Yoko Kanemasu Teaching Portfolio

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**Introduction**

It is a great honour to have been selected winner of the Faculty Teaching Excellence Award in the Faculty of Arts, Law and Education, and to be considered for the Vice Chancellor’s Prize for Excellence in Teaching. I am pleased to present my teaching portfolio below, in which I address each of the selection criteria with examples of my teaching practices as well as outcomes-based evidence.

**Criterion 1: Approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn**

I have a passion for facilitating student learning by incorporating a range of teaching resources and methods that stimulate students’ interest in and motivation for engaging with academic subjects. I discuss below two examples of the teaching strategies that I employ to this end.

**Example 1.1: translating theory into the real world with “fun” and stimulating teaching materials**

As an effort to motivate and inspire students, in my classes I try as much as possible to use *materials that connect academic subjects with the real world in a “fun” and tangible manner*. I believe that concrete and enjoyable activities are effective, especially at the undergraduate level, in generating student interest in the subject, facilitating its comprehension and application, and motivating mutual sharing of learning experience.

In my courses on social theory (SO200: Modern Social Theory and SO303: Advanced Social Theory), a subject often regarded as dry and difficult due to its philosophical and abstract nature, my students and I listen to popular music, such as Bob Marley (reggae), Tupac Shakur (rap) and Queen Latifah (rap) to reflect on commoditisation and conventionalisation of alternative culture and to explore meanings and expressions of Black Feminism. I see that the method works when my students’ faces light up as they listen to the music and understand its relevance to the theoretical discussion at hand. I also show a television advertisement featuring a popular Japanese girl band, a video of the late Michael Jackson’s virtual ‘resurrection’, etc. to help them understand key arguments of Postmodernism, one of the latest and most abstract social theories.
Stimulated by these resources, many students go to the web themselves, find relevant music clips and videos and share them with others on Moodle. This is usually followed by informal and lively online discussions of the materials and their relationship with the theories they learnt. Of course, the real world is not just ‘fun’: I also discuss contemporary wars and conflicts around the world and environmental destruction especially in the Pacific as examples to illustrate some theories. In this process of “embodying theories” with their manifestations in the real world, students not only comprehend the theories (i.e. understand their connection with tangible, ‘real-world’ examples) but also apply them independently (i.e. identify their own empirical examples), and present their theoretical reflections to the rest of the class.

Outcomes corresponding to Example 1.1
I am pleased to note the comments made by my students in nominating me for the award and on Moodle, which appear to show the effectiveness of the above strategy:

➢ “She supports her analysis with controversial events like wars, and this helps us a lot in social analysis because sociology is all about society and it’s analysing society critically. Modernisation in the 21st century and its theories are interesting to study.”
➢ “Certain trends in music, fashion, art and the upraising technology have affected many people in the Pacific today. Reflecting on the lectures, I like how music and art cultures are used to talk about the issues people face.”

Example 1.2: maximising the potential of online/blended learning to enhance interactive and peer learning
I also believe that student interaction and peer learning are critically important in inspiring students to study both independently and collaboratively. Through my experience as a former USP student (MA Sociology) and extensive years of teaching at USP, I have learnt that many Pacific island students are highly skilled in learning through mutual sharing, communication and cooperation. My most successful classes have invariably been the ones in which learning becomes a “collective project”. Here, by taking responsibilities in teamwork and contributing to a mutually-assisted process
of learning, students develop an approach to learning that is both independent and collaborative, instead of “receiving” knowledge from the lecturer passively and in isolation.

I tried to maximise the benefits of this learning style as I undertook online conversation of two undergraduate courses (SO200 and SO303). With advice and assistance from CFL partners, I found that online course delivery offers exciting possibilities of re-creating and even enhancing interactive learning elements. I designed “virtual tutorials”, in which Laucala and regional students are mixed in online tutorial groups, interact constantly and complete online tasks together throughout the semester. They take turns in undertaking leadership roles as Team Leader and/or Collator/Poster (i.e., a person who summarises group work and posts it on a Moodle presentation space to share with the rest of the class). What has transpired in this virtual tutorial space is eye-opening and extremely encouraging, as I show below.

**Outcomes corresponding to Example 1.2**

In the “virtual tutorials”, Laucala and regional students have assisted each other on a daily basis, shown each other how to use Moodle functions, asked each other questions about course contents and assessments, exchanged information and examples to improve comprehension, and even provided moral support to each other before assignment due dates and the final exam. When a student is inactive or fails to take a leadership role, others have encouraged them online or intervened to fill the gap. I am indeed often awed by their enthusiasm for online teamwork and initiatives.

Furthermore, the student performance in 2015, when the courses were offered in the new design for the first time, showed remarkable improvement:

**SO200**

Pass rate: approximately from 63% to 82%

A+ and A grades: from 16% to 20%

B+ and B grades: from 18% to 33%
SO303

Pass rate: approximately from 70% to 86%
B+ and B: from 33% to 52%

Students also left relevant comments in an end-of-the-semester “Reflection Forum” on Moodle which I set up to seek their general feedback on the courses. These comments suggest that online/blended learning can indeed enhance student learning experience and interaction:

➢ “For me the things I enjoyed most in the course were the on-line activities, especially the forums and glossary of terms. By constantly interacting with fellow course mates on-line through forum discussions, I was able to know others better and to develop a sense of appreciation and respect for each and everyone in the course.”

➢ “I am now more confident to take blended and online courses. And I really enjoyed studying ‘Modern Social Theory’ (something I thought that would never be possible). I really enjoyed the online activities especially the Discussion Forums. And I agree with [another student name] on the part where everyone was willing to help each other out.”

I presented this experience at the 2015 Vince-Chancellor’s Learning & Teaching Forum as a contribution to the promotion of online course/blended delivery. As the University moves progressively towards online teaching, I believe it is crucial to embrace and maximise the potentials of online/blended delivery to maintain and enhance student learning experience and outcomes. Online conversion is an opportunity for innovation, not necessarily a hindrance to interactive and meaningful learning experience. I intend to continue to improve my knowledge and skills in this area.

Overall outcomes
I am humbled by the comments students made in nominating me, with regards to my overall teaching approach and style:
“She's professional and the best because we always talk and brag about her teachings and behaviour, so persuading. My friends like her because of her behaviour, teaching and everything...”

“She never fails to make us want to come back and learn the next day :) She’s a very inspirational teacher.”

“She used different ways of learning, if it was from doing discussions, presentations, skits, field work or whatever she sometimes didn’t need the resources, her teaching skills were more than enough.”

**Criterion 2: Development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field**

I have been teaching social theory since the mid-1990s when I started tutoring at USP. Over the years, I have been responsible for developing SO100: Introduction to Sociology (currently SO100: Themes and Perspectives in Sociology) and SO200: Modern Social Theory in the face-to-face and print modes, and more recently, converting SO200 and SO303: Advanced Social Theory to the online mode. While teaching at the University of Worcester in 2009 and 2010, I had an opportunity to further develop my curriculum development skills by designing and delivering six undergraduate courses on social theory, social policy, research methodology and the sociology of the family. Since my return to USP in 2010, I have been updating undergraduate course contents to better meet the needs of the University/region and students. I have also been facilitating a major self-review of the Sociology curricula as summarised below.

**Example 2.1: gender mainstreaming**

In light of the University’s and the region’s greater focus on *mainstreaming of gender* in higher education, as well as my own research and teaching interest in gender, I have expanded the feminist and gender components of my undergraduate social theory courses (Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Black and Postcolonial Feminisms in SO200 and Postmodern Feminism and Queer Theory in SO303), and also given special attention to
the contemporary developments in feminist theory (such as Eco-Feminism) in a postgraduate social theory course (SO401).

**Example 2.2: facilitating a major Sociology curriculum review**

In 2015, as a former Discipline coordinator, I proposed and planned a one–day strategic workshop for a major *self-review of the Sociology undergraduate and postgraduate curricula*. This is because the discipline members felt that, as a result of staff turnover/shortage and unplanned changes to the undergraduate/postgraduate programmes over the years, the Sociology curricula had lost some core disciplinary content and coherence. I designed the workshop in consultation with the then Discipline Coordinator, other Sociology colleagues and advisors from other disciplines.

**Outcomes corresponding to Example 2.2**

The workshop successfully facilitated the Sociology team to agree a number of major changes to the Sociology curricula and to develop action plans for their implementation:

- Online conversion of all remaining undergraduate and postgraduate courses to ensure the accessibility of the programmes to all students;
- Major review of and changes to the courses long unrevised and in need of immediate curriculum review attention: SO110, SO206, SO300, SO310, and SO407;
- Graduate Outcome alignment and RSD implementation;
- Greater collaboration with the Social Work and Gender Studies Programmes; and
- Greater collaboration with the Foundation Sociology Programme.

These initiatives/changes are critical to the development of up-to-date curricula with greater disciplinary rigour and coherence at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. I am excited to have helped initiate this process and look forward to successfully completing it with my colleagues.
Criterion 3: Approaches to assessment and feedback that foster independent learning

My students have commented consistently positively on my assessment and feedback practices. My basic feedback policy is simple; to provide timely, constructive and detailed (wherever possible) assessment/feedback. I also ensure that my assessment is consistent and fair, and strictly adheres to the assessment criteria announced at the beginning of the semester. In addition, in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, I endeavor to use formative and summative assessments in a coordinated and effective manner, as discussed below.

Example 3.1: effective use of online formative assessments

In my undergraduate social theory courses, I use the online tutorial (see Example 1.2 above) and other online activities (i.e., individual online glossary and discussion forum) as formative assessments, in which students are asked to undertake individual and collective tasks addressing specific components of unit contents, which serve as building blocks for more holistic achievement assessed in major essays and the final exam. Given the importance of these online formative assessments, I try, as much as time allows, to provide immediate feedback and encouragement, such as commenting on student posts on Moodle, in a way somewhat similar to the constant and spontaneous interaction seen on popular interactive media such as Facebook.

Outcomes corresponding to Example 3.1

I am pleased to read the comments made by students in nominating me, which suggest that these online formative assessments have been effective in enhancing their learning outcomes:

- “Dr Yoko provides us with discussion forum every week. She also provide us glossary to answer after every unit. The feedback she gave after every assignment boosted us to do better on our next assignment.”
- “Her feedback helped me to improve in my assignments, I notice that I do better every time. I do not fall out like I sometimes do in my other courses.”
“I took an Online Course and she helped me to use Moodle conveniently and stay active in group discussions and activities.”

Example 3.2: use of formative and summative assessments in preparing postgraduate students for MA research

In my postgraduate research methodology course (AL400: Research Methodologies in the Humanities and Social Sciences), students start with formative assessments in the classroom, where they collectively critique journal articles against prescribed evaluative criteria with my guidance and feedback. They then proceed to another formative assessment, in which they individually present a critique of a journal article of their own choice in a conference presentation format. At the end of the semester, they synthesise their leaning in a summative assessment of a research proposal, which they produce independently and is assessed according to the same prescribed evaluative criteria. These assessments are designed to prepare postgraduate students, in stages, for three things among others: 1) conference presentations which will become a major part of their future academic/professional career; 2) MA research, with a clear awareness of how their future research proposal will be assessed by the Research Committee; and 3) a rigorous peer review culture, which is new to many students.

Example 3.3: seeking student feedback on my teaching practices

In addition, I believe that feedback should be as much about our own teaching practices as about student learning. It is my policy to regularly ask students for feedback on my performance as a lecturer. I set aside time, especially at mid-semester, to ask students to evaluate my teaching practices and make suggestions for improvement, without waiting for the Student Evaluation of Courses at the end of the semester so that I can make necessary changes in the second half of the semester.

Outcomes relating to Example 3.3

I am pleased that students seem to notice my interest in their feedback. I quote below two students who nominated me. I do hope I am making the improvement that meets their approval:
“[A]fter every 3 weeks she always ask the students to evaluate the lecture notes and what is needed to be improved.”

“Yoko always made sure her students were comfortable in her style of teaching and was always welcoming in students’ feedback.”

**Overall outcomes**

Students also made general comments on my feedback policy/practices when they nominated me:

- “Dr Yoko she [is] really a professional lecturer she give[s] her feedback on time and also she always call[s] students in her office to give them extra advice how to go on with their assignments.”
- “Dr. Yoko helped improved my learning skills. She inspired me in many ways especially not giving up what I love to do and to further prosper in the Sociology field.”
- “She always provides us with our assignment's feedback. And she always mentioned what are our weaknesses in writing or in our supporting points which encourage us to better in next writings.”

**Criterion 4: Respect and support for the development of students as individuals**

It has been a rewarding and inspiring experience to facilitate USP students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world in which they live. My professional goal has been to contribute to their academic, personal and professional development by appreciating and addressing their unique strengths, struggles and potentials as individuals. I have taken several initiatives to *forge partnerships with students* and to *invite them to participate in the life and culture of the Discipline, School, and University*. I feel that two of them have been particularly successful.

**Example 4.1: supporting student-led initiatives**

In 2015, I assisted undergraduate Sociology students in setting up a *Sociology Student Association*, the first initiative of the kind taken by Sociology students. Having seen the
sense of community fostered by online learning (see Example 1.2), I encouraged my students to pursue their idea to establish a formal peer network and provided advice as the Sociology discipline’s student liaison staff.

**Outcome corresponding to Example 4.1**

The Association was successfully established in late 2015 and is currently planning a Sociology marketing drive, which will involve students visiting secondary schools in Suva to introduce/market the discipline, an entirely student-led initiative. Sociology staff are expected to join the school visits under student leadership. I feel this is a perfect example of students developing and showcasing their leadership skills and maturity as individuals with academic staff contributing to the process with collegial advice and encouragement. Their enthusiasm has been nothing less than an inspiration to me.

**Example 4.2: creating space for showcasing postgraduate student work and interaction between postgraduate student and academic staff**

In 2015 I organised the School of Social Science’s inaugural *Postgraduate Student Seminar Series*, a forum for MA and PhD students to present their research ideas, plans, and/or findings to staff/students for feedback and suggestions. It is also an opportunity for them to practice their formal presentation skills (I moderated the seminars by adopting the standard conference presentation format). Six students from different disciplines (Sociology, History, and Psychology) presented their work to peers and staff.

**Outcomes corresponding to Example 4.2**

The seminar series received highly favorable feedback particularly from postgraduate students themselves, who felt better supported and appreciated as junior researchers in the School. I am pleased to note that this has since become a regular School event with the coordinator’s role taken over by a colleague.

**Overall outcomes**

Finally, I wish to quote one of the comments students made in nominating me:
“[S]he teaches her students not to only graduate with a degree but to also have an understanding of their own society and how each development will help the Pacific society in future.”

This is exactly what I aspire to do, to contribute to students’ development as individuals, and as future leaders who will contribute to the development of Pacific societies. Feedback such as this is the greatest reward for me as a teacher.

I also wish to quote another student who noticed my interest in Pacific cultures and the mutual respect that defines our relationship. This is not something that I have consciously intended but rather an outcome of the mutual trust that students and I have established through our collective learning experience:

“Dr Yoko has a great respect on her courses that she teaches and also she has a great respect to cultures and traditions of Pacific islands. She understands the behavior and attitude of Pacific islanders very well. Therefore students also respect her.”

**Criterion 5: Scholarly activities that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching**

I have had the privilege of participating in some extremely worthwhile learning & teaching related professional activities. I have found two of them especially important because they impact not only on my own teaching practices but also on those of my colleagues at the School level.

**Example 5.1: Active involvement in university-wide curriculum review: STAR**

While I am a novice in *curriculum review*, I have enjoyed and learnt much from my role as one of the original *STAR trainers*, who have been participating in the STAR project since the first ‘train the trainers’ workshop in 2011. I have contributed to overseeing the School’s curriculum review journey, under the guidance and leadership of my senior colleague Dr. Bruce Yeates. As the only original STAR trainers in the School, Dr. Yeates and I have been working with all six disciplines of the School and organised yearly workshops to advance their curriculum review work. We have to date facilitated
the development and yearly review of their curriculum maps and Programme-Specific Graduate Outcomes. Since last year, our work has progressed further to the alignment of individual course learning outcomes and assessments with the USP Institutional Graduate Outcomes and Programme-specific Graduate Outcomes (also integrated with the Research Skills Development framework in many cases), in view of the upcoming WSCUC accreditation.

Example 5.2: Facilitating the School’s curriculum review to meet the WSCUC requirements

In regards to *WSCUC accreditation*, the School of Social Sciences was the first School in the University to organise a one-day workshop in November 2015 to brief all staff on the significance, requirements and process of WSCUC accreditation, to ensure that each discipline developed their own action plan to meet the accreditation requirements and designated a STAR/WSCUC Leader.

Outcomes corresponding to Examples 5.1 and 5.2

Under Dr. Yeates’ leadership I have contributed to the achievement of the following outcomes:

- All School of Social Sciences staff having participated in a one-day STAR/Accreditation Workshop in November 2015;

- All six disciplines in the School of Social Sciences have to date:
  - Become familiar with the USP Graduate Outcomes (GOs);
  - Created, reviewed and validated Programme-specific GOs;
  - Undertaken Curriculum Mapping;
  - Aligned individual Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) with USP GOs and Programme-specific GOs;
  - Begun to align assessments with the CLOs, USP GOs, and Programme-specific GOs; and
  - Designated a STAR/WSCUC Leader.
The School of Social Sciences has formed a STAR/WSCUC Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, chaired by myself as the Deputy Head of School and consisting of the L&T Chair and the Discipline STAR/WSCUC Leaders.

I see these processes as not only strategically important to the University but also pedagogically sound and necessary. As a relatively long-serving staff member, I am excited about these learning and teaching innovations that are transforming our practices as educators and consider myself fortunate to be given a role to play in this journey.

In Conclusion
It has been a privilege to teach at my alma mater, especially at a time when the University is undergoing an exciting process of positive transformation and growth with a central focus on student learning experience and outcomes. Online course delivery as well as ongoing curriculum review, which started with STAR and continues today with WSCUC accreditation, are primary examples of the University’s initiatives for innovation in learning and teaching. I believe that such cutting-edge initiatives, by facilitating the academic, personal and professional development of young Pacific islanders, contribute to the sustainable development of the region as a whole. While the contributions we make in our day-to-day learning and teaching practices are modest, I believe a critical mass of committed teachers will make a critical difference to the success of these initiatives. I hope to continue to improve my teaching practices to play a part in this process.