



Tertiary Teacher Development and Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Ako Aotearoa: The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence marks an appropriate time to reflect on teacher development in the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

Through a focus on enhancing learning and teaching practices, Ako Aotearoa will assist tertiary education organizations and educators to enable the best possible learning outcomes for learners. That purpose will be achieved through a range of activities, including:

- gathering and disseminating evidence about the effectiveness of particular teaching practices,
- providing examples of effective teaching,
- funding and supporting research and development projects,
- helping educators share their expertise,
- improving the ability of educators to support professional development within their organizations,
- helping teachers contribute to research on teaching and learning,
- providing recognition and reward for excellent teaching through the National Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards,
- facilitating networking between tertiary educators who have similar roles and interests,
- publicizing educational development events within the sector,
- linking New Zealand tertiary educators with resources available from similar centres internationally, and
- giving policy advice to the Government, the Tertiary Education Commission and other agencies.

Both the Government's decision to establish the Centre and the high level of participation by tertiary teachers in an associated consultation process, suggest that there is genuine commitment at all levels to enhancing the level of investment in tertiary teacher development, and the ways in which it occurs and can be accessed. As a long-standing advocate for such a Centre, I think that it will be able to contribute significantly to that agenda. But, I would also want to caution against unrealistic expectations given challenges the Centre will face and emphasize that it can only represent some of the pieces in a complex

jigsaw when it comes to what might be regarded as an ideal array of professional development provisions and opportunities.

To make that case, I will offer some views that are derived from reflections on my own continuing development as a tertiary teacher and my role as an 'academic developer', as well as related literature. In part, these are concepts or frameworks for thinking about being a tertiary teacher and developing as a tertiary teacher. And, most are likely to be relevant to teachers who teach in other education sectors. I will note some of the possible implications of these views for the work of the Centre.

CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR THINKING ABOUT TERTIARY TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

1. *Who should I become?*

When we set out to develop as a teacher we obviously need to have a goal or destination in mind. However, teachers are sometimes unsure who they should endeavour to become: what the attributes and capabilities of a better teacher are. This is understandable as scholars of teaching continue to struggle to define those hallmarks. I have found two conceptualisations helpful.

The first was originally formulated by a former colleague, Bob Katterns. From this perspective, teachers who are best equipped to facilitate their students' learning have the following general attributes:

- a rich repertoire of teaching methods and skills,
- sensitivity to the myriad of factors that make particular ways of teaching more or less appropriate,
- good control of specific skills,
- a willingness and capacity to reflect on and research their own teaching, and
- an awareness that the choices they make concerning teaching and learning objectives and approaches are shaped by their beliefs about the primary purposes of education. They can make those beliefs explicit and teach in ways that 'fit' these purposes. In this sense, their teaching is 'educative' as well as effective (Haigh & Katterns, 1984: 23-27).

An agenda for teaching development based on these criteria includes extending repertoire, increasing sensitivity, gaining control and engaging in reflection and research. There is a critical assumption that underpins this view: it is not possible to construct fool-proof recipes for effective teaching because many of the conditions that ultimately determine whether someone learns cannot be controlled by a teacher. Given these circumstances, our responsibility is to identify and use ways of teaching that make the odds for our students' learning as favourable as possible.

More recent in origin are distinctions made between *excellent teachers*, *scholarly teachers* and *scholars of teaching* (e.g., Trigwell & Shale, 2005).

- a) **Excellent teachers** engage in practices that are known to make ‘the odds’ high for successful student learning and they have sound knowledge of their discipline, subject, and profession. They seek out the knowledge of other thoughtful and experienced teachers and also develop this knowledge themselves by being thoughtful about their students’ learning and their teaching. While they are also likely to draw on scholarship-based knowledge, this is not a pre-requisite to being an excellent teacher.
- b) **Scholarly teachers** are characterized by two attributes. They bring the attitudes, values and ways of thinking that are characteristic of scholars to bear on their teaching (e.g., *reflection, evidence-gathering, critique, evaluation, rigour, open-mindedness, intellectual curiosity*). This means, for example, that they don’t leap aboard a current bandwagon without looking for and weighing up the evidence critically. They also do read and draw on research-based literature about learning and teaching. There is an enormous body of scholarship and related literature that unfortunately remains unknown to many and is therefore under-utilised.
- c) **Scholars of teaching** use their own research and scholarship capabilities to try to answer questions that will inevitably arise about their students’ learning and their teaching. These questions are one manifestation of the ‘endemic uncertainties’ (Lortie, 2002) of teaching. While the answers to those questions will have immediate and direct relevance to them personally, they also, as scholars, communicate what they are doing and what they discover to their colleagues. They put what they are doing and discovering into the public domain so that it can be subject to their peers’ review, and can be used by a wider community of teachers.

I would hope that all teachers aspire to be excellent and scholarly and that many will be in a position, and choose to use research as well as reflection capabilities to answer questions about learning and teaching. Ako Aotearoa has a compatible role. It will capture and disseminate the knowledge of excellent teachers, collate and provide access to scholarly literature, encourage teachers to adopt a scholarly orientation to teaching, and promote and support scholarship on learning and teaching.

2. *Does the discipline or profession count?*

Teachers in tertiary settings often encounter, or contribute to, debates about the distinctiveness of pedagogies associated with particular disciplines or professional education programmes. While some emphasize generic features of good teaching, others call attention to differences. What is the status of that debate? There is increasing recognition that there is validity to claims for some distinctiveness (e.g., Healey, 2000; Huber & Morreale, 2002). From the perspective of disciplines, that distinctiveness is primarily attributed to epistemological differences, including views about the nature of knowledge, questions to be asked about phenomenon, the forms of evidence and argument

considered necessary to support views, and ways in which such knowledge should be communicated.

More recently, the notion of distinctive pedagogies has also been associated with different professions and vocations. Lee Shulman (2005) has coined the term 'signature pedagogies' to acknowledge contrastive approaches to learning and teaching that are associated with training and education for different professions and occupations. He also proposes that inherent in these different pedagogies are views about the roles and responsibilities that learners have in respect to their own learning, to one another's learning and to the teacher.

One of the consequences of these differences is that when students and teachers encounter ideas from unfamiliar disciplines, they may also experience unfamiliar ways of learning and teaching. Sometimes their response to that unfamiliarity is negative (e.g., scepticism, discomfort, rejection). Understanding the source of such differences and maintaining an open-minded orientation to other approaches are important considerations for teachers and students.

With reference to the Centre, there is a clear appreciation of the need to be aware of and responsive to these distinctive pedagogies, but there will also be associated challenges in being able to directly address those differences given the resources available. The Centre may also enable teachers to benefit from encounters with other disciplinary perspectives on learning and teaching. As Huber and Morreale (2002) have observed:

Growth in knowledge also comes at the borders of disciplinary imagination ... It is in this borderland that scholars from different disciplinary cultures come to trade their wares – insights, ideas and findings – even though the meanings and methods behind them may vary considerably among producer groups. (p.1)

3. *How should we develop on the way from novice to expert?*

Teachers recognize that their development needs change on the way through their career and often also appreciate that the ways in which that development occurs and can best be facilitated will also change. A model that has given me very productive insights into those changes is offered by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) who differentiate five phases: *novice*, *advanced beginner*, *competent*, *proficient*, and *expert*. So what are some of those insights?

- a) **Novices** need to learn to recognize a limited number of key features of teaching-learning situations and to acquire some general *rules* to guide their actions (If these features are present, do this). The agenda for their learning must be relatively modest as their information-handling capabilities will be stretched handling the storage and retrieval of these 'getting started' rules. The feedback they will be most responsive to concerns how well they are following the rules (Am I doing it right?). They need close support, including mentoring, while they practice applying the rules and begin to generate their own experience.

- b) **Advanced beginners** can begin to construct some of their own rules through *reflection* on those experiences and at this stage they need to be prompted and assisted to reflect carefully on situations. That assistance includes teaching them what aspects of learning and teaching situations they might reflect on and how to engage effectively in reflection (Haigh, 2000).
- c) **Competent teachers**, who are now prepared to take more responsibility for their own development as well as performance, continue to extend their working knowledge through such activities as close analysis of learning and teaching incidents, developing and refining strategies for handling challenging situations, and systematically trying out new strategies and skills in real or simulated situations. These activities, which can occur in the context of case studies and story-telling, can also provide the basis for teachers engaging in *research* as an avenue for development.
- d) **Proficient and expert teachers** draw increasingly on their working knowledge unconsciously through intuition. This means that they may need to be confronted with novel situations or critical incidents in order to prompt them to engage consciously in analysis and the generation of new rules. And, tapping the knowledge of experts so that it can be shared similarly requires different strategies.

Encapsulated in this representation of the novice to expert journey is a 3Rs model for professional development: *from Rules – to Reflection – to Research*. Again, Ako Aotearoa will have the challenge of finding appropriate ways of addressing the development needs of teachers who are at varying phases of the novice-expert journey for particular aspects of their teaching.

4. *In what contexts can we engage productively in professional development?*

The contexts for professional development that tertiary teachers are familiar with (and most likely to bring to mind) include formal credit-bearing programmes (e.g., Postgraduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching), workshops, seminars, conferences and professional meetings. However, we know that in the tertiary sector many teachers do not take up such development opportunities. This does not invariably mean, however, that they lack commitment to professional development and do not engage in it. Their commitment and engagement can often be confirmed if one listens to their everyday conversations. And, conversation can be a context which is particularly conducive to professional learning (Haigh, 2005).

Unfortunately, everyday conversations about learning and teaching are often undervalued ('Just a passing conversation.') and conversation opportunities are not typically provided and supported as a professional development provision. I believe that the National Centre should provide and support those opportunities. It was a frequent observation from those who participated in the consultation process that they appreciated and valued the opportunity to engage in a nation-wide dialogue about important learning and teaching matters. A precedent exists that should be built on.

CONCLUSION

I am delighted that Ako Aotearoa will soon become a significant presence on the tertiary education landscape. Its intended purposes and values coincide with those that shape my own life as a teacher and academic developer. At the same time, I appreciate the significant challenges that it will confront given its brief to improve teaching across the entire sector. While teachers in the sector do have important shared development interests and needs, their diversity is obvious and must be acknowledged. While some wonder whether the Centre will usurp existing professional development provisions, I see its role as a necessary adjunct to those provisions. It will stretch, a little, existing resources. It will also increase equity of access to development opportunities which are currently unevenly distributed. Finally, while its focus is tertiary teaching, I believe that it is likely to become a professional development place that teachers in general may find worth a visit.

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I have had a longstanding involvement in the provision of development and support for tertiary teachers. Previously the Director of the Teaching and Learning Development Unit at Waikato University, I now have a position in the Centre for Educational and Professional Development at AUT University. My responsibilities in this position include building staff research capability, supervisor development and developing initiatives that will increase staff knowledge of, and engagement in, the scholarship of teaching and learning. Commencing in 2002, I developed, on the basis of investigation and consultation across the tertiary education sector, a proposal to establish a Tertiary Learning and Teaching Network (TLTN): Te Kauta Matauranga Ako. The proposal was presented to the Minister of Education (Tertiary) and the Tertiary Education Commission (2002-2004). I have contributed to further consultation on the specifications for the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence through the Teaching Matters Forum.

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