



Enabling Education: A space for enabling non-Indigenous educators to engage in Indigenous pedagogies

Dr Sonia Fonua^a and Dr Emily Saavedra^b

^a Waipapa Taumata Rau | University of Auckland, New Zealand; ^b Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa | Massey University, New Zealand

Abstract

The benefits of Enabling Education programmes have been recognised by students and research for decades, yet understanding how Enabling Education creates space for educator professional development is less well-known, particularly regarding understanding and implementing Indigenous pedagogies. The unique characteristics of Enabling Education, which often include lower staff to student ratios, higher contact hours and time allocated for pastoral care, arguably facilitate more holistic approaches to student engagement, retention, and success. These characteristics ensure educators have more time to spend with students, enabling them to learn who their students are, and how to encourage their participation, and enhance their learning and self-efficacy. This environment also provides real opportunities for educators to critically self-reflect on their positioning with respect to teaching, learning, and engagement. Many students enrolled in Aotearoa New Zealand's Enabling (Foundation and Bridging) programmes come from strategically undervalued groups, including Māori students and Pacific students who may not have thrived in the predominantly western settler-colonial educational contexts. These programmes aim to increase and provide broader access to higher education for marginalised groups, an important focus for us. In this article, we critically reflect on our experiences as non-Indigenous educators in foundation and bridging education. Using critical auto-ethnography, and interview data from our doctoral research, we share stories of our pedagogical shifts to encompass and reflect Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. Our narratives illustrate a diverse repertoire of possibilities for other educators to draw upon when considering enabling practice and pedagogy that ultimately enhance engagement and success of all students.

Practitioner Notes

1. Engaging with Indigenous pedagogies and considering Indigenous knowledges, ways of being, knowing, and doing is beneficial for all Enabling Educators and students.
2. Relationality offers an important framework to reflect on how educators can engage with students.
3. Adopting a values-based pedagogy of care will enhance the learning and teaching context.
4. Professional pedagogical development for Enabling Educators is vital and must be curated to ensure it improves student outcomes.

Keywords

Professional development, Indigenous knowledges, pedagogy, Foundation Education, Enabling Education

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Introduction

Widening access to tertiary education (post-secondary education) has raised issues around the diversity of preparedness in the student body and how students transition to university and other forms of higher education. While universities have traditionally focused on privileged or highly selected students (Roberts, 1999; Biggs & Tang, 2007), policies such as the neoliberal marketisation and the impact of globalisation on the tertiary sector in the 1990s have expanded access, resulting in an increasingly diverse cohort of students. These cohorts have a wider range of academic ability and preparedness, requiring more varied approaches to teaching and learning, and transition. This diversity of ability and preparedness is in part related to students' different educational experiences at different secondary schools and is strongly linked to success at university, particularly preparedness (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012).

Students from strategically undervalued groups are often unaware of the reality of study at university; the mismatch between the student and the university's expectations can be a key factor affecting success and driving non-completion (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012). In our experience, these can include the time and financial commitment(s)/costs involved, and what can constitute independent learning and critical thinking. Tertiary study is important as it provides students with opportunities to broaden, deepen and connect their understanding of different subjects, expose them to new areas of learning, and can provide them with more diverse employment options and ways to support their families and communities financially and through active citizenship. However, getting to and through tertiary studies has multiple hurdles and remains a challenge for many students. Local research continues to speculate as to who is responsible for preparing students for universities, the secondary schools or universities, and in addition how this might look (Jansen & van der Meer, 2012). Like other settler-colonial countries, many Aotearoa New Zealand's secondary schools have undergone reforms attempting to make curriculum, assessment, and teaching and learning more learner-centred but how much of this is preparing them for a university teaching and learning environment which has not undergone such reforms? Schools should be encouraging their senior students to set their academic aims high and educators should use pedagogical approaches that "challenge and stimulate them to engage in independent learning, to search for information, and to develop and exercise critical thinking and logical reasoning skills, as well as written and verbal communications skills, and a strong work ethic" (Jensen et al., 2010, p. 103). But equally, universities should be addressing the diversity of preparedness and ability amongst their students by investing in a multiplicity of approaches to transition, engagement, and purposeful relationship building.

Literature

Outcomes for Māori students and Pacific students in higher education

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the unsuccessful completion of courses is disproportionately higher for Māori students and Pacific students, many of whom experience inequalities in the predominantly white-dominated education space of mainstream institutions (Milne, 2017). Although the proportion of Māori students and Pacific students engaging in tertiary study has been slowly rising, these inequalities are still pervasive. Research on the academic success of first year bachelor's degree university students (2012-2015) indicates that there is still a clear relationship between ethnicity and course completion and the grade achieved. For example, Cao (2016) found Pacific

students were less likely to complete first year courses and more likely to receive lower grades than Pākehā students. During COVID-19 with the more relaxed approach to assessment deadlines and an emphasis on support and 'kindness' (such as removal of late penalties, flexible timelines, accommodations to support success), outcomes often improved (Ossiannilsson, 2020), but it is hard to determine Māori students and Pacific students' outcomes with respect to completion of first year courses with the available data.

Transitioning is a complex process influenced by the culture and type of staff-student interactions or whether the student's family have tertiary qualifications all of which can contribute to the experience of the transition process. Like most countries, the highest student attrition in Aotearoa New Zealand occurs in the first year of study (Usher, 2009). Over the last two decades, despite identifying student attrition as a challenge in the successful transition of students into university, little has changed. For example, in 2007 approximately a third of tertiary students in Aotearoa New Zealand did not complete their degree. Pacific students had the highest rates with 51% not completing compared with 32% of non-Māori (which include Pākehā, Asian, and those from other nationalities) studying at university (Whitehead, 2012). These completion rates were substantiated seven years later when Jia and Maloney (2014) found Pākehā and Asian students were more likely to successfully complete their first year of university than Māori students and Pacific students.

Creating a transition pedagogy

Internationally there have long been concerns about the widening gap between secondary school and university and the subsequent impact on student retention beyond first year (Brinkworth et al., 2009). One suggestion is that universities need to create a 'transition pedagogy,' whereby they adapt their university-wide institutional and pedagogical practices, particularly in the first year of study, to address the increasing diversity of incoming students (Kift, 2008). This may include the implementation of learner centred teaching practice that facilitates learning and engagement, such as embedding academic skills and support services into first year courses thereby acknowledging the impact of being in such large classes (Jensen et al., 2010) as well as welcoming and valuing diversity (Zepke et al., 2005).

The first year of tertiary level study is well known as the time of greatest transition and adjustment, and the time when engagement patterns can be determined, and as such has been the focus of considerable research (for example, Zepke & Leach, 2010). To transition from secondary school to university successfully, it is important for students to build a relationship with their new institution, whether that is integrating into the institutional system or adapting to it (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

What is Enabling Education?

Enabling Education is a sector of the education system that emphasises and supports the successful transition of students into tertiary study. By providing targeted services to students who may not have otherwise entered higher education, it provides a gateway into greater employment opportunities, potentially higher incomes, that may lead to more equitable outcomes in the person's quality of life, including health and wellbeing.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Enabling Education is more commonly referred to as foundation programmes or bridging programmes, which usually consist of integrated courses that provide a

learning context which emphasise relationships between students, and between students and teaching staff (Trewartha, 2008) and recognise the importance of academic and social integration in the classroom which is often overlooked in higher education (Tinto, 1997). Foundation education emphasises the need to build 'strategic, institutional and disciplinary confidence' in students (Dison & Rule, 1996) and focuses on improving the quality of the learning process rather than just content and outcomes. This means educators must also adapt. According to Tinto (2002), students are "more likely to persist when they find themselves in settings that hold high expectations for their learning, provide needed academic and social support, and actively involve them with other students and faculty in learning" and where equity is emphasised (p. 4).

One role of foundation education is to link students with culturally appropriate support and advice integrated within the wider institutional support infrastructure (Saavedra & Sanders, 2022). Zepke et al.'s (2005) framework of nine strategies for teachers and institutions provides a useful guide for transitioning as it suggests useful ways to improve student outcomes in first year tertiary study: valuing good teaching; learner centred culture; positive relationships between students and staff; cultivate high-quality teaching; provide sound academic advice; support quality learning and teaching; restrict class sizes; monitor academic performance; develop institute specific guidelines. This framework has proved instrumental in guiding the discussion in this article.

It is important to note that foundation programmes and bridging programmes can be both distinctly different but also have some common characteristics; some educators in Aotearoa New Zealand use the terms interchangeably. For simplicity and from now on in this article, we use the term Enabling programmes to encompass programmes that support students to transition into their higher education studies and/or provide essential skills in a short course for academic skill development.

Why do we focus on Māori students and Pacific students in Aotearoa New Zealand?

As experienced educators, we acknowledge and recognise that Indigenous knowledges and ways of being provide support for the success of Māori students and Pacific students in ways that many of our western pedagogical approaches do not. We also acknowledge that Māori students and Pacific students have been disproportionally and negatively affected through historical, systematic undervaluing of their worldviews alongside a host of other injustices. We take a strength-based approach that builds on the values, capabilities, and experiences of these students and are committed to countering the systematic failures that have plagued our education system. Our work is in response to "a clarion call for educators to develop sensitivity and sensibility towards the cultural backgrounds and experiences of Māori students" (MacFarlane, et al., 2007, p1) that we prioritise and emphasise pedagogies that centre Māori students and Pacific student learners.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the educational outcomes for Māori students and Pacific students have made modest gains over recent years (Tertiary Education Commission, 2017), but they continue to comprise a large percentage of students who are deemed to have underachieved within formal education sectors, including the higher education sector. Therefore, improving the ecological environment within classroom contexts, both physical and online, is an important consideration if we are to disrupt the trajectories of current educational statistics and ways of measuring successful outcomes that are deeply seated in settler-colonial constructs.

Since the 1860s, when Pākehā (non-Māori) surpassed the number of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, there have been a barrage of systematic political, cultural, social and economic acts of dominance. The resulting settler-colonialism has ensured a strategic undervaluing of Indigenous knowledges through successive acts of assimilation and attempts to integrate and erode cultural identities other than the Pākehā majority. Whilst some may argue the Ministry of Education (2021) identified key initiatives to address some of these inequities through the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES), it is evident that these inequitable experiences are wide-reaching and require additional resourcing to address them alongside an improvement in collective understanding of previous injustices, possible through continual professional development opportunities. At institutional levels, commitments have been articulated through Learner Success Plans designed to ensure the success of specific groups of learners, including Māori students and Pacific students, is prioritised.

Within Enabling Education, influenced by our positionality as a mother of Pacific children and as Tangata Tiriti (non-Māori committed to actively upholding the provisions within Te Tiriti o Waitangi) (Bell, 2024), we aim to work with priority learners, such as Māori and Pacific, to best support their academic aspirations. Guided by ongoing critical praxis, we both actively pursue opportunities to enrich our understanding of Indigenous practices and take actions towards decentring Eurocentric hegemony in the curriculum and in our teaching practices (Milne, 2017); hence we have embraced critical autoethnography, excited by the nature of its “liberatory project invested in critically questioning intersecting power dynamics in cultural lives and individual experiences (Iosefo, Holman Jones, & Harris, 2021, p.2). We do this by connecting with, and intensifying our appreciation of, Tangata whenua (people of the land) through acknowledging these vital ancestral connections and nurturing relational approaches in our contexts.

Method

Positionality

We position ourselves here to articulate clearly where we come from and how we are positioned in the context of Enabling Education.

Sonia: I am Pāpālangi (Tongan for European ancestry), born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand and I am married to a Tongan man from Tongatapu, ‘Eua, Vava’u, and Ha’apai; we have three sons. I am a Senior Teaching Fellow at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland and have been involved in Enabling Education for more than two decades, as an educator but also serving as co-chair of FABENZ (Foundation and Bridging Educators of New Zealand) since 2018. My research interests include Indigenous (science) knowledges, values-based science education, art and creative practice in science education, equity in education and relational teaching practices.

Emily: I was born and raised in a small Aotearoa New Zealand town and I identify as Pākehā (Māori word to describe people of European decent living in Aotearoa New Zealand) and Tangata Tiriti (person of non-Māori descent who acknowledges, honours, and aspires to uphold the provisions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, one of New Zealand’s founding documents). I am sixth generation within my ancestral line to be born in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am married to a Chilean who immigrated to New Zealand in the early 2000s and we have two daughters. I started working in Enabling Education in 2004, having taught international students for the seven preceding years,

and I am an active member of FABENZ where I serve alongside Sonia as co-chair. My research interests include transition pedagogies, use of digital technologies to support learning, addressing equity needs through education, and professional development opportunities for educators.

Throughout this article, we use the terms 'Māori' and 'Pacific' under erasure, acknowledging the multiplicities of identities, knowledges, ways of being, that these terms will inadequately encapsulate. Māori refers to all Tangata Whenua, Indigenous people of Aotearoa. We use the term Pacific to refer to students with ancestral ties to the different Pacific Island nations (excluding Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia) who may have grown up in those nations or be part of the diaspora Pacific populations in Aotearoa New Zealand. We purposefully differentiate 'Māori students' and 'Pacific students' by repeating the term students twice, rather than 'Māori and Pacific students' which we believe groups them as a homogenous collective. Also note, we use the term transition to refer to a process or "set of interconnected personal, social and academic processes that often occur alongside geographical relocation" (McKinley & Madjar, 2014, p. 242).

Using critical autoethnography, a qualitative research method combining personal narrative (autobiography), critical theory, and ethnography, allowed us as researchers to examine our own experiences within a broader cultural context. We used our own lived experiences as a primary source of data, reflecting on how these experiences intersect with larger societal issues and power structures. This approach emphasises the importance of self-reflection, storytelling, and critical analysis, aiming to uncover multiple perspectives, how they overlap and influence experiences, and challenge dominant narratives. This allows us to "embrace the power of surrendering to the creative unknown, in which terror can be rewarded with solidarity and social change" (Iosefo et al., 2021, p.1); critical autoethnography involves a deep engagement with issues of identity, power, and social justice which is pertinent to the focus of this article. We acknowledge our position as privileged observers within the context of foundation/bridging learning community.

We also drew upon previously unpublished participant stories from Sonia's doctoral study, Ha'otā: Transforming science education in Aotearoa New Zealand for Tongan students, as the catalyst for our reflections. Sonia's doctoral research examined the stories of 26 Tongan science learners using a combination of Tongan and mainstream qualitative research methodologies and frameworks to understand their time in secondary, foundation, and universities studies (ethics approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee reference number 014009). A key finding was the importance of social connectedness, readily visible in Tongan (and other Pacific) cultures through the emphasis on tauhi vā (maintaining of the relational space), for improving the educational outcomes for all science learners regardless of ethnicity. Twenty of the 26 participants had successfully completed an enabling programme at university. Their stories concerning transitioning indicated that the learning environment created by staff availability and approachability and the level of academic and pastoral support were important for (Tongan) student success. Furthermore, programme structures foster the development of student learning communities which engage and motivate students and provide opportunities for them to create academic and social relationships, all of which have been shown elsewhere to enhance academic performance (Jensen et al., 2010).

As the authors, we met regularly over Zoom for four months. Recognising our co-chair relationship and our ongoing interactions around Enabling Education in different formats, formal and informal, these Zoom meetings were a culmination of years of prior discussions and critical self-reflection.

Thus, our case approach comes from leveraging our professional relationship, articulating our lived experiences, and considering an already established deep engagement with the topic.

During each recorded session, we considered our own experiences as Enabling Educators with respect to professional development opportunities. We transcribed these sessions using the Zoom transcribing function and analysed the interview text using thematic analysis. This analysis produced two main themes: 1) staffing and learning spaces; 2) professional development in Enabling Education.

Once we completed our analysis, we compared it with the section on transitioning experiences within Sonia's doctoral research (this chapter was not included in the final thesis because of word count). Examples of Indigenous student voice served to corroborate our experiences; as Iosefo et al (2021, p.4) eloquently articulate, "the intersection is crucial: both systems of knowledge-production are enhanced by this braided examination and reflexivity". Ethical research practices encourage the dissemination of interview text hence this article is a means to share previously unpublished student voice. We each read the chapter and identified participant quotes that resonated with our two themes; the participants' quotes often focused on staffing and relationality in teaching and learning spaces. We have woven examples into the next section to illustrate student voice and experience with respect to staffing and learning experiences in Enabling Education.

Integrated Results

Transitioning programmes manage the "interface between student and institution" (Benseman et al., 2006, p. 147) by bridging to specific degree-level content and provide academic, social and cultural support to a small cohort of students. Students in these programmes often require an alternative pathway to degree-level study because of gaps in their knowledge, they have not yet met the entry criteria to their preferred pathway, or they require assistance with their transition to university, or various combinations of these factors. This can be the result of multiple aspects including, but not limited to, potential combinations of pastoral issues, secondary school resourcing and staffing allocations, timetabling and availability restricting subject choice, health and wellbeing complexities, and negative experiences within the education system such as racism, microaggressions, and discouraging relationships with educators. The results of our discussions have highlighted two key elements to the success of enabling programmes; firstly, where the learning and teaching takes place and who is involved; secondly, the professional pedagogic development that educators in this area engage with. Each of these is discussed in turn below using our stories and student quotes. The student quotes have pseudonyms that were chosen by the participant.

Theme 1: Staffing and learning spaces

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Enabling Education is designed to support students in their development of academic and study skills; essential for achieving long-term success in their university education. The goal of Enabling Education programmes is to integrate various literacies (including, but not limited to, digital, information, attention, and critical literacies) embedded in content knowledge and the promotion of self-efficacy. It is evident in the literature that enabling programmes play an important role in facilitating a smooth transition into tertiary study, particularly

for traditionally underrepresented learners (Anderson et al., 2024; Chu et al, 2013). These programmes are located within the tertiary education sector, providing a post-secondary educational opportunity to enter higher education, and incorporate non-lecture based learning (such as labs, tutorials, and workshops) alongside more traditional lecture input (Curtis et al., 2012). Programmes create a pathway to degree-level studies for those who have not met university admission requirements, as well as for individuals returning to academic studies after a significant break in their formal education (Saavedra, 2018).

Enabling Educators are typically allocated more teaching hours for their courses, pastoral care responsibilities, and teach smaller student cohorts than other university teaching staff. An increased proportion of workload is allocated to teaching in Enabling Educators' contracts when compared to other educators within higher education (i.e. lecturers and professors). This increased proportion of contact teaching is often offset by the paucity of a formal research workload component. As a result, teaching staff are usually more available and accessible to their students and colleagues than most undergraduate programme's teaching teams.

Emily: In terms of enabling, you need people who are aware of different learning needs, aware of different learning stages and awareness of student needs. We have comparatively smaller class sizes than many first-year uni courses, so therefore there's an expectation that kaimahi [staff] get to know the students and get to know what they need in terms of being able to respond to those needs. So, enabling educators need to have the adaptability, the resilience, the ability to have multiple tools that they can draw on, understanding that there is considerable diversity in their teaching and learning spaces, and that they aren't trying to homogenise or change those learners to fit a predetermined mold.

A small student cohort enables more peer-learning opportunities, increased relationality, and the possibility of educators forming strong relationships with students and being able to effectively monitor their individual progress. This is useful for students because,

The people I was learning with knew their stuff, they rubbed off on me. I wanted to do well, we competed too, that was pretty fun. Seeing others do well makes me want to go hard. Because we were a smaller cohort, I knew other people... once I got to bachelors, the degree was so diverse and far bigger... (Takai).

Culturally relevant pedagogies

Another important way to assist with transitioning is to ensure institutions are learner-centered and are responsive to students' different cultural needs so they feel their "cultural attributes are valued and accommodated" (Zepke et al., 2005, p. 14). One way to do this is to engage with culturally relevant pedagogies.

Sonia: I teach about culture and understanding that culture is not ethnicity. So, you can be part of multiple cultures, which I think is a really important thing to learn, particularly at university. I try to make sure we create potential for them to share who they are, as an individual, as part of a collective, or all aspects of themselves that they want to share. One assignment I have tried, I like visual assignment, I like to do creative things and encourage creativity because it pushes students a little bit, but allows those who like that kind of thing, but often don't get the

opportunity to do so in academic spaces. One example, I asked students to create a portrait of themselves, either a self-portrait or still life, using objects that express who they are and who they are bringing to the course. I leave the parameters really loose and say, just share who you are. And then you witness this amazingness when they produce the full range of bare minimum, didn't want to do this because they find it too hard or really a waste of time, to the full artistic demonstration of skill sets / artistic expression of enthusiasm. Some of these may not be amazingly awesome artwise, but the conceptualisation behind it is amazing. And then they share them with each other in the tutorial. They have got something to talk to and to explain and they've got a prop that really helps them to be able to express themselves, because they've illustrated it. And then they get to talk about it, compare each other's, and get some idea of diversity as well.

Culturally relevant teaching emphasises the importance of classroom interactions while culturally relevant teachers create positive relationships that counter traditional power differentials (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Glynn et al., 2012). This can include acknowledging and addressing the power differentials experienced by systematically undervalued groups such as priority learners, namely Māori students and Pacific students in the educational context of Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, programmes with a high proportion of Indigenous students can encourage a strong focus on ethnicity and culture which can help develop and enhance cultural pride and resilience amongst the student cohort. Programmes where Indigenous students are the majority are more likely to encourage positive discourse and avoid deficit theorising around achievement and ethnicity, as students articulated in Sonia's research:

[In my programme] I finally interacted with other Pacific people, I learnt not to be ashamed to be Tongan; I felt more culturally aware and strong in my identity... I think interacting with other people of the same kind of experiences of racism, sharing it and giving each other advice on how to deal with it [was helpful] (Mele).

According to Zepke et al. (2005) providing opportunities to form social networks also helps with transitioning. The intense shared learning experiences created by enabling programmes strongly encourages relationship building. The enabling environment allowed students to compare learning styles and study techniques, and ultimately build lasting relationships formed within an empowering learning context rather than cope with the deficit experiences that many described during their secondary schooling.

During my [enabling programme], that was a good thing, that was probably one of the good things I got out of it, it helped me to independently teach myself... the main thing I would've taken out of it was my learning techniques... in high school I didn't know how to teach myself, it was pretty much what the teacher says, I do that, and [I] pretty much learnt how to teach [myself] during it (Mata).

Pedagogic approaches

Enabling programme structures and contexts can also create opportunities for teaching staff to practice techniques that add to their repertoire and develop reflexive practices that inform and improve their approach to learning and teaching. Enabling contexts also provide the space to

reflect on what it means to know something and to learn from, not just learn about, our learners (Hoskins & Jones, 2022).

Emily: Most enabling educators create bite size, consumable bits of information rather than the lectures at university [where] a lot of information is just thrown at students, and students are expected to be able to consume that [whereas] in our enabling spaces, a key job is to be able to break it up into concepts and digestible chunks are accessible to a range of students... who may have different learning requirements or learning preferences so being able to look at those different ways of doing it, and I guess, constantly revising and reflecting that... Revising, responding, revising, reflecting, and then responding, responding to your student needs not necessarily to what you're trying to get through or how you would learn yourself.

Sonia: So, I think within the classroom, as an enabling educator, you are really emphasising the understanding that there's difference. And you're not trying to look for uniformity, so you create, you imagine different ways you could support learning. I'd expect you'd be able to read the room, and enable students to do things in pairs, or by themselves, or in a group. I create options of how people do things so that they can do it by themselves, or they can do it in a group. Recently, I responded to feedback about my slide content being heavy on pictures and images, light on words, which is fair- so I made another version available for students who would prefer more words by taking out lots of the pictures and condensing it so there's are less slides but they have explanations of what I was using the images for or the questions I asked, outcomes I was looking for.

This is a good example of how educators can adapt and respond in the classroom, particularly if they are aware and have the capability to recognise and meet the needs of diverse students' ways of knowing, being, and doing. This is also an important approach when considering how diverse students understand and form relationships with teaching staff. First-year transition can be improved by creating opportunities for positive relationships between staff and students as well as implementing workload policies so teaching staff are more readily available for students' learning (Zepke et al., 2005) which have been previously shown to contribute to academic success (Curtis et al., 2012).

According to Sonia's doctoral research, the availability and accessibility of Enabling Educators was helpful for student learning:

I didn't know much... I knew there would be challenges but I didn't really know it would be this hard, but... I remember in [enabling programme] how the teaching staff always had the time, extra time, to teach us. That really helped because I remember the first test, I failed [but] at the end of semester I had improved... that help from the support [the teaching staff] gave us, it really helped us improve, and be successful, well-prepared... it's the support, we [got] to sit down with teachers and just talk about what [we] think is (Vaea).

Within enabling classrooms, students are supported to develop autonomy and gain confidence within the context of their studies. Another distinct feature is the accessibility of staff, which can

help create a learning environment that allows students to feel more comfortable engaging, asking questions, and trusting teaching staff. For example:

it was really helpful, it took some of my shyness away... one year with the same people, you already know them. In tutorials when [the teaching staff] say 'No question is a dumb question', I feel my questions aren't dumb anymore, so I just ask them... (Fatai).

Non-lecture based teaching

Teaching staff are expected to deliver all teaching components of a course, not just the lecture. In most cases, they are also teaching in non-lecture settings identified as having the potential to impact successful outcomes for students (Curtis et al, 2012) such as, tutorials and lab classes and running review sessions and test preparation activities alongside curriculum development. The combination of active involvement in these activities provides ample opportunities for relationality. Being involved in multiple teaching components allows a more comprehensive and responsive approach to the learning process to be implemented,

Sonia: The multiple iterative cycling of content and materials across the learning components helps students learn by considering the timing of the lecture, the tutorials and assignments. So, I'm stacking the lecture intentionally, knowing that I've also got two hours of tutorial to go through the same content. Otherwise, I wouldn't necessarily deliver it this way - I'm treating this as a combined package of learning and understanding, and learning to understand, so they develop study skills and opportunities to build resilience in their learning, it's intentionally and comprehensively thinking about the process of learning, and the diverse student body in engaging contexts

Emily: It's always important to consider learning is a process, not a product. You can't see the lecture and the tutorial independently, which is easier when you are teaching or heavily involved in the delivery of both.

An inclusive and affirming learning environment which cultivates high-quality teaching is also helpful for transitioning (Zepke et al., 2005), especially when teaching staff try to interact and monitor student performance. Connecting and developing authentic relationships between staff and students are a major factor in student success:

[I] liked how we had our tutorials, and how we could interact with the lecturers more (Takai).

[they] were a good teacher... [they] knew us all personally. They knew who was struggling, [they] would give us extra help as well... our other lecturers, come in, they go out... we knew who the [enabling educators] were, [their] background, so it wasn't really like a 'professional' relationship, more personal... They went around and talked to each one of us... getting to know everyone, it made us trust [them] and yeah... I think that's why we enjoyed [their] lectures (Soana)

With respect to staffing approaches and learning spaces in Enabling Education, there are several factors that enable successful experiences for students. One key aspect is the learning spaces

themselves, which encompasses where learning and teaching occurs, who is present, and the reciprocal nature of learning and teaching. Other essential elements include culturally relevant practices and pedagogic approaches that support different ways of being, knowing and doing, contributing to the creation of context where students can thrive. Carefully considering an integrated approach to delivering content, acknowledging the lecture and non-lecture based learning environments provide opportunities for students and educators to connect and develop authentic relationships that support academic progress. To achieve such learning spaces, it is vital that enabling educators critically and intentionally engage with professional pedagogic development.

Theme 2: Professional Development

We contend that professional development is a fundamental component and necessary commitment for all educators, irrespective of length of service and experience. In this section, we share our experiences as non-Indigenous educators working in and around enabling programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand. The paucity of professional development specifically focusing on Enabling Education can leave gaps in enabling educators' praxis. These gaps can be further compounded by the reality that most educators in Aotearoa New Zealand are non-Indigenous yet there is a significant Indigenous student presence in our classrooms, especially in Enabling Education. Thus, we have intentionally focused on sharing how we have learnt from our classroom settings using critical self-reflection in our enabling educator careers that span multiple decades. We believe there is significant value in sharing authentic and honest experiences, including our own pedagogical shifts so that other (enabling) educators interested in moving towards a conscientised positionality can be encouraged to explore their professional pedagogical development (PPD) further.

Staff/staffing in Enabling Education – where does PPD come from?

Educators come to Enabling Education from a range of different backgrounds and must cater to a range of diverse learners. These multiple layers of diversity contribute to the complexity of determining, not only what an Enabling Education workforce looks like, but also which capabilities such a workforce should hold (Alkema, 2021). Added to this, are the additional (and often exponential) pastoral care needs within Enabling Education cohorts:

Emily: All enabling educators are highly qualified. In my context and experience, they've got master's, if not doctorates in their subject areas, plus they've also got teaching qualifications which is often quite different to other educators at uni. They are also regular, pro-active participants in professional development opportunities and communities of practice with respect to teaching as they are strongly passionate about their student success, there's a longevity - people are committed long term to the enabling space. Enabling educators know their students and are aware that most have experienced ongoing inequities and unequal outcomes in their education. We are therefore trying to address those injustices in some way, shape or form in our delivery.

Sonia: I've worked in very different enabling contexts and one thing that is common to them is recognising that while a teaching qualification might be useful, enabling

is a unique teaching environment, it's not secondary school, and tertiary education is very different.

We share our positioning and experience with respect to Enabling Education here:

Sonia: I first taught at university as a tutor and lab demonstrator and then moved into the enabling context after finishing my master's degree when one of my supervisors suggested I apply for a role. I started and absolutely loved it, I just really liked the change in how much time I had with the students, teaching tutorials, and labs, and lectures. I had so many teaching hours which meant I got to know the students really well. I stayed in that role for 16 years because I loved the opportunity of what we could do with the students and what we were encouraged to do. We were fortunate to have really good student/teacher ratios. After I left that role, I taught in undergraduate for a few years. More recently, I have added enabling back into my teaching load.

Emily: I started in language teaching, teaching English for speakers of other languages and Spanish as a foreign language, in Aotearoa New Zealand, Bolivia, and Japan. So, I worked primarily with students learning new languages and then moved into teaching English for academic purposes. Then I moved to the United Arab Emirates and worked on enabling programmes, diploma and higher diploma, to prepare students to get into their first-year graduate degrees, and first-year bachelors and master's degrees. When I returned to Aotearoa ten years ago, I began working in enabling and pathway programmes. So, over 20 years I gradually moved into the academic literacy space and supporting students to transition from high school or workspaces into higher education.

The liminality of enabling teaching, which is most commonly situated in tertiary education but bridges the secondary and tertiary sectors, has meant there has never been a formal study path for enabling educators. As outlined above, both of us found ourselves in Enabling Education equipped with disciplinary qualifications that were complemented by transferable skills and experiences developed from our previous teaching positions, rather than an accredited qualification focused on teaching and delivery pedagogies and practices for Enabling Education contexts. Therefore, we have had to curate our own opportunities for professional pedagogical development (PPD), a term we have created to encompass the spectrum of areas enabling educators to develop and maintain to be effective for their diverse student cohorts. The diversity of Enabling Education programmes makes it difficult to identify and cater to all PPD needs simultaneously as some programmes focus on broad academic skill development while others are pathway students into particular careers. This makes standardising a national qualification problematic and results in educators curating their bespoke PPD pathways.

To transition requires students to have the capability to navigate change, using resources that allow them to engage in change rather than just assimilating. Gale and Parker (2014) argue that there is a mutuality of agency and structure in transition that should allow students to instigate transformation in social institutions which would recognise the importance of relationality and reciprocity between educators and students. We would argue that this transitioning and transformation is one of the opportunities for PPD, building upon the Māori pedagogical concept of *ako*, as reciprocal learning that occurs between both educator and student, something we both

have strongly embraced based on our work with Māori students and Pacific students. Similar educative concepts can be found amongst the various Pacific nations.

Ako is more than teaching and learning. It describes a meaningful relationship characterized by mutuality, respect, and the notion of integrative, whole people learning. It transcends the individualistic notions of learning by understanding that learning outcomes achieved by students cannot be separated from their environment, culture, belief system, family, and group they affiliate with. It acknowledges that new understanding and being in the world grows out of shared learning experiences. (Napan et al., 2020, p.63)

In this next section we share vignettes of our pedagogical shifts to encompass and reflect Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, beginning with an example of the importance of recognising and explaining values in teaching and learning spaces.

Story 1 – Values-based teaching

Culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). It requires pedagogies to be responsive and relevant to multiethnic communities, supporting young people to maintain their cultural and linguistic competences while building cultural competence in the dominant culture. From our perspective,

Emily: The importance of values, in fronting your values, and being explicit about your values for students to be able to relate, and for you to really understand what and why you're doing things is a guiding point both as an educator, and as a student. So, for educators, making yourself aware, negotiate with yourself and understand, I really started understanding how much my norms are not other people's norms. So, critical, reflective practice, questioning of self, why things are done a particular way.

Sonia: I am explicit about the values I bring to teaching, and which values inform my teaching and learning spaces, and I use a visual in my slides and tutorials to share this and offer the opportunity for students to reflect and include their own values in discussions, and considerations of how they will ‘be’ in the teaching and learning spaces. For example, trust. You're not going to trust me immediately, but the invitation is there. And empathy and compassion, I have to really show and talk about it so that students know how I will be empathetic and compassionate because I talk examples in my first class, I lead with this conversation about values, as I believe it is the most important.

Vaiolleti's (2006) work describes five ‘*ulungaanga faka-Tonga* (Tongan behavioural characteristics) needed for effective *talanoa* in Tongan contexts. These resonate with the idea of values-based teaching because they articulate essential aspects of behaviour to ensure positive and safe relationships examples of such values-led teaching are increasingly common (see Fonua (2021), for tangible examples). Even when cohorts are not exclusively Māori or Pacific, students thrive in classrooms where pedagogical approaches are grounded in easily identifiable cultural norms. This is one of the key skills of a successful enabling educator; they will have a vast repertoire to draw upon.

Story 2 – Relationships, Relationality, Whakawhanaungatanga

Māori and Pacific educational research (Bishop et al., 2014; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Reynolds, 2018) emphasise the need for meaningful relationships and connections to be established in- and outside the learning environment. The quality of the teacher-student relationship has been documented as affecting engagement, achievement, success, and retention (Fonua, 2020; Saavedra, 2018). However, the diversity of ways of being, knowing, and doing limits the ability to assume a universal standard of what constitutes a good relationship (Thaman, 1998).

Emily: I think communication and the style of communication, are important for relationships, especially considering how you open a conversation rather than shut it down. Being around diverse student cohorts means you learn a huge variety of ways to communicate, especially seeing how people deliver messages and how people respond to them.

Sonia: When I follow up with students, I don't say you haven't done your assignment, instead, I ask them how things are going, how they are finding uni, and is everything ok? Then I offer them the option of having a chat if they want to, to open that communication channel. It demonstrates empathy, I invite students to submit late in case there is a reason, rather than penalising them and moving on.

By holding space in which communication is authentic and where the teacher-student hegemonic power dynamic is minimised, we create opportunities for dialogue that supports relationality. This is an example of how we have learnt from students about the importance of relationships and the process of engagement, including aspects such as “time, space, humour, persistence, generosity, forgiveness” mentioned by Hoskins and Jones (2022, p.315).

Story 3 – Pedagogy of care

Teaching and learning should move towards a caring pedagogy, one that integrates an empathetic approach not just a didactic approach. Cultural obligations need to be factored into everyday as well as emergency situations, highlighting the need for culturally appropriate support (Saavedra & Sanders, 2022). For example, we emphasise *manaakitanga* which is a Māori concept that “embodies a type of caring that is reciprocal and unqualified, based on respect and kindness, a ‘duty of care’” (MacFarlane et al., 2007, p. 67) and Vaoleti’s (2006) work around Tongan behavioural characteristics mentioned earlier, also highlights the importance of ‘ofa feunga (compassion) and anga lelei (tolerant, generous, kindness). Our thoughts on this include:

Sonia: An important thing from working in enabling is understanding your ethic of care, how important is to have an ethic of care, and how do you authentically demonstrate this to students? It’s also recognising that emotional baggage of secondary school can be present in varying amounts. So, it’s recognising and understanding why students are in enabling, and taking the responsibility to say, I’m gonna try my best to make sure that this is a positive experience for you.

Emily: This speaks to the reciprocity of learning spaces and places that we’re in, learning to say I don’t know, let’s find out together is way more powerful and meaningful for students, than just giving them an answer. It’s making them aware

that it comes from a place of love. That it's for your best interest that I don't just give this to you because you're not going to benefit from that type of approach.

Story 4 – Diversity of success

Most first year students are concerned about the change in pace, the volume of content and required reading as well as assessments (Kantanis, 2000). However, minority students also must contend with perceived as being different and having a sense of 'otherness' which provides them with other challenges and issues (McKinley & Madjar, 2014). These can include negotiating acculturative stress ('culture shock'), social integration, cultural values, and academic engagement, all of which can influence success in this new environment. From our perspective,

Emily: If the goal is success, we need to figure out how to be successful. Whatever that success is, acknowledging that it's not necessarily academic. I've learnt that we also need to recognise what success looks like: students are not always in study for academic success, or what we might think is academic success i.e. high grades, and in some cases, success could be that they're not there in my particular course anymore. That's the thing that stood out over the years, and rung truest for me - success has very many different definitions. It is important to find out from each and every student what their success or what success looks like for them in their time and space.

Sonia: It is also important to consider where success is felt and shared, and celebrated, and at the same time, how do you deal with failure? Is it safe to tell your parents, or do you need help with solutions to this failure... working with students to problem-solve this, and show that we care how this will turn out for them, that's all Enabling Education, the whole package, not just giving a grade but considering how the grade impacts a student's life, and what are the consequences, and do they need assistance or guidance, or to feel part of whanau (family) where your educators really care about all this stuff.

Culturally relevant teaching emphasises the influence of classroom interactions on academic success and the importance of bridging the gap between the cultures of home and school. Drawing on Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching encompasses the belief that all students are capable of academic success, and that educators should be pedagogically responsive and be part of the communities they serve. It also emphasises equitable and reciprocal student-teacher relationships, connectedness with all learners and educators demonstrating passion, and facilitating learning.

Conclusion

This article has focused on providing a nexus for Enabling Educators to share their stories and critical reflections as a way of demonstrating how non-Indigenous educators can authentically engage in and honour Indigenous pedagogies. Our narratives are based upon our experiences and critical reflections within Enabling Education programmes, corroborated by student voice derived from Sonia's doctoral research. The Tongan students' voices included in this article were foundational in guiding our thinking, driving us to offer our observations and cumulative experiences as Enabling Educators committed to improving outcomes for Māori students and

Pacific students that continue to feel the effects of being strategically undervalued learners in our education system. Our critical autoethnographic reflections and stories illustrate a diverse repertoire of possibilities for other educators to draw upon to help shift the higher education context “to be guided by more than western logics and ontologies” (Iosefo et al. 2021, p.2). We particularly emphasise the importance of acknowledging and honouring any Indigenous communities connected to your learning context, especially when considering enabling practice and pedagogy that ultimately enhance engagement and success of all students.

We believe that it makes sense to utilise the experiences and input from students, especially those challenged by a system dominated by a different worldview (Thaman, 2010) who have not had the opportunities to thrive in western settler-colonial education contexts. Through students, we have actively and intentionally incorporated an approach to learning and teaching that is values-based and relational. Holistic engagement with Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing throughout our careers has resulted in significant learnings which strive to embed in our approaches in our daily lives and consequentially our work as educators. We are dedicated to adopting a pedagogy and ethic of care that is empathetic and compassionate. It is through these approaches, lenses, and perspectives that we have experienced authentic shifts in our own pedagogical approaches as we engage with learning and teaching. Throughout our Enabling Educator journeys, we have both negotiated the incorporation of Māori and Pacific ways of being, knowing and doing in our professional pedagogical development and expression in our teaching and learning spaces. Honouring such approaches, lenses, and perspectives continues to influence authentic shifts in our own pedagogical approaches.

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