are shared, issues are easier resolved and education is more enjoyable.

A common theme contributed through graduate discussion was a feeling of whānau within the class. Students described their classmates felt more like family than just classmates. Comments sharing this perspective included:

*I think that is why there is such a high Māori success rate because of the whānau environment. Because Māori thrive in communities whereas in a Pākehā environment you are alone. Like we are not used to that being Māori (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*It definitely helped me and I think I can say for all the students. We were all like a whanau. It helped us all come together as one and pull through the tough times so no one was left behind (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

Bishop (1999) states whānau is the central word in whānaungatanga (positive and supportive relationships) and “one of the most fundamental ideas within Māori culture, both as a value and as a social process” (p. 203). Hohepa (1999) explains students can gain a sense of whānau as they work together on a regular basis, sharing a common commitment and purpose as a group.

It is clear through discussion that there was a reciprocated motivation to be there for each other in a family-like environment. Graduates appreciated and valued each other as not merely classmates, but as a whānau. These pillars of whānaungatanga and manaakitanga are central throughout this research as key foundations:

*It is that belonging with the class and it's like that for Māori family as well. (Advisory group, Atutahi)*

*For me it was the whānau environment, within the course we grew a tight bond through everyone just through training hard and all this learning. Yeah it was the whānaungatanga and the group was really tight we just wanted to come to course back in those days (2012 whānau.)*

Durie (2005) stresses that whānaungatanga is essential in all exchanges with Māori. He states that through living by this value a collective responsibility for the wellbeing of others is developed. This is achieved through a commitment to a common purpose. This element is fundamental in teaching and creating a culturally responsive environment.

It appears this attitude and way of thinking supports students through times of personal struggle, where a feeling of isolation may have led them to withdraw from study. When students consider themselves part of a whānau, relationships are strengthened as they individually and collectively awhi (support) each other through tough times. Comments that share this insight include:

*We had a few tangi and that really brought us together I think. I think we took the whole day off and like paused assignments and everything to go be there for that person. Because (name withheld) little brother passed away and then (name withheld) mum so that's pretty close and they both passed the course so that is another thing to them aye, losing people close to them and they still passed this course (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

There were so many different people who had overcome different adversities to provide inspiration. The bonds created amongst students to help each other was awesome (Anonymous graduate from survey).

The strong feeling graduates describe as whānaungatanga is created through a range of elements interwoven in the Cert4fitness programme. Factors already discussed include the tikanga Māori foundation, the learning environment, Cert4fitness as a course and the concept of the students being vital to the whakapapa of the programme. It seems these pillars encourage a culture of commitment and loyalty. Typical comments collected from participant stories highlighting the desire to “succeed” or “turn up” for each other were:

*When I would see someone slipping, I would make sure I would try to be there to help them in any way I could, and you know others would as well. It wasn't only coming from the tutors, but it was coming from the peer groups as well. (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).*

*Your peers helped you by encouraging you to come back. If somebody missed a few days we would check up on them make sure they are coming back. It was just a good environment to be in to like you wouldn't want to miss out on a day because you miss a day you missed something cool (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

Graduates identified that their teachers were one of the reasons a feeling of whānau was generated. Peterson and Deal (1998) highlight the importance and influence teachers can have as educational leaders. They can create a positive ripple effect in the learning environment and are capable of so much more than merely standing and delivering in a classroom.

They also talked about equality and the positive experiences of working within a diverse group. Bowen (1977) believes it is the responsibility of higher education to enhance social development in cultural cohesion while Gutmann (2004) recommends a key goal of higher education is to teach acceptance, understanding and respect of cultural difference. Hurtado (2007) supports this concept by stressing the need for research that will provide enhanced understanding and tools to teach these values to our students. Graduate feedback captured views such as:

*I was lucky that we had a good team that supported each other. Our tutors had the ability to bring different peoples and cultures together and taught us to work as a team (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

Graduate discussion referenced two in-class activities described below as being significant in encouraging whānaungatanga, unity and empathy. Participants felt these were key in contributing to the culture of positivity and connection. Whānau board day was completed at the start of the course. Students were asked to bring in a picture or pictures representing their “why”, an image or images that captures a person, people or place that was special to them. Students shared their part of the “jig-saw” to the class before placing it on the whānau board, a large notice board on the wall of their classroom. This board showed students as individuals and whānau who were special to them. It represented the heart of the programme, holding mana and wairua. When the going got tough students reminded each other of who they were representing and their “why” to help them through. Comments included:

*It's a place of healing for most people. It's sharing, you don't share that kind of stuff with people. You know on our year, I don't know if it's the same in other years, it's the stuff that you share that brings you closer together as a whānau. That's powerful (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

*When you share your personal feelings and thoughts through all those little sit downs' and korero it really opens up a person and brings us together (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*You are put in a position to share things about yourself, the only thing you can do is get closer to those around you aye (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

Guided by participant words, it is proposed these events are important in building trust, encouraging compassion and placing students in a place of vulnerability. Ghosh et al., (2001) describe tertiary students who trust their teacher, peers and institution develop faith and confidence in their learning journey. Student trust has been found to positively encourage loyalty and as a result, retention is improved, perception of learning quality is reinforced and academic achievement is enhanced (Moore and Bowden-Everson, 2012; Ghosh et. al, 2001).

One student shared that through this process they gained an appreciation for non-Māori in their class. They gained compassion and understanding for a culture that was different to their own. They shared:

*Like when you're pulling down the whānau board it's not only special to a Māori person it's like to special to Pākehā as well. Yeah I was just tripping out how relatable we are and how much we connected (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).*

Another graduate contributed the effect of their teachers being involved in the same activities, placing themselves in a place of trust and vulnerability.

*Like whānau board day. Them opening up and sharing their stories and their stuff, you kind of just know they are different to other teachers. And it's not just that teacher-student relationship, its real mates as well. And you build that relationship so they really care about you so you don't want to let them down (2015 focus group, Matariki).*

Curzon-Hobson (2002) maintain a teacher's actions are crucial in creating a feeling of trust. Through leading by example in activities and demonstrating vulnerability a greater connection between student and teacher is created.

Taaonga day was an activity delivered in the second half of the programme. Beginning and ending with a karakia, students are asked to bring along an item that is connected with a person or place that is special to them. The student shares the story associated with their taaonga. Graduates shared the impact these two experiences had on them as individuals and collectively as a class:

*I think when you talk about taaonga day and the whānau board, that stuff there in itself it just breaks down so many barriers, it's raw, it's real and that's just opening all that stuff up, all that connection, people connecting with each other and realise that person is going through that and that person is going through that. That stuff is really, really important I think. And it feels safe (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

Students feel more motivated and empowered when working alongside a teacher in a relationship where trust has been created (Corrigan and Chapman, 2008). Van Maele and Van Houtte (2010) state that "educational research increasingly acknowledges the significance of trust as an indicator of positive teacher-student relationships producing favourable outcomes for student learning and teacher functioning" (p.86).

Participant feedback in this section highlights the multiple layers that are intertwined in this project. The described activities contribute towards the tikanga Māori foundation, enhance class culture and strengthen connections between students and teachers. These experiences nurture whānaungatanga and provide equality through a feeling of vulnerability and trust.

## The Teacher

There is an abundance of literature highlighting the importance of who the teacher is, suggesting this is as important as what the teacher teaches. Central to creating a culturally responsive pedagogy, there is strong significance in relationship development, positive role modelling and student care (Alton-Lee, 2003; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Bishop and Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al, 2009).

Sidorkin (2002) believes a teacher is the key difference for Māori in mainstream and essential in influencing academic achievement. Teachers with strong relationship skills have value to offer because relationships support all other features in learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) reinforce this viewpoint by addressing problems of Māori attrition: "the evidence is pointing more to the relationships between teachers and Māori students as the major issue. It is a matter of cultural relationships not socio-economic resources, as these differences occur at all levels of socio-economic status" (p.7).

Alton-Lee (2003) proposes that teachers are undoubtedly the most important influence on students' learning. This perspective is of particular importance when teaching diverse student groups or Māori within the mainstream system. In completing an analysis of approximately 800 studies, Hattie and Timperley (2007) found that "teachers are among the most powerful influences on learning" (p. 238). Graduate comments that epitomise this perspective include:

*As a Māori student, what it took for me to get through first and foremost was the tutors, the tutors have wairua. And that was one of the most important things to me. KP and Sheree, and Sheree isn't even Māori and she has wairua. And so I think, it's the people that lead, it's how they are connecting with the students. Because I tell you right now, if it was any other tutors that I didn't think had wairua I would have walked out many times. As a Māori student that was a massive thing for me (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

*You just wanted to make KP and Sheree proud at the end of the day and make it to graduation. Because they put so much work into you and all they want is for you to graduate (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).*

When participants were asked about the influence of their Cert4fitness tutors as "a person", the results were overwhelming. Forty-one graduates identified that their teacher as a person had "a great deal" of influence on them graduating while the remaining person stated "a lot". Comments that personified graduate feeling towards this feature included:

*It's the tutors that make the course really. I know for myself I hated school and the thought of going back to study was quite daunting but just KP and Sheree just made it so easy to transition into adult study and you know were just so supportive. I don't know, I can't even say, it was amazing (2013 focus group, Waiti).*

*Cannot express enough how amazing our tutors were. The most genuine and passionate teachers I know who are willing to adapt and be whatever they need to be in order to help their students succeed to a high level (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

Brooks (2019) proposes that for effective learning to take place there must be a strong relationship between the teacher and student. He presents a series of questions centred on relationships that are described as possibilities for change. Freire (1973) reports that an effective and revolutionary teacher must engage in cooperative critical thinking with their students in pursuit for "mutual humanisation".

It is vital for teachers and students to be partners in learning creativity with strong relationships founded on equality and trust. Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) propose that for effective learning to happen there must be an emotional connection in the process. Emotions are built upon reciprocal relationships of trust, respect and cooperation. When teachers fail to appreciate the significance of student emotions, they fail to appreciate a critical strength that enhances learning. They state, “one could argue, in fact, that we failed to appreciate that very reason that students learn at all” (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2007, p.9).

There is an abundance of research highlighting the influence a teacher has on the academic success of Māori students. This statement has been reinforced in this project as clear graduate voice has strengthened this perspective. Recent research by McAllister, Kidman, Rowley, and Theodore (2019) presents an issue that may become problematic if not addressed. They announce that New Zealand universities are severely under-represented in Māori staff, who made up just five percent of the total academic workforce between 2012 and 2017. Despite values advocated by universities regarding diversity, equity policies and respect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi regarding Māori staff, there has been no progress over this time.

The following section shares graduates’ perspective on their teachers as role models. It is important for Māori students to be exposed to Māori teachers and staff who can work in a tuakana-teina (older and younger person) relationship and mentor students.

#### *Role Models and Whānau*

Macfarlane et al (2014) describe a role model as “a person who demonstrates a particular behavior, skill or social role for another person to emulate” (p.132). They continue by explaining in an educational context, teachers can have a positive influence on students by demonstrating personal attributes, behaviours and attitudes that can encourage students to match their effort and actions in a similar manner.

Knowledge extracted from graduate discussion evidenced the positive influence from teachers who role modelled positive behaviour. Aligned to this perspective was a feeling of the tutors being parent-like figures, as whānau. There was a sense of students not wanting to let their tutor down, a desire to make them proud. Typical comments that captured this perspective included:

*You just want to make them proud. I said I looked at them like a Mum and Dad like I didn't want to go from this course and then just head back down the dumps or something because they might be let down by me... So, you don't want to let them down (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

*I got motivated from KP and Sheree because I didn't have many positive role models in my life until them. So I wanted to pass for them as well. You just don't want to let them down. But you need people like that okay because I never had anyone until them. And the cool thing was they had your back; they gave you a grilling when you need it to what they will show you the way. They'll be hard, firm, but fair and give you a solution (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

Bishop et al (2009) are clear in their beliefs about student-teacher relationships. Māori student achievement and successful learning outcomes are influenced by these connections. Positive relationships established on honesty, trust, reciprocity and respect are identified as essential to effective learning. The importance of unity and a collaborative learning environment is crucial, with many students feeling that effective teachers replicate whānau (Mullane, 2010).

Greenwood and Te Aika (2008) suggest that teachers play a key role in influencing academic achievement of Māori learners. The teacher is in a position of responsibility

to connect with a student and empower them in a trusting and shared learning journey. Macfarlane et al (2014) report many Māori students appreciate the leadership from ‘touchstone teachers’ who “...acted as mentors, advocates and confidantes in the school context. These teachers tended to look for and focus on the good in the Māori students, and made efforts to regularly articulate the Māori student’s potential and exceptionality” (p. 160).

The relationship developed between student and teacher is significant in establishing a culturally responsive model (Bell, 2011; Bishop and Berryman, 2006). Freire (1973) highlights the importance of a learning environment built upon shared trust between learner and teacher, where the teacher demonstrates care, faith and hope in their students. Graduate comments that highlight this perspective include:

*There was never really an option for me to not finish, there were certain situations where maybe I could’ve fallen out but again, the whānau feel, you felt like you needed to do it for yourself but everyone else here. And your tutors, KP and Sheree I felt like I was letting down Mum and Dad if you know what I mean (2015 focus group, Matariki).*

Airini et al (2011) make recommendations on striving for Māori and Pasifika student success. While a whānau approach around working relationships is essential, so too is a clear understanding of professional boundaries. Students do not need a friend, but a positive and supportive teacher who enhances the learning process. Examples of graduate views illustrating this included:

*They made it clear they were always there for us, like our parents, and we felt that way. Like a Mum and Dad to all of us. It was good and made a big difference (2014 focus group, Waitā).*

*Sheree came from a very motherly point of you when she used to teach. You know, that’s how she was. Whereas KP was like a bro, an older bro, that you wanted to be like him because this is what he represented. I wanted to be like that. But they both work so well together (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

Focus groups evidenced a consistent theme of how students viewed their relationships with their teachers. Graduate student comments described an environment where teachers were respected by students, due to integrity and a desire to work hard for them.

A strong theme emerging from all focus groups was the influence of teacher leadership through role modelling. Typical comments throughout include:

*One of the biggest things that make you trust them is that they walk the talk. They can actually be the ones I can trust because they’re doing it you know, backing it up. Far integrity aye, like if you can’t do it then why should I do it (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

Embedded within the role model theme is that of leadership integrity, a lead by example approach from teachers. Macfarlane et al (2007) link pono (integrity) to contribute towards a teacher having mana and character of dignity. This is a key factor linked to the “Hikairo Rationale”, a bicultural approach to working with students created by Macfarlane (2007). Teacher pono is one of the seven domains described by MacFarlane and embedded within I runga i te manaaki (pastoral care).

McEwan (2001) encapsulates graduate comment and stated literature by describing that an effective teacher is partly personified by being passionate and positive; mission-driven and real; a teacher who leads by example. Hawk et al (2002) reflect on teacher role modelling by explaining that students are “very observant of even the most minor examples of a teacher saying one thing but doing another” (p. 14).

## *Belief and Care*

Māori students feel cared for when teachers treat them as individuals (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2007). It has been widely documented that caring relationships are pivotal to student success and learning outcomes are positively influenced (Abbott-Chapman & Edwards, 1998; Gorinski & Abernethy, 2007; Hall et al. 2001; Promnitz and Germain, 1996). When a teacher demonstrates care in aspects such as attendance, results, health issues or whānau students feel valued and cared for.

Gay (2000) describes caring as a power in the context of teaching and learning. She cites the work of Webb et al (1993) who state “caring is a value and a moral imperative that moves self-determination into social responsibility and uses knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of others. Caring binds individuals to their society, to their communities, and to each other” (Webb et al, 1993, p.45).

Graduate students contribute discussion that evidenced this aspect within their Cert4fitness journey:

*I like it when you tell them you're not coming in and they ask why not, and they actually support you. I wasn't here for a bit more than a week because I was going through shit and stuff and that was a pretty hard week for me. They actually helped me and rang me, said how can they help. When I got back, they brought me back up again (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).*

*If you're having problems at home or something, they always check up on you and support you through. They are genuine and they care. Because they don't have to, they could be like I finish at four I don't have to worry about these fullas anymore (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

McMurphy-Pilkington (2009) believe that Māori adult learners respond best when their teachers care about their success, thus creating a culturally responsive environment. Hawk et al (2002) support this perspective by describing that confidence and self-esteem in Māori learners is enhanced through engagement created by care.

Hooks (1996) presents the essence of what appears to be a common theme throughout focus group discussion. In her view to “teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (Hooks, 1996).

It was evident through conversation there was a general feeling that the teachers continued to care about learners after graduation, leading to confidence and a sense of loyalty. Comments illustrating this feeling included:

*Even after the course they have still got us, like if we needed them, they would be there for us straight away. Like I still text and come in and visit them if I need advice on something and they're always willing for that to sit down and help (2016 focus group, Waipuna-ā-rangi).*

*They gave me confidence to be myself, even after the course. It helped me look at life willing to do whatever it took, I was confident and just inspired to do whatever I put my mind to really (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

Hawk et al. (2002) describe that when a tertiary teacher cares it is more likely to be described as friendliness than love. They also describe a concept of reciprocity as “complex and important. Each aspect of the relationship can engender a reciprocal response. If a teacher is seen to work hard for students, they are more likely to work hard in response. If a teacher really cares, students will really care for him/her” (p.11).

## Communication

In discussing their learning journey participants reflected on the influence of communication from their teachers. Communication can be identified as a vehicle to deliver previously presented values such as whānaungatanga and manaakitanga. As with many aspects of graduate feedback, it must be acknowledged that effective communication is central in the learning process and is integrated throughout the stories shared by participants.

Focus group discussion identified that participants shared the value of effective communication with their teachers. Comments that characterise graduate feeling included:

*I think they had really good people skills, especially when they know how to talk different to a Māori person or it might be a non-Māori person or a might be a person from Mexico or whatever. But they have got good people skills, they know how to talk to you (2014 focus group, Waitā).*

*And they try and connect too, it doesn't matter who it is or where they come from, they try to connect which is awesome. Coming out of school, I came straight out of school and I was just going around different classes, there is no connection with your teachers at all. As soon as you get here on the first day you are being enticed to connect by them. They are trying to connect with you. (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

It appears effective communication is central to teacher role modelling, teaching delivery and pedagogies, creating a safe learning environment and any aspect of relationship development that is important for Māori learners.

## The Teaching

It is important the educational journey is shared between the student and teacher, where learning is reciprocated (Freire, 1973). The teacher is not the sole (or soul) leader in leading learning. Students become empowered in a process that develops with flexibility in experiences and direction. A hierarchy does not exist. Freire (1973) states “authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are owned by the teacher” (p.80).

Smith (1997, 2003) describes this approach as ako, an important co-operative partnership between the teacher and the student in leading learning. He describes this as a fundamental principle that must be embedded in mainstream educational settings for Māori to prosper. This idea of shared teaching and learning aligns with graduate feedback presented throughout focus group discussions.

*They find this way, they have this ability to teach a person for a person. They teach me different to how they would teach (name withheld) and just figure out, they understand you, really quickly. I haven't found very many people that can do that, not only can they understand you but it matters to them how they teach you and how you feel and you can tell you are important, you are not just a number in a class and they listen to you (2010 whānau).*

Contributed graduate knowledge in what is described as effective teaching has been themed into understanding learning styles, teaching variety, expectations, the learning environment, teaching delivery and off-campus learning. These cannot be separated, with each interwoven with the next.

*They are the best tutors/teachers I have ever had. They made difficult things seem simple and made us all feel like we could achieve even the toughest of academic things (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

*I think just knowing, knowing how each individual learnt and then making a custom plan for that sort of works so well (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

### *Teaching Pedagogies*

Ninety-three percent of participants reported that teaching styles had a great deal of influence on helping them graduate with the remaining seven percent describing a lot. These findings present the positive impact that Cert4fitness teaching styles have on qualification completion.

Fleming (1995) describes that in observing effective teachers there are multiple ways to facilitate learning. The teachers who offer an extensive range of teaching methods provide positive learning opportunities to meet the needs of students. As a result, greater student outcomes are achieved.

Sciascia (2017) highlights the significance of effective teaching approaches in tertiary for Māori learner success. She states “Māori pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning are conducive to enhancing learner experiences and contributing towards Māori learner success. Through incorporating Māori pedagogical approaches to learning, practitioners are exposed to different ways of thinking, being and doing” (Sciascia, 2017, p.11).

Focus group comments identify teachers who take time to understand their students and facilitate learning to meet individual and collective needs. This student-centred approach acknowledges learning styles and promotes a range of learning experiences (Smith, 1991; Stables and Scott, 2002). Alton-Lee (2003) note that this attitude to leading learning demonstrates care and support to students. Comments from graduates illustrating the influence of learning styles included:

*They will teach you in different teaching styles like for the visual learners and for the kinesthetic learners who like to do. You will be learning the same stuff but through different teaching styles. They didn't just cater for one group who learnt through visual, I feel that is what our current course does, just a lot of visual learning. Yeah, we just sit in a lecture theatre and it gets boring and we all get hoha (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*Different learning techniques were good, to cover all of us. They would find out what our learning techniques were and made sure that we would cover it that way (2014 focus group, Waitā).*

Graduates valued teachers who varied their teaching methods and style to provide a multi-dimensional approach to learning. Vaughn and Baker (2001) propose that by using a variety of teaching styles, learners are exposed to unfamiliar and familiar learning experiences that provide “comfort and tension during the process, ultimately giving learners multiple ways to excel” (p.610). Comments that reinforce the blended and integrated teaching approach include:

*I found that Cert4Fitness caters for all learning styles, so that was one thing. Because I am dyslexic I am a real hands-on learner and a big picture thinker and so when I think I've done a degree before it was very heavy paper-based and it was man, I just muddled my way through it. But I think Cert4fitness for so many people caters for the hands on learning, it caters for the reading and the writing because we have still got some of that in class and it's just a big mixture of*

*learning styles. And if you have a look at the mainstream education system there's not really a lot of mixture (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

*Practical learning helped my theory learning. Theory things are so not me and to do things practically was good, that's what helped me but also the presentations and the PowerPoints. You would see it but they would explain it to you in a way that I could understand and they just know if you get it or not (2018 focus group, Hiwaiteangi).*

Prior research suggests that many Māori students share strong preferences towards interactive, applied and tutorial style learning approaches. Quality teaching is an effective balance between theory and practical learning with experiential practices enhancing engagement, understanding and empowerment (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Gorinski and Abernethy, 2007; Williams and Cram, 2012). It is vital to appreciate that Māori students are culturally different to non-Māori. This requires learning needs that must be supported and understood in culturally responsive ways (Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Durie, 2001; Smith, 1997).

Knowles, Holton and Swanson (2005) note that teachers who embrace active teaching pedagogies to meet the needs of Māori influence greater learner achievement. Williams and Cram (2012) suggest an effective balance of practical and theory learning is most effective for Māori, supported by a group-focused approach. Graduate student evidence describes a key factor in best teaching for Māori is to know the student. An understanding of what each student requires in their learning journey creates a student-centred approach.

The Cert4fitness programme is connected to an industry associated with exercise and physical activity. It is common for students to be largely kinaesthetic learners, with a part visual and auditory element in their learning needs. The following comments illustrate this:

*The teaching for me, I hate sitting in class, I absolutely hate it. Like copy off the whiteboard we have an assessment tomorrow, which sucks. But with them they actually taught it to you practically, which made it stick for me and made it easier and fun and I learnt it. It was easier to understand and we cracked it really (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

*For me the teaching, so like the practical and the theory, say like the whole day was split into the theory and then do the practical of that theory that same time. So like you know to be honest there were some not so bright sparks but through doing the practical it stuck with them and because we were just constantly going over it and then we would do it practically as well. (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

There has been evolution in the role of the teacher over the years. The idea that teachers are the sole holders of knowledge who share facts to be repeated in exams is no longer effective or acceptable. With the influence of digital technology and student need it is essential students are guided and encouraged to find answers and problem solve themselves. Effective use of reflection through questioning and feedback is one feature that demonstrates good teaching practice (Sexton, 2011). Bishop (2005) supports this concept by explaining the creation of a learning environment that is shared, interactive and safe for exploration of knowledge. Participation from students is vital and teachers should interrelate with learners to co-create new knowledge. It is important for students to be skilled and confident in inquiry-based learning, the exchange of ideas and the ability to use multiple methods in learning (Bishop, 2005, p.261).

Connected to meeting the pedagogical needs of learners but from a different perspective is appreciation for variety. Focus group discussion highlighted the positive influence that variety had on learning motivation and enjoyment. Broader than simply altering teaching methods, graduates shared that change enhanced enthusiasm and engagement.

It was evident through graduate feedback that activities experienced during the programme had a lasting effect on learners after graduation. By living the learning students carried confidence and skills that continued to positively impact their lives.

*The activity component has a big impact on Māori. I felt like when I did the course when I experienced many times that I was having to push through hard challenges, I would build up resilience. And that would roll on to other areas. When you get through the course and you walk across the stage with an A+ because there was all this crap going on, but I had the support. Our activities build the resilience up to make you stronger, so you don't give up (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

*The activities actually helped me face other challenges that came after the course. I just had to take my mind back to a certain time in Cert4fitness and I was able to physically get through that challenge. The environment going offsite was really helpful (2010 focus group, Tupuārangī).*

### *The Learning Environment*

Hattie and Timperley (2007) say that students learn best in an environment where it is safe for them to make mistakes through exploration. Airini et al (2011) support this perspective by explaining Māori student success relates to learners feeling comfortable and safe in their learning environment. Creating this opportunity provides a culturally enhancing space where self-identity is encouraged, confidence is grown and learning is nourished. This environment creates a whānau style feeling where the class as a family can work, celebrate and struggle together (Gavala and Flett, 2005). Comments sharing graduate perspective include:

*The tutors set such a positive creative atmosphere for learning it made learning fun. Also, the tutors are compassionate, kind and caring it made our environment feel safe and feel like home (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

*I learnt here and passed because I felt safe. The method that they used, their tutoring style, it made me feel safe. I learnt from my mistakes, because everyone made mistakes. But how they encouraged me, I was going to say corrected me but really encouraged me, to work at it again to get it right. That is really important. They didn't ever make me feel dumb at all, this is huge. It was the safe environment, they believed in me. (2010 focus group, Tupuārangī).*

Graduate comment suggests the construction of a culturally safe environment aided confidence and resulted in effective learning. There are several contributing factors founded on a strong tikanga Māori foundation that are difficult to separate. These factors are discussed in the following sections and include influence from students, the teacher and the teaching.

### *What defines a Classroom?*

Field trips applied in the learning journey are an effective way to increase student motivation, positively influence attitude and promote comprehension, skills and understanding (Bitgood 1989; Kern & Carpenter 1984; Mackenzie & White 1981). Strongly linked to academic learning outcomes, many of the trips are now embedded in the tradition of the Cert4fitness journey. The anonymous survey completed by participants (post focus group meeting) clearly identifies the positive impact off-site learning has on qualification outcomes. Seventy-nine percent of participants identified that off-site learning and field trips had a great deal of influence on graduating Cert4fitness while another 17 percent stated these experiences had a lot of influence.

Embedded within teaching variety and learning pedagogies, these experiential opportunities are purposeful and rich in learning. Students are exposed to varying learning environments, past students who have walked the Cert4fitness journey, community role models and more. It is essential that the timing of trips aligns with various factors within the programme. Aspects such as learner skill-set, academic foundations, confidence, trust, and learning goals determine what happens and when.

*Our offsite things we did, like just getting out into the community, so many people don't get to do that. It was always different and that was cool. So that was always motivating and something to look forward to if it was a big week. Like yes, we are offsite! (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

Through “feeling” different modalities of exercise that industry has to offer students are presented with heightened learning otherwise unachievable in their regular teaching space. As the programme unfolds throughout the year these experiences encourage students to self-reflect in post-graduation pathways. Comments included:

*Seeing industry and seeing where we could end up. Like I remember when we went to Auckland, I remember feeling I'm in the right place, this is where I meant to be. (2013 focus group, Waiti).*

*The trips themselves and the people we met were motivating and opened your eyes to where you could go from here (Anonymous graduate from survey).*

Whānaungatanga is nurtured and promoted through group experiences on Cert4fitness field trips. Conversations, shared reflection, support through challenges, compassion and empathy through shared journeys is incredibly strong for class culture and the benefits are evident.

### *Teaching Delivery*

It was a common theme throughout focus group discussion that graduates valued the personality and style of instruction from their teacher in their learning. Hildebrand (1973) describes enthusiasm as one of five key traits that excellent tertiary teachers demonstrate in their classes. Sherman, Armistead, Fowler, Barksdale, and Reif (1987) reinforce this perspective by identifying teacher energy and enthusiasm as being significant in effective learning. Teacher passion can “stimulate interest and thinking about the subject matter, and love of knowledge” (Sherman et al, 1987, p. 67). In research conducted by Kane, Sandretto, and Heath (2004) the most commonly cited personality characteristic of tertiary teachers was enthusiasm, citing “here is someone who is really enjoying the whole academic experience, that whole learning experience” (p.298).

Graduate feedback identifies energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by their teachers positively impacted their learning. Comments include:

*In terms of content it wasn't so much what was being in the course because that was cool, but in my opinion I think it was the way that it was being taught because they could have told me how paint dries and you know it would be cool (2018 focus group, Hiwaiterangi).*

*The excitement levels and class helped. They were always cheerful, just the way they would come about whatever they were presenting was always in a happy way, engaging and passionate (2011 focus group, Tupuānuku).*

*For me it's the passion they present with and talk with... they obviously love what they're doing and it sort of just radiates off them and you just feel that vibe from them. It makes it a lot more enjoyable that they come here with like enthusiastic about teaching you. Because you can feel straightaway when somebody just doesn't want to be there, you just know (2010 focus group, Tupuārangī).*

Discussion by participants suggests a teacher with a positive and enthusiastic personality brings enjoyment and fun into learning. Teacher traits such as enthusiasm and passion contribute to enjoyable learning experiences for students. Willis (2007) proposes that often learning stops when the fun stops. It has been suggested that through incorporating fun and play in learning, sociability, motivation and understanding the topic is enhanced (Ejsing-Duun & Karoff, 2014).

Graduates shared that certain learning resources provided by the teacher assisted in their learning. Airini et al (2011) suggest that by providing students with quality learning resources effective learning will not “just happen”, they state there is a greater influence of who the teacher is and how they teach rather than the learning resources they offer. However, their participants shared they felt increased confidence in their capability to graduate by knowing such resources were accessible (Airini et al, 2011). A comment reinforcing the idea of teachers being a significant resource from a 2012 graduate is:

*The biggest resources were like KP and Sheree, like you could just go to them any time you wanted to, like literally any time, even after class. They would always be happy to help. They are always willing to put their hand out or just like, help with anything (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

Two educational resources used to enhance the learning process were shared in numerous discussions. Participants identified that Facebook and in-class PowerPoints were effective tools in promoting learning.

Typical comments that shared participant view on Facebook as a resource included:

*We had our own Facebook group to study as well. That really helped us out. It was really good (2014 focus group, Waitā).*

*I think too Facebook was a real good resource for us. When you're out of the class it would still keep the vibe going because he would throw out pictures and towards the end of the year with periodisation he would put up our own personal quotes and stuff like that. So even at home and you're motivated aye (2012 focus group, Pōhutukawa).*

Researchers have found that Facebook has a positive influence when being used as a resource to extend classroom communication, enhance cooperative learning, and even encourages reserved students to participate in the learning process (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Saxena & Majumdar, 2014). Gámez (2015) states that Facebook “can provide great support to the new social orientation of educational processes because they allow a human connection more personal and motivating than other platforms” (p.6042). He states that the motivation of students is enhanced when the teacher approaches the process in a way that is personal without losing their professional image.

Facebook was used as a key resource in organising communication for this research project. Participants were recruited through this social media platform, where separate focus groups were established, and decisions were made around meeting dates and times. There has also been a closed group created, where all participants in this study can view research progress and provide feedback. Facebook has been a valuable tool in promoting open communication.

Apperson, Laws, and Scepanisky (2006) explain that the effective use of PowerPoint in teaching enriches students’ learning experience, noting that students demonstrate increased enjoyment in class, show increased motivation towards the subject and develop a more encouraging attitude towards their learning. However, PowerPoint must engage with and connect students to their learning in a way that is thoughtful and creative. If this is achieved, PowerPoint can be an effective platform to promote engagement and active learning (Azuka, 2002; McMahon, 2002).

Typical comments that illustrated participant feedback on the use of PowerPoint in teaching delivery were:

*You know, it wasn't just PowerPoints you look at and put in your bag. We used them and that's how retention happened (2013 focus group, Waiti).*

*The PowerPoints they do are good but it's how they present them makes it so more understandable. They both have their own styles in doing it, but were both effective at doing it. Yeah just the way they took you through the PowerPoints made you pay attention (2013 focus group, Waiti).*

Final participant words in this section were gathered during a conversation on teaching delivery. Comment was captured by a graduate of 2015 who shares that teacher passion influenced their perspective on their teachers. This passion was transferred by students to community groups they worked with.

*That's huge yeah their wairua. With all of them. That's how you could feel the passion you know when they taught us (2015 focus group, Matariki).*

### *Standards and Expectations*

Kidman (2005) describes that when students are empowered, they show enthusiasm and understand how to contribute to and take responsibility for their learning. They also become accountable for their actions and are highly committed to achieving levels of excellence. An environment of high expectation is set early in the Cert4Fitness programme through partnership, where students and teachers develop a course kaupapa (philosophy). Tutor expectations are high, and integrity is essential. In return, this generates a pride that compels most to do their best. Chickering and Gamson (1987) explain that high expectations are a vital principle in the practice of good education. When students are expected to perform well, a self-fulfilling prediction is created. Comments that explained the contribution of teachers to influencing high standards and expectations include:

*It's all about having a certain standard. Everybody has got standards, there is a certain expectation in this course. The way tutors put it out there, by sharing what they are expecting without saying what they are expecting, there is a level of expectation you know, you got to turn up for you partner and your class. It's this unspoken accountability which I guess goes back to that. (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

*I like the way that the tutors had high expectations about deadlines for assignments and stuff but were still flexible if you had stuff going on in your life. They would give you opportunities to get them in and not want to give up, that helped me (2017 focus group, Ururangi).*

*That's how they were on the first day. They made it clear, how this was going to go and what was expected. So, there was nothing hidden, it was presented before you and you knew exactly from day one, right, for this term this is what is required (2010 focus group, Tupuārangi).*

From the comments, it is clear high expectations and standards are embedded within the kaupapa of this programme. Graduate feedback describes a process that is co-created and led equally by students and teachers. Further comments that captured the influence of the group included:

*That you're a part of this whānau who has to work together to get to the end and you can't let them down. It's like having that integrity there for other people you know (Advisory group, Atutahi).*

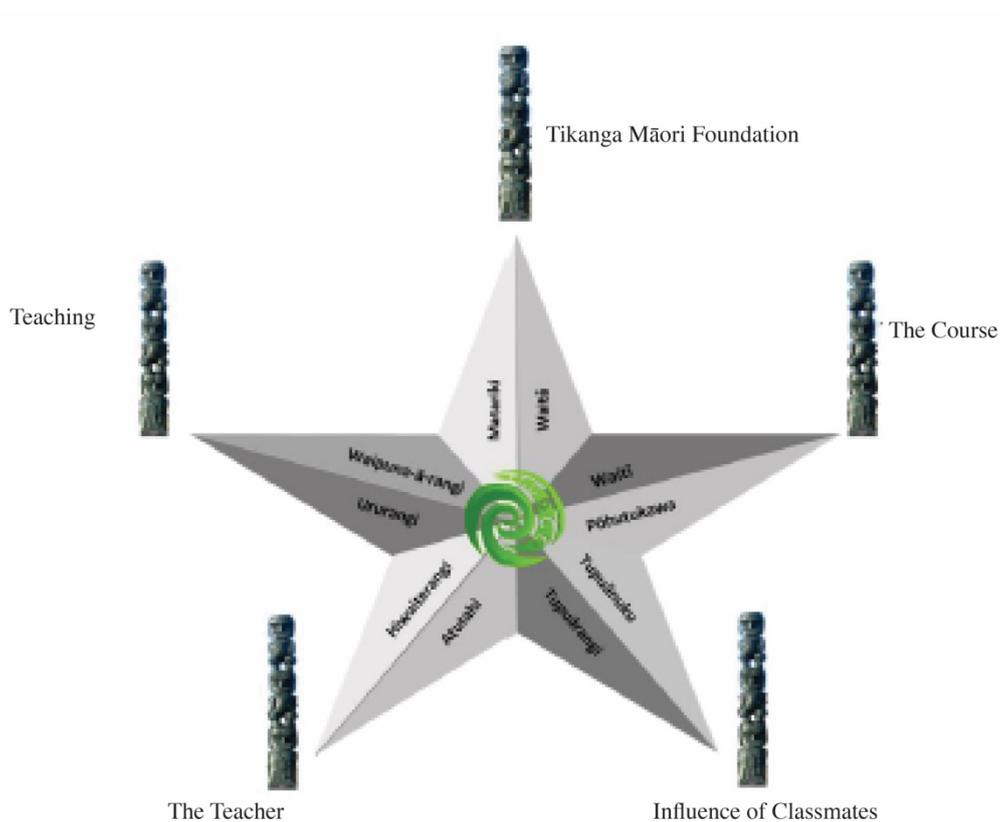
*That expectation that was laid at the start that was sort of embedded into everyone so that when you didn't meet it, like everyone on the course would sort of hold you accountable to it (2018 focus group, Hiwaiteurangi).*

Interestingly graduate discussion acknowledged the value in classroom and behavioural discipline. Graduates made a connection between standards, expectations and student conduct that had been influenced by the teacher. It was important to balance sensitivity and discipline with upholding a student's mana and wairua:

*When it comes to discipline, their stare is enough. But it works, you still feel good, your wairua is still intact if you know what I mean. They haven't dismantled you with how they have done that, you're still intact. And that is so important, especially for us Māori students (2010 focus group, Tupuārangi).*

## Discussion

Inspired by the stars, with Māori learners at the heart, a framework built around Matariki guided the research process. This has been named “Te Whetu Arahi i te Ako” – the guiding star of learning. A star can be represented with five points, creating ten sides in its creation. Each side represents the nine Focus Groups and the Advisory Group, Te Iwa o Matariki and Atutahi. Research findings were organised into five themes, known as Pou to guide more effective teaching practice for Māori based upon Cert4fitness graduate feedback. All five Pou are connected, one cannot exist without the other. As illustrated in figure 80, connections align with the key theme of this research, the star or student. The star and five pou are illustrated in the diagram below.



*Figure 2: Guiding star in learning with ten contributing groups*

The connections between the pou and star create a pentagon-shaped framework. This framework has encapsulated the research process and can significantly be viewed as an outline for effective teaching for Māori. The shape of a pentagon can also be seen as the outside of a whareniui. From here a Whare wānanga (house of learning) can be seen, with five guiding themes, or pou, as gathered in the research findings.



*Figure 3: A house of learning illustrating the five pou*

#### **Pou One: Tikanga Māori Foundation**

An integrated tikanga and kaupapa Māori approach is the essence of the programme and the foundation that all else stands upon. The findings demonstrated that core values and principles of the Cert4fitness programme such as whānaungatanga, manaakitanga, ako and kotahitanga provide a home away from home for Māori learners. Each value is openly expressed and interwoven throughout the curriculum, daily activity and every aspect of course life. Non-Māori students appear to embrace this approach and a safe and mana-enhancing learning environment evolves.

Findings reinforce the literature by describing that best teaching practice must interweave culture with learning. Māori students must be encouraged and supported to bring to class who they are and where they are from (Bishop and Glynn, 2000). Effective teaching should be influenced by student culture and embedded in the process (Bell, 2011), with teachers needing to engage with students and their culture to effectively connect with them (Alton-Lee, 2003).

These results build on existing evidence that in order for Māori to flourish in education, a positive tikanga and kaupapa Māori foundation are essential. An abundance of literature evidences the importance of this feature anchoring Māori achievement in education (Bell, 2011; Bishop, 1999; Bishop & Berryman 2006; Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Durie, 2005; Meyer et al, 2010; Macfarlane et al, 2014; Mullane, 2010; Pihama et al, 2002; Sidorkin, 2002; Smith, 1997, 2003; Webber; 2012).

This pou is foundation for the other four pou identified in this study. Principles and values embedded within this approach connect with other pou in this study and cannot be separated. Characteristics such as whānaungatanga (connection through positive relationships); manaakitanga (care); kotahitanga (unity); rangatiratanga (shared power); and ako (partnership in learning) among others scaffold between each of the five identified pou (Bishop et al., 2009; Macfarlane et al, 2014).

Without guidance from a beating heart that is essentially kaupapa Māori, Cert4fitness as a course, classmate influence on achievement, the teacher and the teaching would all suffer. This philosophy is the mauri, or life force of all that happens within this programme. The challenge for teachers in the tertiary environment is to place students at the forefront of all that is created. It is vital to create a flexible learning environment that fits around the learner rather than expecting students of different shapes to fit into a rigid box.

### **Pou Two: Cert4fitness as a Course**

It is perhaps culture that has created the existence of the Cert4fitness being, with each student contributing a little of themselves along the way. Traditions are strong within the learning journey and in some cases, reputation precedes experiences. Like our whenua (land), there is an attitude that we belong to the course and it is our responsibility to uphold its health, strength and mana.

Graduate commentary expresses a passion and pride of their journey within “the course”. A combination of learning experiences, memories and positive personal growth appears to create an affinity between learner and programme and creates a feeling of whakapapa between cohort years, of graduates connected to a bigger “fitness family” as a result of the course. Graduates portrayed a sense of tūrangawaewae while traveling the journey the course offers. Students assume the role of kaitiaki to protect and nurture the programme in the same way the programme develops them.

This pou develops and grows as each year passes with whakairo (carving) never-ending. It is nurtured by the other pou and is directly cultivated by the students who walk the Cert4fitness journey. The programme is a collective result of students, teachers and experiences who have jointly created the mauri (life force) and mana this programme holds.

The Cert4fitness programme can be considered an accumulation of the other four pou, a product of combined experiences. Described by many as “the best year of my life”, the course appears to have taken the form of a living organism that is often acknowledged for changing lives. The Cert4fitness course encapsulates all that is shared within the Tikanga Māori and Classmate Influence pou and is nurtured by the teacher and how they teach.

There is a potential gap in the literature in viewing a programme of study in the way that is described in this story. In the planning, organising and creating of a programme, contributing teachers and curriculum developers could perhaps look deeper into what constitute the course of study. Every aspect of the course is interconnected with another, like the five Pou in this study, and if connections are not strong, then changes need to be made. The kaupapa behind Cert4fitness development is complex yet simple in design. With the student placed at the centre, programme framing builds multiple layers of bamboo-like scaffolding. Incredibly strong, but flexible, this approach allows environment adaptability.

### **Pou Three: Classmate Influence on Learning**

Pou three acknowledges and signifies the importance of what is referred to as kaupapa whānau to Māori students. Graduates expressed the positive influence a collective approach to learning had on their academic experiences and achievement. Initiated and sustained through tikanga Māori foundations, this pou develops significant strength from sustenance of the other pou. Experiences of vulnerability, unity, challenges and course life appear to create a heart of powerful togetherness.

Findings emphasise the importance and impact of classmates on qualification completion for Māori learners. An environment must be created to encourage inter-class connections within the learning journey while facilitating group cohesion as a whole. It is evident that classmate influence positively impacted qualification outcomes for Māori students within the Cert4fitness programme. All but one graduate identified that their classmates had “a great deal” or “a lot” of influence on passing the programme. There is an abundance of literature indicating that by creating healthy relationships with their classmates Māori students are better situated to positively achieve (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Durie, 1997, 2001; Gorinksi & Abernethy, 2003; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Macfarlane et al, 2014). Heavily influenced by values described in pou one, a Tikanga Māori Foundation, principles such as whānaungatanga and manaakitanga are essential in developing a strong footing.

Whānau is the principal word in whanaungatanga, one of the foremost values to Māori health and wellness (Bishop, 1999). Māori students view this dynamic as important to academic success and wellbeing. By living this value, a collective responsibility for the wellbeing of others is developed through a commitment to a common purpose. To maximise a culturally responsive environment, this element might be considered the backbone of the Cert4fitness programme.

This concept nourishes each of the other pou just as it is influenced by them. This pou is entirely founded in a tikanga and kaupapa Māori base. and is reliant on effective teaching that creates opportunity for groups to develop these attributes. It provides the prospect for students to maintain the mana of the programme, to uphold the traditions left by those who walked before them and pass them to those who follow them. It is ultimately the responsibility of the teacher and teaching team.

With this pou connecting to the lifelines of other pou, each feeds the other to prosper. Whānaungatanga does not just happen in the classroom. In reading graduate stories emotion can be felt. The sense of pride, feeling of passion and genuine view of unity can be read through countless comments that are very articulate and real. The teaching team is ultimately responsible in cultivating this whānau environment. It is crucial they are trusted and supported by managers, as they are the ones who are at the front line each and every day. Students must lead the learning and teachers need to be flexible and individualise lesson design as the journey unfolds.

#### **Pou Four: The Teacher**

When participants were asked about the influence of their Cert4fitness tutors as “a person”, the results were overwhelming with every graduate identifying their teacher as a person had “a great deal” or “a lot” of influence on them graduating. Conversation about “the teacher” was central to all focus group discussion. Who the teacher is as a person and how that transpires to students in the education environment was regarded as essential in qualification completion and learning experiences.

These results build on existing evidence that highlights the importance of who the teacher is, signifying this is as important as what they teach. Entirely built upon a tikanga Māori foundation; relationship development, care and role modelling are integral factors in better supporting Māori learners in tertiary achievement (Alton-Lee, 2003; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). The influence of teachers on qualification outcomes and effective learning for Māori has been widely documented (Alton-Lee, 2003; Sidorkin; 2002), with Hattie and Timperley (2007) describing that perhaps the most powerful influence in formal learning for Māori is the teacher. The teacher holds a special responsibility to connect with and empower their students (Greenwood & Te Aika, 2008).

Whānaungatanga and manaakitanga must be central to everything the teacher embodies. A teacher who cares about their students is the backbone to Māori learner achievement (Smith, 1997, 2003; Savage, et al 2017). Communication can be identified as a vehicle to demonstrate tikanga Māori values such as whānaungatanga, manaakitanga and ako. Positive relationships are founded on two-way communication where a teacher must develop a space of openness and approachability; rapport, trust and an interpersonal approach are essential (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Walker, 2008).

A major theme within this pou is student respect for a teacher who ‘walks the talk’. It appears teacher integrity and role modelling have a significant influence on student behaviour. Participant stories share about increased effort, improved motivation, higher expectations and the removal of excuses as a result.

Māori learners thrive in an environment that is fuelled by positive energy, care and belief. Attitude reflects leadership and this process must be role modelled by the teacher in a consistent and genuine fashion. Teachers need to be committed to excellence and give 200 percent in effort and learning experiences in order to gain 100 percent in return. Learners give trust and respect to teachers who demonstrate effort, organisation, attitude and performance standards.

### **Pou Five: The Teaching**

Pou five is the way the teacher teaches. Participants reported that the teaching encouraged opportunities to enhance a strong kaupapa whānau feeling that provides learning much deeper than a Eurocentric curriculum could provide. Over time teaching factors maintain the health and mana of the Cert4fitness programme. It is the teacher that must initiate, guide, follow, lead and live the learning experience with their students. Effective teaching can only be measured by effective learning, with graduates sharing a number of significant methods they experienced in their Cert4fitness study. Key to successful teaching is a teacher who understands how the learner learns best and acts to meet that need.

Discussion reflects upon graduate guidance on teaching pedagogies that are considered effective for Māori students and the environment where learning transpires. A definition of a mainstream classroom is challenged, and participants express the influence of teaching delivery. The final section of this Pou shares the impact a kaupapa of standards and expectations has on Māori learner achievement.

Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1997, 2003) describes ako as a fundamental principle that must be embedded in mainstream educational settings for Māori to prosper. It is important the educational journey is shared between the student and teacher, where learning is reciprocated (Freire, 1973). Teachers demonstrate a culturally responsive pedagogy when placing learners at the heart of their planning and teaching. This approach has been proven to raise achievement of students who are the subdominant culture in mainstream learning (Bell, 2011; Gay, 2010). Educational experiences prosper when teachers prioritise student need and place them at the centre of planning and facilitation.

Existing literature on teaching pedagogies aligns with findings in this project. Teachers who embrace active teaching methods to meet the needs of Māori guide positive academic achievement (Knowles et al, 2005), by providing active learning opportunities (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). Airini et al (2010) advocate that Māori students’ value diverse experiences in their learning journey while Williams and Cram (2012) suggest an effective balance of practical and theory learning is most effective for Māori.

A safe and effective learning space is created when a teacher values cultural respect and associated traits, classmate influence is positive, a strong course kaupapa is embraced, and a tikanga Māori foundation frames the learning experience. Teachers and students have responsibility for co-creating a culturally safe environment. In this space student mana is enhanced and a feeling of whānau is created where learners can work, celebrate and struggle together (Gavala and Flett, 2005; Higgins et al, 2005). Teachers who apply pedagogical methods based on high expectations of their students are being culturally responsive and student-centred in their approach to learning (Bell, 2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006).

With each pou connected to the other, this theme is especially interwoven with a tikanga Māori foundation, classmate influence on learning, the teacher and the teaching. An expectation of high standards is not limited to student performance, as previous discussion highlights that teachers are also held accountable to facilitate excellence and quality. This research reinforces the notion that an effective teacher must know their students and do everything in their control to create an effective and culturally responsive environment. A teacher who has “a finger on the pulse of learning” understands and empathises with student struggle in the modern tertiary environment of today.

## Conclusion

This report has highlighted the importance of five themes that emerged in discussion with graduates of the Cert4Fitness programme: tikanga Māori foundation; Cert4Fitness as a course; classmate influence; the teacher; and the teaching. The research has identified how these five factors can be combined to ensure Māori success in a mainstream tertiary education environment. Student success is not accidental, it is the result of careful planning and thought in structuring both the learning environment and learning experiences that will lead to student empowerment and self-confidence, to the enhancement of whanaungatanga and to the creation of a tradition and legacy of success and ongoing relationships.

Noguera (2015) encourages teachers to understand the possibilities of building learning through culturally responsive pedagogies within institutionalised structures. He maintains an effective teacher is one who sets their students free, not controlling but empowering, providing tools and belief to enable students to control their own learning. It is the responsibility of a teacher to embrace a culturally responsive learning environment and walk through a tomokanga (gateway) to meet the needs of Māori as offered in this project.

Data illustrates disparity and inequality in a Eurocentric tertiary education system that continues to struggle with decolonisation. Required changes that are dramatic in some areas and subtle in others need to be discussed and actioned. Pockets of exceptional practice continue to battle in what seems like isolation. It is crucial change is led by Māori, with students at the centre of learning. Through pūrākau and kaupapa Māori methodologies, five pou have been identified by participants in this study to cornerstone what effective teaching meant to them as Māori. These five pou are the foundation of “Te Whetū Arahi i te Ako”- the guiding star of learning for these taura (students).

A tikanga Māori foundation is a fundamental requirement with core values such as whānaungatanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga and ako interwoven through every aspect of learning. Relationships are key. A learning environment where students are part of a collective, a kaupapa whānau, is crucial. Positive student interaction develops care, support and strength. The influence of classmates on qualification outcome is significant. Teachers need to work together and follow students to create a programme that is student-centred and seen as a type of living organism. Each aspect influences the other and programme health as a whole requires nourishment. Students become the kaitiaki of the programme in a way the programme becomes kaitiaki for them. Teaching pedagogies must be well understood with every aspect of educational facilitation centred on student learning styles. Delivery must be varied, organised and enthusiastic. Who the teacher is and what they stand for is key. Personal attributes such as belief, care, approachability and compassion are vital in supporting students. The role modelling of high expectations with integrity is a must. The teacher, and teaching team, have the ability to co-create the other four pou with student guidance. The secret is common-sense and not rocket-science. Just follow the stars...

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