



Sustained Excellence
in Tertiary Teaching
Kaupapa Māori Category

Yolanda (Yo) Heta-Lensen

Senior Lecturer
School of Community Studies
Unitec Institute of Technology
Auckland

"My teaching is about handing a korowai of inclusivity that celebrates diversity and that honours Māori as the Indigenous people of this whenua to the next generation of early childhood education (ECE) kaiako."

Yo feels fortunate to have been immersed in Kaupapa Māori and to have experienced the transformative potential of education when studying Māori education under Graham Hingangaroa Smith and Linda Tuhiwai Smith at the University of Auckland in the 1980s. Those experiences inspired her own teaching praxis and focus on Kaupapa Māori. As an early childhood teacher educator, she is aware of the role she plays in shaping the next generation. She provides ākongā opportunities to think critically about societal issues by developing their capacity for reflection, questioning and engagement. It is important to her that early childhood teachers understand the power they have to make a difference as the critic and conscience of society, and how to use it positively. She uses mātauranga Māori as the vehicle to achieve this and is guided by Kaupapa Māori to ensure that Māori knowledge is respected.

Yo believes that ECE is a field of education that is under-valued in Aotearoa New Zealand and that teachers do not receive adequate recognition for the critical roles they play in supporting our future generations. Knowing that the greatest learning occurs in the early years of a child's life, she works to reinforce the value of the profession, the view of tamariki as taonga, the impact teachers can have in children's lives and why that carries with it a duty of care. Her pedagogy incorporates a range of Māori values, including manaaki tangata, whakamana, aroha, and whanaungatanga. She models the application of these values in her practice so that ākongā in the initial teacher education programme have examples of ways to build respectful relationships with whānau and community, based on tikanga.

Her key teaching role is to support the development and implementation of mātauranga Māori across all courses in Unitec Institute of Technology's Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) programme. Her courses are carefully staged to scaffold ākongā knowledge of how to plan, implement, evaluate, and improve on the incorporation of te reo Māori me ngā tikanga Māori in practice. The first year course *Te Kete Manaaki Tangata* provides an introduction to oral skills in te reo Māori and develops understandings of manaaki tangata. In the second year kete, *Te Kete Manaaki Whenua*, ākongā critically consider Māori approaches to the environment. They experience how engaging children with resources in their natural environment nurtures their creativity, intuition, energy and imagination, and develops their relationship with Papatūānuku. She designed the final year kete, *Te Kete Manaaki Taonga*, to provide leadership opportunities for ākongā who are about to graduate as fully qualified teachers.

"The arts sets people free! By incorporating culturally appropriate pedagogies I promote tikanga connected with our cultural taonga so that ākongā gain insights into their roles as teachers in helping to preserve and respect mātauranga Māori."

As she is always mindful that she is preparing teachers with varying understandings of te ao Māori to work with under-5-year-olds, Yo introduces a range of language strategies, including waiata korikori, so ākonga gain knowledge and appropriate examples for working with tamariki from a range of cultures, including Māori. Her own background in kapa haka guides her approach to preserving the depth of this art form as a taonga to be passed on to the next generation. In 2018, Yo won a Unitec Staff individual award for Excellence in Teaching Kaupapa Māori, honouring her innovation and development of these three courses in the Bachelor of Teaching programme. In 2019, she was a member of the winning team awarded a Unitec Staff team award for Excellence in Teaching Kaupapa Māori.

Between 2014 and 2016, Yo was involved in Te Kura Whānui, a digital learning transformation project at Unitec, contributing to the development of mātauranga Māori in eLearning spaces. She also supported the development and delivery of mātauranga Māori across a range of disciplines including nursing, sports, ECE, health and social development, osteopathy, and medical imaging. Yo continued her leadership in Kaupapa Māori across disciplines when ECE became part of a Community Development Network between 2017-2019. She is currently Kaiārahi across the School of Community Studies in addition to her senior lecturer role in ECE and supports their capability to embed Te Noho Kotahitanga and champion their Māori Success Strategy. As well, she coordinates wānanga for staff, which provides opportunities for reflection and a chance to show how Te Noho Kotahitanga is a guiding light, particularly during their transition through the upcoming Review of Vocational Education (ROVE).

"Toi tu te kupu, toi tu te mana, toi tu te whenua.

This whakataauaki, handed down by Wanganui tūpuna, Tinirau, reminds us to hold fast to our land, our culture, our language, and our mana as Māori. This is at the heart of how and why I teach."

Yo acknowledges the leadership of the Pae ārahi, Matua Hare Paniora, who has walked alongside her for the last 20 years, supporting the advancement of mātauranga Māori, role-modelling tikanga to staff and ākonga. Matua Hare supported Yo and colleague Nicole Job to write the ECE karakia Te Noho Kotahitanga, a karakia which has gained traction in the wider institute. It is used in a number of other contexts, including professional learning and leadership. A further initiative of Yo's was to establish Te Whare Tāpere, a culturally relevant teaching and learning space, used solely for the delivery of mātauranga Māori in the ECE programme.

Central to whanaungatanga in Yo's practice is a commitment to honouring people's whakapapa, validating culture and identity. Her classes provide time and space for all ākonga to speak of their traditions, landmarks and origins. She also works alongside colleagues, enhancing immersion learning for ECE ākonga. These relationships have resulted in an impressive academic output, promoting Unitec's vision for partnership between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti. Yo plays an active role supporting partnership with Associate Teachers in the BTch ECE programme and is committed to supporting Māori aspirations in Early Childhood Education. In 2014 she was commissioned to write a literature review to support the development of a te reo Māori strategy at her local puna reo. She has developed a range of successful academic support systems within her programme and utilises tuakana-teina, scaffolding students to develop leadership qualities and confidence as professionals in their field.
