



Sustained Excellence in Tertiary Teaching General Category

Dr Kirstine Moffat

Associate Professor (English)
School of Arts
The University of Waikato

“The foundations of what I consider to be excellence in teaching lie in this childhood memory: discovery, the joy of connection, and magic.”

The magic, joy and wonder Kirstine discovered when her father read to her as a child led her to a stellar teaching career in the School of Arts at the University of Waikato. Her success in transmitting her love for stories to others is reflected in the teaching excellence awards she has won – University awards in 2012 and 2019, and Faculty awards in 2011, 2012, 2018 and 2019.

Kirstine’s work allows her and her students to enter storyworld every day. Although the stories may now be longer, more complex, and more challenging than her childhood favourites (except she still makes room for ‘Rapunzel’ in her Adaptations paper and *The Lorax* in her Utopias and Dystopias paper), she says the joy of discovery is just the same. She believes discovery is what education is about – teaching the new, while instilling in students both the tools and the desire to discover things for themselves. She considers connection is crucial and, just as her father acted as both guide and interpreter, she seeks to help her students navigate the demands of study. She seeks to bridge the distance between teacher and student by creating a learning environment that is welcoming and inclusive, where students can ask challenging questions, while feeling safe and valued.

“I want my students to be active agents in their own learning, not just passive recipients. I want to engage the head and heart, cognition and emotion.”

As a teacher of literature, Kirstine’s subject is the story. She shares novels, poems, plays, and films with her students, acting as an interpreter. She is also an author of stories and a teller of tales, connecting with students through her innovative and creative teaching style. The natural fusion between her subject and creative and dynamic ways of presenting material allows her to use interactive performance, costume, disruptions to space, and immersive experiences which prompt her students to think and to feel. Such interactive experiences require students to participate, invest, and give something of themselves.

Kirstine is pleased that, through engaging with English literature, she is able to not only pass on to her students skills that will help them in their professional lives – the ability to read critically, communicate clearly, and argue convincingly – but also to stimulate them to reflect on some of the big questions of life, such as coping with grief and loss, balancing individuality and social responsibility, and finding the courage to speak.

Because Kirstine creates a learning environment characterised by discovery and creativity, she has increasingly become more experimental with student assessments, incorporating options that foster student engagement and empower them to think for themselves. Students can

now write a blog about their learning reflections or create a story/poem/script/short film accompanied by a reflective analysis. In this way, students become invested in the assignment, frequently seeking to expand its parameters. Her role as a supervisor of Masters and PhD students is equally focused on helping students acquire a confident academic voice. She regularly co-authors publications with her students as they start their academic journey and feels proud when they build on the foundations she provides to publish articles and attend conferences. Her insistence on independent thought and clarity of oral and written expression has been invaluable to her students, who have gone on to become academics, advertising executives, tour guide operators, curators, corrections officers, teachers, researchers, actors, writers, civil servants, and social activists.

Kirstine's students come from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. They may come straight from school, from the workforce, from parenthood and many different countries. Some are the first in their family to attend university. Kirstine finds that, whatever the situation, individually and collectively they can offer wisdom and insight gleaned through listening to, and learning from, them. At the beginning of each paper she talks to her students about the classroom as a space of honesty and trust, making it clear that they are all on a learning journey together and that their thoughts and feelings matter. As the course progresses, she makes time for in-class feedback and is open to changing aspects of the course content or her teaching.

"By connecting with my students ... I can create a learning environment in which they feel invested and heard."

As part of her leadership role, Kirstine finds pastoral care of her students is an increasingly important part of her job. Through the connections she establishes with her students, especially with Masters and PhD students, but increasingly also with undergraduates, she provides guidance on everything from time management to building confidence and self-belief or coping with illness and stress. Further leadership roles included overseeing a regrouping and refocusing of English around new teaching initiatives as Convenor of English from 2010 to 2014, and that of Associate Dean Postgraduate from 2015 to 2018. Drawing on her skills as mediator and problem-solver, she undertook initiatives such as the organisation of an annual graduate conference, the introduction of awards for students presenting the best Kaupapa Māori research paper, and the provision of Postdoctoral Writing Awards to foster a positive research culture.

At her university, Kirstine presents at CeTTL workshops (*Teaching Large Classes/Effective Presenting*) and runs workshops on creativity and teaching for visiting academics from Zhejiang University City College and Hebei University of Science and Technology. Beyond the University, she has run a successful workshop at the *2009 New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English Conference*, which led to requests for teaching resources and an invitation to write an article for *English in Aotearoa* on multiple ways of reading texts. She presented the keynote address on creative assessment at the *2016 Assessment Matters Forum* held at AUT and has shared her research at *New Zealand Association for Research in Education* and *Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia* conferences. She was part of a TLRI-funded research project (2012-2014) on threshold concepts and their work on subjective interpretation as a threshold in the Arts and Humanities has been published in *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* and *Waikato Journal of Education*. Her teaching on aspects of the films *River Queen* and novel and film *Kingsman* has resulted in articles in *Moving Worlds* and *Adaptations* respectively. Beyond the tertiary sector, she visits and shares resources with Waikato and Bay of Plenty secondary schools, adjudicates secondary school competitions in the arts, and gives talks on music and literature to community organisations.
