



Teaching practice that results in successful achievement for Māori and Pacific learners

Real-world examples of good practice in tertiary education

Executive Summary

This Insights paper highlights tertiary education practices that support successful achievement outcomes for Māori and Pacific learners, identifying common, culturally responsive quality practices embedded across very different providers, learner cohorts, industries, and delivery models.

The six PTEs profiled in this paper each have a deep commitment to their communities, a holistic understanding of learners' realities, and a deliberate focus on outcomes of value to learners, whānau, iwi, and communities.

The findings reveal that achievement is not driven by isolated interventions, but by integrated systems of teaching, pastoral care, cultural identity, and community connection.

Four core ingredients underpin success across the PTEs studied:

1. Values driven governance and management
2. Collaborative, connected learning environments
3. Holistic learner support
4. Achievement and outcomes that matter.

These organisations demonstrate that when learning environments are culturally grounded, relational, flexible, and community connected, Māori and Pacific learners not only achieve qualifications but experience personal transformation, sustained employment, and intergenerational impact.

Introduction

Through the External Evaluation and Review (EER) process, NZQA evaluators have been privileged to see many examples of what works well across the tertiary and vocational education sectors. [Our insights are published here.](#)

This paper explores some of the key tertiary education quality indicators which matter most when working with Māori and Pacific learners, and how the actions of some private training establishments (PTEs) align with these to support high levels of priority learner achievement. This is grounds for celebration, and might inspire other education providers to adopt some of these PTEs' practices.

That said, this paper does not offer a blueprint for dealing with priority learners. Each of these providers engages with very different educational levels, fields, business models and challenges. What they have in common is their dedication to meet the needs of their distinct communities.

These organisations were chosen for their observed success with Māori and Pacific learners which was captured by the External Evaluation and Review process. Completion and destination data indicates parity of achievement and consistently strong results for priority learners. Strong culturally embedded support methodology and interactions with local communities are also validated strengths of these organisations.

NZQA evaluators visited these PTEs and held conversations with the organisations' stakeholders (learners, graduates, whānau of learners, tutorial and support staff) and then management. The aim of the discussions was to understand what makes an organisation able to consistently foster successful achievement for Māori and Pacific learners. As the participants responded to this question (and

PTEs sampled

Community Colleges New Zealand Limited: ComCol provided foundation-level training in sports and hospitality to disengaged youth in Canterbury and Otago. This would allow learners to either undertake higher-level training at another provider or employment in their region. Now ComCol provides employment-readiness training and work-brokering services to long-term unemployed people.

Ignite Colleges*: Ignite Colleges delivered intensive literacy and numeracy classes and level 3-5 qualifications in security, hospitality and health and wellbeing – programmes that provided learners with the skills and knowledge to gain employment in their communities. Learners attending Ignite Colleges came from the South Auckland region and were primarily of Māori and Pacific ethnicity. Learners attending Ignite generally had low prior achievement and had an opportunity to also pathway to higher-level qualifications with Ignite Colleges.

St John's Theological College: St John's delivers the level 5 Christian Studies qualification to Māori, Pacific and tauwi learners commencing their training to become reverends in the Anglican church (or related tikanga). Learners are sponsored by their respective iwi or Pacific communities to live and complete training at St John's College and then pathway into higher-level training in theology at another theological college. Learners can be of all ages and may also be of low prior achievement. They are responding to, and aiming to fill a need in their respective communities. Once trained, learners take up church positions in New Zealand and the Pacific.

Stratcom Security (Training Systems and Solutions Limited): Stratcom delivers micro-credentials and a level 3 qualification in security. This training is delivered throughout New Zealand by Stratcom trainers who travel to communities and iwi to provide the training. Learners are of all ages, often second-chance learners, and are generally looking for employment. The training aims to support learners into employment in security.

Oceania Career Academy: OCA is tasked by the Pasifika Futures Limited community organisation to support disengaged or unemployed Pacific and Māori youth (mainly) within the Auckland region. These learners either study level 2 and 3 construction or, more recently, health and wellbeing, or take a course in readiness for employment. All training options are designed to provide the learners with real opportunities to find sustainable employment and the beginning of a career. The use of dedicated navigators/life mentors supports the learners to also gain life skills that will keep them in employment.

Vertical Horizons New Zealand Limited (VHNZ): VHNZ provides level 2-4 qualifications and unit standard-based, short-duration courses in infrastructure and construction throughout New Zealand. These courses are delivered to people who are already employed and need the qualifications or are upskilling to gain employment. To meet the needs of iwi in the North Island, VHNZ has also created a Māori and Pacific department that provides iwi-based or trade-related foundation training to young Māori and Pacific learners. The aim is to foster employment (and possible higher-level training) with Māori and Pacific businesses.

* Following a change of ownership, Ignite Colleges now trade as Skills Institute.

subsequent further prompts) the evaluators captured their stories as they unfolded.

These stories were collated and analysed for themes that support practices for greater retention and achievement. The findings were distilled into four core ingredients that have supported these six PTEs to provide a learning environment that promotes Māori and Pacific success.

NZQA is privileged to have worked with these organisations to share examples of good practice with other PTEs. The identified 'ingredients for success' are referenced throughout this paper to show how organisations can maximise achievement for their Māori and Pacific learners. NZQA acknowledges that organisations will recognise activity similar to their own. We hope these examples will validate current practice and/or inspire ideas for further improvement.

Core ingredients unpacked

The core ingredients of identified culturally responsive tertiary education quality in practice are:

- Governance and management embedding a clear purpose, ethos, principles and values into operational activity
- Learner engagement in a collaborative, connected learning environment
- The provision of holistic learner support to meet the well-being needs of learners.
- Achievement and outcomes of value to communities and iwi.

An organisational ethos and principles that drive activity

Non-hierarchical approach

A notable feature of the participating PTEs is that all staff are involved in the care and direction of the learners and graduates. This is despite these organisations' hierarchical structures. For the learners, everyone is accessible, including the chief executive/general manager. The organisations' staff are empathetic, passionate and committed toward learner success and the wellbeing of the communities where they work.

All staff regularly engage and have open channels of communication with the learners and their families. Each learner is acknowledged daily by all staff they encounter. This fosters a sense of belonging and equality – learners (and graduates) feel they are an integral part of the organisation. Staff become 'uncles' and 'aunts' to the learners.

Practise a humanitarian ethic

Each organisation focuses on meeting basic human needs and rights by understanding the individual learner's needs, as well as those of their family/whānau and environment. This is accomplished through multiple and comprehensive pre-application conversations, regular updating of families and learners regarding their progress, (primarily in a positive manner) and/or providing mentor systems that work alongside each learner and their families.

Each organisation feels that to know the learner means you need to know and acknowledge their 'baggage'. These PTEs make an effort to 'see' each learner and accept them as they are. Before learners arrive, and when they start studying, they have individualised sessions with the tutoring and/or support staff to understand what their goals are and what barriers and needs may impact their learning. Regular informal and formal conversations or checks allow staff to understand any emerging needs and make adjustments to meet those. This will be further explored in the holistic support section, but this focus leads to empowering learners who have not had opportunities or have made limiting life choices.

Each organisation has a values-based operation, teaching learners to value themselves and identify their own potential. Learners are expected to take responsibility for their decisions, and expectations to do so (such as calling in to explain their absence rather than getting a parent to do this) are clearly explained and established from the very beginning. This starts learners on a journey of feeling greater control and acknowledging the small success steps.

Each classroom purposefully becomes a space where learners can bring themselves and learn from others through the use of inclusive methodology in the teaching and learning activities and having time to share socially with others. Each day presents opportunities to succeed (whether it be turning up

on time, finishing a task or assessment, completing a day of study, or being part of a team) supporting the learner's ambition to gain further success. Learners begin to recognise their personal limits quite early on and are helped to push past these: 'Making mistakes is a way to learn'.

This non-judgmental approach means staff can find and work through solutions with learners and families as issues arise. Rather than laying blame for an issue (such as starting an argument between learners), the focus is on understanding the root cause and then developing skills for future negotiation through difficulty and stress.

Staff actively promote and practise values of listening to understand, no blame, inclusivity and availability to create an environment of trust with the learners, supporting them to experience positive relationships. The fundamental drive is toward fostering personal transformation towards a more confident, self-believing individual.

Focussed on actual, sustained outcomes for learners

Educators in New Zealand acknowledge that vocational learning provides both a vehicle for personal growth and a pathway to employment and careers. In addition to their delivery of vocational education, the PTEs in this study provide:

- training that is free of charge and often supported by the provision of the tools and uniforms needed (in some cases also free)
- multiple opportunities for career and study advice and learning
- opportunities for further academic credits towards foundation qualifications, or career and study preparation
- business advice
- opportunities to develop the life skills to be work or career-ready
- support for the emotional wellbeing of the learners.

In addition to delivering vocational training, these PTEs also:

- sourced employment opportunities for learners

- acted as advocates to support the learners/graduates into employment
- supported learners to access housing
- provided food packages and kai during classes
- provided access to the resources (such as technology) needed for learning.

Once graduates were employed, staff were also available for advice about employment matters.

Strategic relationships with iwi, communities and agencies are actively fostered to build a support network around the learners during and after training. The organisations have (or pro-actively seek) partnerships with community and iwi groups, fully understanding that these are grounded in a two-way flow of support and service. By engaging regularly with the community groups through conversations, asking for their advice or being a part of a community, iwi or church group the relationship is maintained. Often the organisations are recognised within their communities for the roles they play in supporting learners towards success, with staff who "are not people who do things just do things for the culturally responsive tickbox [...] they build trust and connections".

Tutors remain involved with industry. They can deliver material that is current and fulfils industry expectations, and develop relationships that support learners into employment. Other professional development for staff focusses on emerging needs within the learner body and communities.

Actively engage to become culturally aware

Within these organisations there is a desire to improve opportunities for Māori and Pacific learners (or, in the words of those PTEs focussed on Māori and Pacific learners – their people). The PTEs go out of their way to forge strategic alliances with iwi, Pasifika communities and agencies, and align their organisational goals and intentions with these bodies. The organisations see connecting learners and their families with their cultural identities and back to their communities and/or marae as part of their service. This recognises that these learners represent their communities' growth and future plans.

All staff have a passion for and experience in working with disadvantaged Māori and Pacific learners. The PTEs employ Māori and Pacific staff to help create an environment where cultural needs are met and learning is culturally immersed. These people's evident knowledge of tikanga and te reo fosters the necessary connections and trust between staff and learners. It also supports training on marae.

These organisations demonstrate a specific commitment to Māori and Pacific learners. They support language development by the learners and staff. A kaupapa framework is followed in all engagement with the learners, families and their communities. The learners gain the capability to answer 'Who am I and what is my identity'. Understanding your whakapapa is central – learners get to know where they come from and how they are connected to each other and the 'outer world'. This is irrespective of the learner's ethnicity – in fact the exposure to different cultures and worldviews is integral. Learners gain the skills to learn from each other and walk in more than one world.

Because the staff gain such an understanding of the learners in their care, there is an acknowledgement of the multiple responsibilities that learners (particularly Māori and Pacific learners) have to their communities and whānau. Efforts are made to make the training flexible to accommodate the impact of those responsibilities on their training.

A collaborative, connected learning environment

The classroom and campus is a whānau environment

Each day/training starts with whanaungatanga (family reconnection), where learners feel supported to converse freely and share their knowledge and experiences. In the campus and classroom, learners are made to feel equal and are acknowledged and recognised by each other and by all staff. Graduates continue to remain part of and contribute to the PTE.

Staff are respectful and have a positive attitude throughout their work with learners and their whānau. Learners' whānau are invited to be active contributors, and learners are supported to share their learning

experiences with their families and communities. Family members feel the organisation "is not just enrolling the 'child' they are enrolling the family", that it "looks after all of us" and is "giving the family a gift of change". Such involvement by the learners' whānau increases whānau accountability in the learners' success.

Learning is connected to the needs of the community

Tutorial staff are experienced practitioners within their respective industries, but also have a passion for and want to work with disadvantaged people. Appropriate methodology, such as Te Whare Tapa Wha, is employed to ensure a holistic approach to teaching and learning.

The design, delivery and review of programmes aims to maximise learning opportunities for the learners, and includes:

- a focus on future employment opportunities
- an understanding of the anxieties faced by the learners, resulting in delivery where theory occurs in small 'bursts' surrounded by practical, experiential activity
- learners' own experience is actively sought, and there is shared peer learning
- teamwork is actively fostered
- placements are used for real-life experience and the formation of new cycles of life and work-related behaviour.

Life, work and industry needs are actively and equally fostered throughout the learning pathway. Relationships are actively fostered with employers, external services and whānau. These stakeholders value their relationships with the provider. Not only do these stakeholder relationships ensure relevant programme review, they also create networks that facilitate opportunities for learning and future employment.

Graduates are supported to keep in touch, and the PTE willingly acts as an advocate for the graduate by looking over contracts or supporting the learners in the workplace to ensure their best interests, and those of their families, are being met. Such care of the graduates is seen as necessary, as it builds sustainable

employment and therefore wealth within communities, which in turn begin to thrive.

Everyone succeeds together

In these PTEs no learner is left behind. Learners start together, forming small communal classes. These classes also finish together. The learners grow together through collaborative practice. The PTEs in this study used a range of practices to support their learners to succeed:

- Needs assessment is completed at the beginning of the training to identify potential employment interests, needs and goals, and is used by tutorial staff to support progression toward the learner's potential future.
- Attendance and punctuality are actively fostered. Acknowledging and recognising each learner supports this life practice to quickly become embedded. As all outcomes (small and large) are acknowledged to the learners and their whānau, this positive, regular sharing of success supports the integration of behaviour.
- Peer support groups are created for completion of work outside the classroom. Team/group work forms an integral part of each class.
- There is open sharing of experiences so staff and other learners can learn from each other (peer learning/tutoring). This supports gaining a shared language and an understanding of each other's backgrounds, culture and lives. Older/more experienced learners take on the role of mentor (tuakana/teina) regularly.
- Everyday campus life incorporates physical activity to aid learning. This supports the theory that learning occurs in quick bursts.
- Practical, experiential learning and placements allow numerous opportunities for the learners to apply their skills and knowledge in work-like settings.
- Make every day different – learners' emerging needs are gauged in the morning, and activities are chosen from a 'bank' that supports those needs but still promotes learning.
- Learners are not rushed and are able to complete work at their own pace. If there is a difficulty, fellow

learners help out with peer teaching so that work is completed. If extra help is needed, tutors can provide one-on-one support.

- Visual resources are available and present throughout the learning space to aid recall, contextualise literacy and numeracy and support learning. These are strongly supported by a variety of kinaesthetic learning activities.
- Kai (food) is available in the classroom to minimise stress and better enable learning to occur.
- Study workshops as well as workshops on life skills, such as budgeting and health, build the whole individual. Work readiness skills are also actively taught.

Learners say the learning is 'loud, boisterous, fun, and tutors go the extra mile in supporting you to success'.

Learners are given opportunities to be decision-makers in their learning journey. Tutors role-model collaboration, bringing all the decision-making into the classroom to ensure consensus is gained. Learners see themselves in the learning.

Providing holistic support

Pastoral care and guidance continues beyond training

Across these PTEs, wellbeing and pastoral care are seen as being just as important in supporting learner achievement as academic teaching. The care continues beyond the training, supporting graduates into and during employment.

This support is not separate from the teaching and learning processes. There can be separate support people within the organisation, but they are so integrated into the teaching space that the learners do not recognise them as a separate role in their learning – they are part of the wrap-around support each learner experiences.

Some of the PTEs gain extra funding from the community and/or agencies to increase the level of support. This helps the learners in getting to and from training, during training and after completion. All support is focussed on removing, or at least minimising, barriers.

Minimising barriers

Needs assessments are completed by support and tutorial staff when first working with the learners. These are done to understand the complex needs and realities of each learner (as discussed earlier). They are also used to identify any barriers to learning. These PTEs 'get' the learners on a personal level. Regular tracking of each individual learning plan ensures the needs of the learners are being monitored and managed, allowing learners to focus on study.

As mentioned, communal support such as meals, food for the family, laptops, free tools or protection equipment, and free courses are universally provided. For those PTEs with extra funding for support, additional services are in place, such as providing transport to and from study and placements, through to the provision of accommodation free of charge.

All the PTEs in the study provide training that is flexible and works around their learners' external commitments. Tutors and support staff keep in touch with the learners and employ multiple means to support the learners back to study, such as learning plans for catching up that are informed and regularly adjusted to enhance learners' prospects for success. For a couple of PTEs, this means staff are mobile and travel to where the learners are, and the training is worked around their schedules.

Supporting/support from the community to enhance success

Ongoing conversations between support staff, learners and their families help learners to set new routines toward success. Staff become part of the community which supports the families to grow as well. Group and social activities, often led by the learners, include the families, therefore strengthening needed connections into the community. As noted by one family "we get to hang out and play sports together – having the community involved is great"

Internally, each classroom establishes peer support networks accessible through many means (phone, social media, etc). This creates another family to whom the learners can turn when in need of help, advice or camaraderie.

External services are readily accessed, with close working relationships between them and the PTE staff. This supports the learning experience for each learner as well as supports learners to easily access help after training.

The PTEs actively foster advisory groups specifically focussed on helping the PTE to support their Māori and Pacific learners.

Providing outcomes of value

Learners studying at these PTEs achieve the following outcomes:

- a vocational qualification and/or training
- credits, skills and knowledge that can be used in further training
- foundational literacy and numeracy skills, knowledge and confidence
- NCEA Levels 1 and 2
- work and life-related qualifications and knowledge such as first aid certificates, health and safety certificates, driver's licence, forklift licence, financial literacy.

All learners experience personal growth. Skills and attributes as a result of the training include:

- gaining confidence to talk to people
- no longer feeling intimidated by difficult, new or conflicting situations
- knowing how to set and act on goals
- being able to seek assistance
- the skill of turning up, on time, every day.

Learners develop social and emotional support networks. They also gain closer connections to their communities and other cultures.

The growth in knowledge about te reo Māori or Pacific languages and cultures assists these learners to operate across cultures easily.

After the training is completed:

- graduates who are already in work have improved work practices and gain:
 - better paid jobs
 - job promotions and the confidence to apply for and work toward a better job
 - confidence to contribute to improving the workplace
 - empowerment to ask questions of managers
 - options to progress to further job-related training opportunities.
- graduates who are not in employment have developed:
 - connections with employers and industry that translate into sustainable full-time or part-time employment opportunities and pathways
 - the knowledge and skills needed for regular employment that leads to improved housing, improved lifestyles and whānau transformation.

For many whānau, this may be the first family member to attend formal tertiary education. They begin an intergenerational chain of knowledge and empowerment.

Conclusion

Throughout the case study, the evaluators saw a great deal of commonality in approaches.

What sets the above organisations apart is the depth and breadth of the teaching and support environment they create for each learner to gain a qualification that supports their future aspirations. This consists of several interlocking factors:

- Learning that is steeped in Māori and Pacific values, beliefs, knowledge and ways of being.
- An environment that Māori and Pacific (and potentially all) learners recognise and feel comfortable in.
- Learners are supported to become functioning parts of a family and a community.
- Each learner is recognised by each staff member.
- Effective, early assessment of needs ensures each learner's story is understood, and informs training development and delivery.
- Passionate, qualified staff, and strong relationships with external services and organisations. This ensures that needs are met and learners are given the skills to succeed as they work toward a qualification or credential.
- Learners grow holistically to become the person they want to be, as well as being role models for their current and future communities.



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

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The *Insights* series draws on NZQA's data and expertise to provide insights into qualification, assessment, and quality assurance matters. *Insights* papers have a particular focus on equity issues, good practice and bringing to life administrative data that will support education system improvement.

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ISBN 978-1-877444-71-5

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