



Sustained Excellence
in Tertiary Teaching
Kaupapa Māori Category

Ahorangi Tuarua Mera Penehira

Associate Professor

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Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangī

“One of the most important aspects to being a kaupapa Māori teacher and academic is to share my world, open doors, and support students to make connections with others who can further support their teaching, learning and research.”

Mera Penehira (Ngāti Raukawa, Rangitaane and Ngai Te Rangi) believes excellence in kaupapa Māori teaching and learning centres on students in the context of whānau, hapū and iwi as these represent the fundamental societal structure of Māori, as well as the communities that kaupapa Māori students serve.

“To embody the notion of ako is to also understand that I am both an educator and a learner every time I engage with students.”

As a kaupapa Māori teacher, Mera engages in critical, cross-disciplinary, cross-nation and multi-generational research, teaching and learning. She says this requires humility, confidence and an openness to learning new things. Her commitment to respectful relationships and excellence at all levels is central to her engagement with students. She says the notion of ako is intrinsically linked to kaupapa Māori.

Mera believes that key to understanding the complexities of kaupapa Māori in education is being politically aware, astute and active. She challenges students to do likewise, developing a level of critique that ultimately results in transformative praxis and meaningful change for them and communities alike.

Underpinning Mera’s teaching is Mātauranga Māori and/or Mātauranga ā Iwi (Māori and Iwi-centred knowledge), which enhance both learning and the experience of it. The Mana Kaitiakitanga Framework, an expansion of Kaupapa Māori theory that she developed within her doctoral research, has been pivotal to her approach to teaching and learning. She has used this framework as a teacher working within Aotearoa and other nations with a range of different Native and Indigenous peoples.

She also incorporates in her teaching the two Māori and Indigenous wellbeing courses she has developed - Māori and Indigenous Wellbeing, University of Auckland, 2013 and Native and Indigenous Spirit and Wellbeing, Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangī, 2018. She has taught kaupapa Māori research methodologies at the University of Auckland - Research Methods in Māori Education 2013-2017 - and has encouraged and supported students to develop their own kaupapa-ā-iwi (iwi-specific) research methodologies throughout her masters and doctoral supervisions in her academic career.

Mera asserts that kaupapa Māori is an indivisible culmination of te reo Māori (Māori language) and tikanga Māori (customary practices and protocols); they accompany each other and each component adds depth and understanding to an appreciation of Te Ao Māori. She has taught

these throughout her teaching career, first as a kōhanga reo teacher and later to total immersion classes in pre-service teacher training.

In her role as an Associate Professor in the School of Indigenous Graduate Studies at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, Mera is responsible for leading the International Indigenous Doctoral Programme with students based at the University of Washington, Tacoma, University of Hawai'i Maui College and the Waikato-Tainui College. She oversees doctoral education, as well as maintaining tribal authenticity with students, travelling four times a year to run wānanga with five doctoral cohorts. This appears to be the only such programme in the country. It is within these spaces that she combines Native and Indigenous theories and teaching approaches.

Mera uses her research to inform her teaching. She has developed and taught many new kaupapa Māori courses in universities and at wānanga. As Director Postgraduate Studies in Te Puna Wānanga (TPW) for four years (2014-2017), and more recently Director Research, she was largely responsible for the development of the postgraduate programme in the school as both student and staff mentor.

“Teaching excellence in the frame of kaupapa Māori requires both community presence and commitment to working alongside and uplifting others.”

Mera's role includes formal mentoring, such as staff presentations at kura and in the workplace, and daily incidental mentoring, such as meetings with kaiako, check-ins with wānanga colleagues, reviewing co-worker presentation outlines, and supporting new and emerging researchers in developing research proposals. She also enhances the understanding of kaupapa Māori in the community by online presentations and media appearances.

Whanaungatanga – developing and maintaining strong relationships – is a cornerstone of Mera's teachings. One example is her involvement, as the co-academic leader at the Universities of Auckland and Waikato, with the MAI (Māori and Indigenous doctoral programme). The MAI programme arose in response to institutional barriers and the resulting inability to work successfully with Māori and Indigenous students at the doctoral level. Mera's work included connecting over 120 doctoral students by way of writing retreats, monthly academic workshops, conferences, seminars and a Facebook group. The programme has been considered such a success that it was duplicated in Canada.

Manaakitanga – respect and support for learners, colleagues and communities – is also integral to Mera's teaching practice. She is particularly moved by the research of other indigenous peoples and nations and how this impacts positively on work done in Aotearoa. She has shared manaakitanga at longhouse gatherings in Washington State, the ohana celebrations on the 'aina in Maui, and participated in the campus communities of universities overseas.

Mera has been active in publishing and research over the past decade. She has studied Māori and indigenous education and wellbeing, traditional knowledge and healing, sexual health education and mana wahine advancement and politics. Her research awards include a Wharekura International Exchange Grant from the University of Auckland, the prestigious Hohua Tutengaehe Research Doctoral Fellowship in Māori Health from the HRC, and a three year Postdoctoral Fellowship. She has recently been awarded the Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia, the first time a wānanga has received such an award. Ten students and academics will be funded to attend a 6-week Indigenous Health and Entrepreneurship Opportunities – Ayurveda and Rongoā Māori programme.

“For me, kaupapa Māori is not merely an opportunity to have a teaching career, but it is a way of life that I have fully embraced.”

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