

Northern Regional Hub-funded project

Project Report



Ako Atū, Ako Mai: Kaiako
collaborating, learners
collaborating

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Executive Summary..... | 2 |
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Collaboration as a 21 st Century Skill for students and Kaiako | 3 |
| Project aims, purpose and setting..... | 4 |
| Professional Learning Communities and Peer Mentoring..... | 4 |
| Methodology | 5 |
| Data collection and analysis..... | 6 |
| Key Findings | 7 |
| Outputs..... | 7 |
| Discussion of the Findings..... | 8 |
| Pre-Production..... | 8 |
| A training workshop..... | 8 |
| Establishing a PLC..... | 9 |
| An ideal environment for group collaboration..... | 10 |
| Developing peer mentoring relationships..... | 10 |
| Production | 11 |
| Benefits of collaboration | 11 |
| Changes made to practice | 13 |
| Post-Production..... | 14 |
| Collaboration now and in the future | 14 |
| Value to Kaiako..... | 16 |
| Value to the students | 16 |
| Value to the organisation | 16 |
| Summary..... | 17 |
| Project outputs..... | 19 |
| PLC Implementation Guideline | 19 |
| Suggestions for Future Practice..... | 21 |
| Conclusion | 21 |
| References..... | 22 |
| APPENDIX A – Teaching Self-Review Checklist..... | 24 |
| APPENDIX B – Peer Mentoring Reflection Form | 28 |

Executive Summary

Collaboration is central to our fast-paced, constantly changing world. We work and live in relation to others. Our success at any endeavor is often dependent upon our ability to collaborate. Yet despite a recognition of the importance of collaboration, we often fail to appreciate that this is a set of skills and behaviours that need developing. This project was about developing the skills and behaviours of collaboration – helping teachers (Kaiako) to collaborate and in so doing helping Kaiako to help students to learn how to collaborate.

Ako Atu, Ako Mai: Kaiako collaborating, learners collaborating was about Kaiako constructing their pedagogical knowledge through collaboration and sought to determine whether through focused critical thinking opportunities, collaboration models of operating supported Kaiako pedagogical practice. Collaborative opportunities were trialed over a six-month period, providing environments where Kaiako could learn co-teaching skills, course and programme design methods, teaching methods in the creative practice context, and, importantly, how to work as a collaborative team. The concept of *Ako* provides the theory and framework for this project. Introduced by Pere (1982), the term *Ako* refers to a unified cooperation of learner and teacher in a single enterprise. It offers a distinctly different cultural perspective on the interchangeability of teacher and learner or tutor and tutee, framing the Kaiako activities and roles within the project as mentors, mentees and peers, learning in peer and expert-novice relationships.

The context for the project is the SAE Creative Media Institute (SAE) in Auckland, a PTE that delivers industry-focused education, for the audio, music and screen industries. SAE is a NZQA accredited, degree granting institution that is connected to a global network of over 50 SAE campuses worldwide. A model for Kaiako collaboration as a professional development mechanism was not currently operating in SAE at the commencement of the project.

Two collaborative models were trialed:

1. a Professional Learning Community (PLC) comprising six-weekly meetings
2. a peer mentoring support model involving peer (dyad) partnership meetings in the time between PLC meetings.

These models provided opportunities for Kaiako to learn and exchange ideas within a climate of debate, investigation and evaluation (Wagner, Garner & Kawulich, 2011). It is proposed that the models will subsequently influence students' learning experiences and outcomes, including development of collaborative skills as an essential 21st Century skill.

Three resources have been developed from the project:

- 1) a PLC Implementation Guideline
1. a Teaching Self-Review Checklist
2. a Peer Mentoring Reflection Form.

These resources can be used by other tertiary and education providers interested in implementing mechanisms to support Kaiako and student collaboration in their institutions.

Introduction

Collaboration as a 21st Century Skill for students and Kaiako

To teach students how to learn and work collaboratively, Kaiako need to model the skills and behaviours of effective collaboration, including soft skills and transferable skills (Forrier & Sels, 2003; van der Heijden, 1999; van der Heijden, 2002). It cannot be assumed that Kaiako know how to effectively collaborate, nor how to model and teach this essential 21st Century skill to students. New Zealand tertiary education providers are therefore seeking ways to build collaboration skills with Kaiako to help them teach collaboration to learners.

Krathwohl's (2002) knowledge taxonomy positions metacognitive knowledge – of which collaboration is part of – as the highest type of knowledge dimension for an individual, whilst Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen and Grissom (2015) affirm that high quality collaboration among teachers is associated with increases in their students' achievement, their teaching practice, and their peers' students' achievement. The benefits that can be realised by the SAE Kaiako engaging in stronger collaborative approaches to their work, such as participating in the PLC and peer mentoring include enhancement of own learning and critical reflection on their teaching, a fostering of collaboration, and support of educational capability development (Booth, Merga & Mat Roni, 2016).

Collaboration is recognised at the highest levels within the New Zealand tertiary education community. At a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) 2018 Investment Round workshop, for example, Mike Blanchard, the Deputy Chief Executive of Operations, spoke about the importance of collaboration from the Tertiary Education Organisation level through to individual staff. Dr Karen Poutasi (2017), in her address at the 2016 Secondary Principals' Association NZ (SPANZ) conference, highlighted collaboration as a 21st Century skill wanted by employers. These views are supported by Washington (2018) in his article contending that the overarching purpose of 21st Century education is to provide students with a set of critical skills that will be needed for success in a global market, specifically: creativity, collaboration, critical-thinking, and communication.

Strong principles of an effective learning community include collaboration and connection. Participation in these communities provides Kaiako with an opportunity for ongoing, self-directed learning and ownership of professional development (tki, n.d.). Burton (2015) talks about how collaborative practices can be unstructured and inconsistent, leading to a perception that collaboration is unvalued or not obligated.

SAE is a practice-based, industry-aligned provider of accredited higher education programmes, preparing students for participating in the creative media workforce. They recognise the importance of collaboration for Kaiako professional development and student learning, positioning collaboration as a central skill in their recently accredited degrees; for example, 210 of the 360 credits for each degree is made up of collaborative projects. These qualifications in Audio Production, Music Production and Screen Production are the result of stakeholder engagement including listening to what the industry needed. A student peer mentoring programme has also been established to promote collaboration across levels, providing support for early-stage students by level 7 students. Within creative industries, there is a strong understanding of the importance of being collaborative and a recognition that Kaiako should role-model this skill.

Project aims, purpose and setting

The central aim of this project was to determine the effectiveness of a PLC and peer mentoring model as two collaborative mechanisms for professional development of Kaiako in the PTE context. These models were used to:

- 1) create a collaborative environment for Kaiako to make implicit pedagogical knowledge more explicit
- 2) foster Kaiako capability to work collaboratively with peers to bring about evidence-based informed developments in their pedagogy
- 3) stimulate pedagogic dialogue and development within SAE
- 4) increase successful student achievement and course completion in the longer-term.

It was anticipated that the learning gained from this project would lift internal teaching and learning capability and increase research competencies of Kaiako teaching degree qualifications. This will bring a focus to ongoing and future professional development in SAE through building organisational systems and developing mechanisms for staff to share their learning. Beyond SAE, the research team also hoped to contribute to a wider understanding of how collaboration models support and enhance Kaiako research and teaching practices.

Professional Learning Communities and Peer Mentoring

Two collaborative models were trialed in this project: A Professional Learning Community (PLC) comprising six-weekly one-hour meetings, and a peer mentoring support model involving peer dyad partnership meetings in the time between PLC meetings. The peer mentoring model utilized the conceptualisation of co-mentoring, where Kaiako gave and received support in their partnerships (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2010). This model guided the processes and practices of Kaiako peer and self-review, Kaiako using self- and peer-review guides as a means of capturing their mentoring conversations. The two models provided opportunities for Kaiako to learn and exchange ideas within a climate of debate, investigation and evaluation (Wagner et al., 2011).

Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) in their review of the literature on PLCs conclude that there is no universal definition of a professional learning community. They add however that there is broad international consensus that a PLC suggests a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-centered, growth-promoting way (p. 223). The Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website (n.d.) defines a PLC as:

“A group of organisations or individuals that operate as a collaborative network. Some are face-to-face but many are connected via the Internet. They provide opportunities for educators to connect with others, share ideas and resources, reflect critically on their practice, and create new knowledge about teaching and learning”.

Although the TKI material on PLCs is positioned within the compulsory school sector, their rationale for establishing PLCs can be applied in the tertiary education environment, as they state:

“To maintain a 21st century focus teachers need to be continually learning themselves. This means engaging in professional learning communities where educationally challenging discussions and sharing of practice occur. The exposure to new ideas and ways of teaching ensures teachers are continuing to learn and improve their practice. Professional learning communities need to be more than networks; they need to stimulate and provoke teacher learning and development.”

Darwin (2000) defines peer mentoring as comprising mutually supportive and challenging partnerships of co-equals. The use of peer mentoring as a Kaiako reflective and professional development tool and as an approach to enhancing student engagement and success is common within the tertiary and higher education sectors in New Zealand and globally (Andrews & Clarke, 2011; Collier, 2017; Lunsford, Crisp, Dolan & Wuetherick, 2011; Nash & Pukepuke, 2011; Ross & Grant, 2012; Townsend, Kidd & Figg, 2011). However, the use of formal and facilitated PLCs in the New Zealand PTE environment as a Kaiako support mechanism is a relatively new phenomenon. Additionally, evidence of the effectiveness of PLCs combined with peer mentoring in the PTE context through trialing a pilot programme is scarce in the available literature.

Methodology

The project commenced with the assumption that collaboration impacts positively on Kaiako professional development by engendering a greater sense of belonging, both socially and academically. The primary data sources included:

- a review of the literature on collaboration which assisted in the initial design of the PLC and peer mentoring approaches
- transcribed minutes of the PLC meetings, summarising the Kaiako discussion points and any shared strategies and resources
- transcribed Kaiako reflections documented in a peer mentoring reflection form
- summative interviews with Kaiako conducted at the conclusion of the project trial period to gather their feedback about the effectiveness and usefulness of participating in a PLC and dyad peer mentoring partnerships.



10 Kaiako based on the SAE Auckland campus who teach across different disciplines and programmes participated in the project. They met as a PLC every six weeks and engaged in peer mentoring partnerships between the PLC meetings to continue collaborating with each other to gain peer support and feedback on their teaching and research practices. The peer partnerships were organised by Kaiako aiming for cross-discipline pairings. At each PLC meeting, Kaiako reported back on how they

had used the peer mentoring opportunities and any actions they had taken as a consequence.

The project commenced with a training workshop for Kaiako which:

- i) explained the concept and practice of PLCs and peer mentoring
- ii) described the expectations of the collaboration activities in the project context
- iii) provided an opportunity for Kaiako to identify how they would use the PLC and peer mentoring partnerships for their pedagogical and research capability development.

The original intent had been for the project mentor - who was based outside Auckland - to participate in the PLC meetings via an online platform. Zoom video conferencing was agreed on as the most accessible form of online connection. This method of connecting the project mentor with Kaiako in the meetings only occurred twice during the six-month period as all participants decided the flow of the PLC process and discussions was diminished, thus reducing the quality of collaboration. Consequently, the project mentor attended three of the six meetings in person, the other team members facilitating three meetings.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected iteratively throughout the project through transcribed minutes of the PLC meetings and a summative focus group interview conducted by the project mentor at the conclusion of the six-month period. Kaiako were asked to share their experiences and learnings from their peer mentoring partnership at each PLC meeting, providing an avenue for data collection directly related to application and outcomes of the peer mentoring activities. The summative interview gathered feedback from Kaiako about the effectiveness and usefulness of the PLC and the peer mentoring partnerships, for example:

- how working and learning collaboratively increased pedagogic knowledge and practices
- the advantages of learning and working collaboratively
- how collaborative models help Kaiako critically reflect on and make improvements to their practice
- any challenges participating in a collaborative environment.

Thematic analysis was undertaken to evaluate Kaiako discussions during the meetings and their responses in the final interview. The key themes that emerged from this analysis related to how the PLC influenced Kaiako construction of pedagogical knowledge and improvement of teaching and learning practices; the advantages and/or drawbacks of engaging in peer mentoring partnerships to review practice; and the value of peer mentoring as it supports peer and self-review. A review of the literature on collaboration as a mechanism to foster pedagogical knowledge and enhance the development of collaborative skills in Kaiako was undertaken to further inform this project.

Key Findings

This project proved to be a valuable and insightful way of determining how collaborative models such as a PLC and peer mentoring can enhance pedagogical knowledge. The project also allowed us to assess how effective such models were. Specifically, we found:

- Commencing the project with a training workshop provided Kaiako with an opportunity to explore the concepts of a PLC and peer mentoring as collaborative tools to support their teaching and research practices. The workshop enabled Kaiako to engage in and benefit from the PLC meetings and peer mentoring partnerships as there was an established understanding of the purpose and processes for these two activities and of their roles and responsibilities as PLC group members and peer mentors.
- The PLC meetings provided a place and space for Kaiako to share their teaching and research experiences, discuss and seek solutions to teaching and learning challenges, ask for feedback on their research projects, and explore opportunities for collaborating on projects that would enrich their students' learning experiences.
- The PLC modelled an effective environment for Kaiako, enabling them to model the skills and behaviours of collaboration with their students.
- The PLC prompted Kaiako to engage in critical reflection on their practice. Reflecting on practice was further enhanced by their engagement in the peer mentoring partnerships.
- Peer mentoring provided a framework to guide Kaiako peer and self-review.
- Through peer mentoring, Kaiako build empathy for student peer learning processes.
- Peer mentoring provided a conduit between the PLC and continued professional development.

Outputs

Based on the Kaiako feedback and documenting the PLC and peer mentoring activities they engaged in during the project, a PLC implementation guideline was developed (*refer Figure 2., p22*), which, together with a teaching self-review checklist (*Appendix A*) and a peer mentoring reflection form (*Appendix B*), are the key outputs from this project. These resources will impact on Kaiako engagement in regular evaluation of and reflection on their teaching and research and increase their ability to design and use sound pedagogical methods.

Given the lack of published studies of any similar use of combining two collaborative models to support Kaiako pedagogy in the New Zealand PTE sector, this project extends the existing knowledge and practice of PLCs and peer mentoring as professional development support mechanisms. It is anticipated that the resources developed here will be easily transferable and immediately useful to other providers across the New Zealand tertiary landscape.

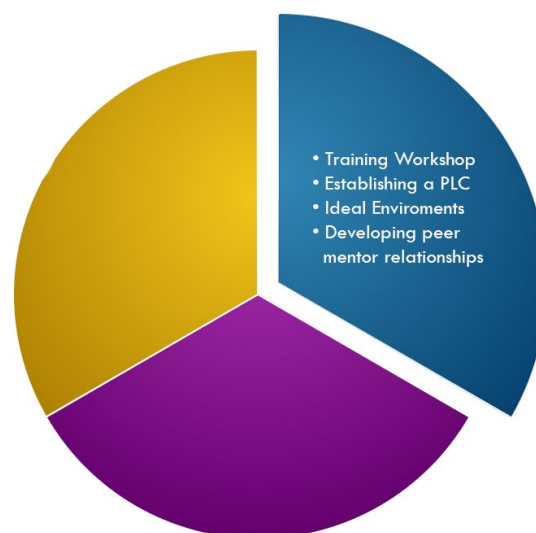
Discussion of the Findings

Our findings are primarily qualitative in nature as the project activities and data collection methods were focused on gathering Kaiako comments, conversations and responses to the summative interview questions. Kaiako comments are included to provide a real sense of their experiences and perspectives as they participated in the two collaborative activities.

We decided to frame our discussion of the project findings through language and processes that are common within the creative industries, that being pre-production, production and post-production. While this 3-stage model is most often found with creative productions such as filmmaking, it is an effective framework to also discuss the processes that occurred in our project and in particular the project findings.

Pre-Production

Our project found that there were some essential mechanisms that needed establishing at the outset, that is, during a **pre-production** stage, in order to help enhance collaboration. These included running a training workshop, establishing a PLC, creating an ideal environment for collaboration to occur and developing peer mentoring relationships.



A training workshop

A one-day training workshop facilitated at the beginning of the project provided Kaiako with the opportunity to explore the concepts of a PLC and peer mentoring, and make decisions about their expectations, the purpose, the process, and the outcomes of the six-weekly meetings and peer partnerships they would engage in. The workshop was a professional learning opportunity that fell within the framework of collaboration as it provided scaffolding for Kaiako to begin developing collegial relationships within a 'rehearsal space' (Pemberton, Mavin & Stalker, 2007).

The qualities and skills of PLC group members in terms of both what people bring to a PLC and how they influence the group dynamic were emphasised, as well as how Kaiako could use the peer mentoring partnerships as another opportunity to collaborate and further enhance their practice. Other topics included:

- Purpose and strategies of reflective practice
- Communication fundamentals – feedback, listening, and questioning
- Research by creative practice

- Principles of good teaching

In the summative interview, Kaiako were asked to consider the usefulness of that initial workshop in helping them understand the concept and practice of collaboration and prepare them for participating in the PLC and their peer mentoring partnerships. From their perspective, the workshop was vital, enabling them to gain a better understanding of a PLC and how peer mentoring can be used as a review and feedback tool. They also appreciated being able to decide how they would use the PLC meeting time.

Additionally, the workshop provided them with an opportunity to discuss their current teaching and research projects, including sharing exemplars and getting early-stage feedback on these. There was agreement across the group that *“by the end of the workshop the purpose of the project became more relevant, particularly hearing about what others are working on and how we can enhance this work through collaboration”*. One Kaiako stated that he *“felt jazzed by the end of the workshop.”*

Establishing a PLC

“I was still trying to figure out what research is, so struggled in the early stages with how to get something out of the PLC meetings.”

Feedback from the Kaiako regarding what they thought was important in establishing the PLC reflected the stages a group often moves through to become a cohesive, high-functioning team originally developed by Tuckman in 1965. For example, one Kaiako admitted that at the start of the PLC they had been very hesitant to speak up and contribute, however as the meetings continued, *“the meaning, purpose, and conversations were normalised as people offered examples of their work”*. Another Kaiako made similar comments, saying *“There was a sort of strangeness phasing into the whole process but that started to change quite early on”*.

Several Kaiako talked about the amount of uncertainty that had existed in the beginning. Being held accountable for the quality of their work had created a level of uncertainty for some Kaiako and it had taken them a while to work through this. One Kaiako stated, *“Even though we knew the PLC was about sharing and getting feedback from each other. What if I shared something that was ineffective and got this sort of feedback?”*. Kaiako were clear in the early stages of the project that it was vital to establish a safe place to talk and share.

As the project progressed and the gatherings became a regular event, Kaiako felt more at ease with the process and how they were working together: *“Everyone contributes to creating a sense of safeness, therefore the norms and expectations of behaviour are agreed to and adhered by all of us.”* Their comments highlighted the reality that collaboration doesn't happen immediately just because a group of Kaiako are brought together to meet once every six weeks. People need time to feel comfortable participating in and making the most of the PLC meetings: *“It has taken up to now for me to really figure out the discussions about the what, where, and how of research and teaching.”*

An ideal environment for group collaboration

“It has been one of the few places where academic staff come together. We don’t often meet like this or think of ourselves as a collective.”

Holding the PLC meetings away from the workplace environment was strongly advocated by all Kaiako, keeping the PLC separate from the usual work environment. They thought that changing the physical environment would “*definitely make for more relaxed meetings and increase our productivity as a group*”. The PLC was described as a place where Kaiako could remove themselves from their usual work area and the classroom and avoid distractions: “*I can gain headspace by moving away from my workspace. The PLC separates you from getting distracted by work waiting*”. They also talked about the importance of securing the PLC meetings from interruptions.

As well as talking about the physical environment of the PLC, some Kaiako focused on the social-emotional aspects, such as how they interacted with and treated each other, and how committed people needed to be if the PLC was going to have any positive influence. Comments like “*commitment to the PLC is important*” and “*people have to care about each other for this to work*” highlighted this.

Developing peer mentoring relationships

“The PLC would be a huge vacant space if we didn’t have the peer mentoring as well.”

Valuing the opportunity to have a peer mentor was apparent in Kaiako feedback, many of them stating this was a new source of support for their pedagogical practice. Several factors were identified by them as critical in establishing the peer mentoring partnerships to ensure both partners benefitted from this collaborative activity. These included:

- Schedule regular meeting times and dates and commit to these.
- Acknowledge and talk through each other’s style of dialogue.
- Have a clear concept of what peer mentoring is.
- Participants choose how formal they want the meetings to be.
- Recognise that mentoring is not a form-filling exercise.

When asked what they thought were essential elements that influence the effectiveness of a peer mentoring relationship, Kaiako identified six, as depicted here. They talked about the relationship as needing to be reciprocal, where peers share their experiences and the relationship is mutually beneficial.

Although trust is illustrated as one of the six elements, Kaiako saw this as a pivotal aspect of the peer relationship.

Without trust, the degree of reciprocity and sharing of experiences “*would be greatly diminished*”.



Production

Once the collaborative models of a PLC and peer mentoring had been established, it became clear that these mechanisms had benefit to Kaiako, impacting on and leading to changes in their practice. These three findings are outlined below as part of the **production** stage of collaboration.

Benefits of collaboration

“I don’t feel like we have to be our own island of knowledge now.”

Kaiako identified several benefits they had received from the PLC and the peer mentoring partnerships. Whilst some of the benefits were attributed specifically to the PLC others to the peer mentoring, Kaiako also talked generally about collaboration as an effective mechanism to support their professional practice. Comments such as “*It feels like people genuinely care*” and “*Working together is a real morale booster*” indicated the value for Kaiako from collaborating. Additional comments made about the benefits are summarised in Table 1. Direct quotes from Kaiako provide their perceptions of and experiences in the two collaborative activities.

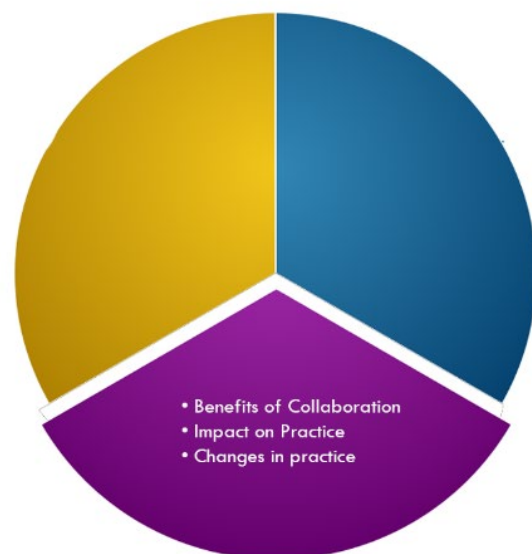


Table 1 – Benefits of Collaborating

| PLC | Peer Mentoring |
|---|--|
| <i>Reflect on your own work after hearing about other's</i> | <i>Identified a whole lot of things of interest for me to get my teeth into</i> |
| <i>Tremendous value in the conversations we had</i> | <i>The peer mentoring provided a psychologically safe space</i> |
| <i>Contextualised scholarly work for me</i> | <i>Helped make sense of PLC for me</i> |
| <i>Pushes you to explore other exciting projects/opportunities</i> | <i>It was a very positive experience. I hope to do more of it</i> |
| <i>I am starting to contextualise projects – useful to see what others are doing in this space. See different versions of projects and learn how to contextualise these – want to continue to get</i> | <i>Provided an opportunity to share inter-departmentally, sharing our research endeavours and teaching expertise</i> |
| <i>Bringing together of the academic staff across disciplines/departments</i> | <i>It provided a mechanism for having purposeful conversations</i> |

As discussed in the pre-production section of this report, Kaiako had experienced some uncertainty and hesitancy to share their practice and ask for feedback from each other in the early stages of the PLC. This was illustrated in Kaiako feedback, for example: *“Initially it took a while to share something that was ineffective and get feedback on this, but this feels more and more like a safe place”*.

There was unanimous agreement in the group that the peer mentoring partnerships had created a conduit between the PLC meetings and their continued skill development.

Comments such as *“The mentoring was a mechanism to continue the conversation outside the PLC”* and *“I was able to identify a whole lot of things of interest for me to get my teeth into from the meetings which my peer mentor could then support me with”* illustrated Kaiako perceptions of the value and benefits of engaging in peer mentoring partnerships alongside the PLC.

One Kaiako talked about the *“tremendous value”* he had gained from the peer conversations and that he hoped there would be further opportunity to continue the mentoring. Another Kaiako added that peer mentoring was imperative, and that *“without it, work would be problematic”*. Although Kaiako had not used the partnerships to engage in reciprocal teaching observations, they all acknowledged the benefits of this and planned to incorporate teaching observations with their peer mentor in the future.

Using the peer mentoring reflection form added another dimension of support to the peer mentoring. Kaiako chose to diarise their mentoring conversations at the time of meeting as well as using the form at other times to document their thinking and reflections. Two Kaiako acknowledged that they had not met regularly in their mentoring partnership as time to get together was a challenge, and therefore they hadn't benefitted as much as others who had met consistently:

“We didn’t put enough time and effort into the partnership. We need to dedicate time to it to really feel the benefits of it. Time was difficult to get together as the department was under a lot of strain when we started this project.”

One of the questions in the summative interview asked Kaiako to consider how the peer mentoring had influenced their self-review. Their responses included:

“Heaps. The mentoring has helped me get ready to enroll in a Masters programme and decide what I want to do in my research.”

“Finding out about each other’s fields of interest has helped me in my decision-making.” “It has given me a leg-up as I have had this opportunity to think about what I want to do.” “Very useful with my programme development.”

“My peer mentor has helped me immensely with my exegesis.”

“The value has been huge, being with a peer who knows what they are doing and learning from them.”

Changes made to practice

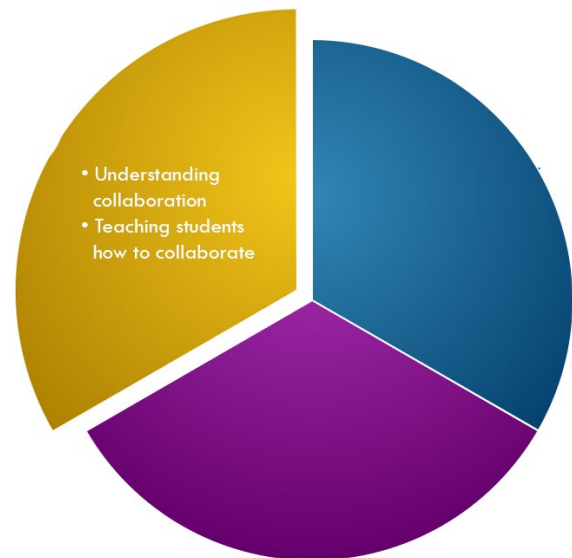
With an eye to the second aim of this project, we were interested to explore if Kaiako had made any changes to their teaching and research practices as a result of engaging in the PLC and peer mentoring partnerships. This was a question asked iteratively throughout the project at each PLC meeting, and in the summative interview. Some Kaiako identified significant changes they had made, with comments such as *“This has enabled me to share research work across student cohorts because I found out about them in the PLC meetings”* and *“I have introduced different modes of research into the level 7 students’ curriculum”*.

Others mentioned more generic changes like accessing expertise from other Kaiako to develop their teaching material and framing project work differently having heard how other Kaiako were managing this in their programmes.

Kaiako feedback indicated that group discussion, sharing across departments and disciplines, and learning from each other leads to Kaiako making changes and developing their practice. The PLC and peer mentoring were catalysts for this.

Post-Production

Upon conclusion of the project and therefore the piloting of the two collaborative models – the PLC and peer mentoring, we identified that Kaiako now have a deeper understanding of collaboration and in so doing can now more effectively teach students how to collaborate. These **post-production** findings are outlined below.



Collaboration now and in the future

Given that the main objective of this project was to investigate whether collaboration positively influenced Kaiako teaching and research practices, three of the summative interview questions asked Kaiako to consider if the PLC and peer mentoring had improved their understanding of collaboration and development of collaborative skills, whether they felt more able to explain collaboration to students, and if they thought students would benefit from developing collaborative skills.

There were mixed responses to the first question, ranging from some Kaiako admitting they were still unclear about the meaning of collaboration “*per se*” whilst others stated they believed working together collaboratively was already happening: “*If we weren’t working in a collaborative way already, this would have been a revelation*”. This latter comment was contextualised by one Kaiako adding “*We were already collaborating within our departments however not as a whole cross-disciplinary group*”.

In response to the second question, Kaiako said that they had always felt confident in explaining collaboration to their students, “*regardless of the project and the opportunities to engage in the PLC and peer mentoring*”. One Kaiako stated that they felt more able to help students understand the concept of collaboration as a direct result of participating in the collaboration activities themselves. A similar response was given by another Kaiako as they said, “*I am encouraging students to realise when and where collaboration is needed because I am far more familiar with the concept now*”.

The third question generated several affirmative comments about the benefits students would realise from developing collaboration skills, with two Kaiako stating

that their film students have to collaborate, *“it’s not a choice”*. Other comments included:

“Yes, I think there would always be a group of students who would be interested in coming together to present their work and get feedback from each other. This would entice them to collaborate with each other.”

“My experience to date? The students are fine collaborating to create the work together i.e., working on projects together, however they struggle with presenting and getting feedback from peers.”

“I think students engaging in collaboration to support their learning would normalise the idea of constructive criticism.”

As well as creating opportunities for students to collaborate and integrating this methodology in their programmes, some Kaiako also highlighted the importance of helping students learn how to collaborate. For example, *“Students need a Kaiako to guide them in collaborative activities so that this environment is kept constructive”* and *“We need to give them a process and a vocabulary to provide feedback in peer critique situations”*.

A final question asked of Kaiako centered around what improvements or changes they would suggest for future collaborative activities to be successful in SAE, in particular the benefit of continuing the PLC and peer mentoring partnerships. Several recommendations were made including the importance of maintaining a well-defined structure for both the PLC and peer mentoring process and having the flexibility to change the environment where Kaiako met to work collaboratively. Both suggestions were premised by the need for Kaiako to be able to engage in open discussions with clear expectations in a safe place. Having PLC meetings without the Campus Director always present was mentioned, Kaiako seeing this as allowing for people to speak more freely.

Kaiako also talked specifically about collaboration in the research space, emphasising the benefits of working on projects across disciplines and using the PLC meetings to *“unpack”* research ethics as one example. Having a research policy and allocation of time in place before the PLC is formally established in SAE was mentioned. Although one Kaiako questioned whether participation should be voluntary or compulsory, there was agreement from all Kaiako that the PLC and peer mentoring provided useful mechanisms for supporting their pedagogical practice.

Key Themes Identified

The above research findings indicate that collaborative models such as a PLC and peer mentoring are of value to Kaiako, students and the organisation.

Value to Kaiako

“Learning about the work our colleagues are doing means we can use each other’s expertise with our own student cohort.”

There was consensus across the participants that coming together as a group of Kaiako in a PLC was highly beneficial. As well as providing an opportunity to share practices and talk about teaching and research, some Kaiako also commented on the benefit of the peer mentoring occurring alongside as an additional support mechanism and acting as a conduit to the PLC. The PLC and peer mentoring provided mechanisms for drawing on what Kaiako know and can do as well as what they can’t do, which presented possibilities for mutual engagement and sharing of practice.

Effective collaboration takes time to develop and implement (Williams, 2010). The PLC was a new experience and a new opportunity for Kaiako to consider, discuss, share and learn about their teaching and research practices. By the final PLC meeting, Kaiako comments indicated a shift along this ‘continuum of collaboration’ and realising the benefits of working together for their academic development. Another indicator of Kaiako developing their understanding and use of collaboration was their comments about increased engagement in reflecting on practice through the peer mentoring partnerships and how this was enabling them to integrate collaboration into the curriculum to impact student learning.

Value to the students

This project did not include the student voice. The plan is to engage in a second project which will investigate whether collaboration supports and improves student learning experiences and outcomes. However, findings from the project show a shift in Kaiako thinking and practice around using more collaborative activities to enhance student learning, based on their own experiences as Kaiako collaborating.

Value to the organisation

“There should be a conscious effort by the organisation to prioritise these collaborative activities.”

Programme development, integrating collaborative activities into the curriculum and creating cross-disciplinary student project opportunities were all highlighted as beneficial outcomes from the project. Kaiako collaborating which influences organisational improvement was evident in Kaiako comments and feedback. The PLC and peer mentoring partnerships meant a much wider exposure to ideas, resources, activities and strategies for Kaiako to reflect on and improve teaching and learner engagement, which could be easily added to organisational knowledge. The opportunity for interdisciplinary sharing was emphasised as a key value of the PLC and the peer mentoring initiatives.

Summary

The central aim of this project was to determine whether collaboration supported Kaiako in their teaching and research practices over time. Based on the iterative data collected via the six-weekly PLC meetings, documented Kaiako reflections from their peer mentoring meetings, and the summative focus group interview, opportunities to collaborate regularly and learn how to collaborate had greatly increased Kaiako development of their pedagogical practice.

Was collaboration a unique activity in SAE? Although Kaiako were already engaged in activities such as team and staff meetings, specifically focusing on collaboration as a mechanism to encourage and support critical reflection on practice was rare. As Kaiako in this project identified, the PLC had provided them with opportunities on an ongoing basis to share their teaching experiences, successes and challenges, and listen to and learn from other Kaiako working in the shared context of teaching students. The chance to meet regularly over a six-month period as a PLC and in peer mentoring partnerships meant Kaiako could follow up on strategies they had learned about from each other and were experimenting with in their own teaching context. These two collaborative activities also prompted Kaiako to continually explore new ideas and gather resources for their research.

Challenges in their teaching were brought to the PLC meetings where they were treated with respect and assurance that these were commonly shared amongst the group members. The PLC provided a safe place for Kaiako to share problems they were facing and explore solutions together. As well as using the PLC meeting time to discuss and respond to teaching and research challenges, the Kaiako used their peer mentoring partnerships to meet and talk through strategies for enhancing their practice. This use of time between meetings became a significant aspect of the PLC approach in supporting Kaiako practice.

Since completion of the project, the PLC and peer mentoring have been established as regular Kaiako activities, continuing to develop Kaiako collaboration.

Some Kaiako thought that students were already collaborating in their programme and all stated they felt more confident in understanding the 'what' and the 'how' of collaboration and had confidence in using collaborative activities to support student learning. Although collaborative skills were not specifically transferred to students during the project period, Kaiako made several references to how they felt more able to help their students learn how to collaborate and establish collaboration as a student learning approach.

Figure 1 presents a deliberate practice model that illustrates the key principles of collaboration as identified by Kaiako and supported by the literature. The principle of a shared vision and goals reflect the literature on PLCs which places this as the central element of a collaborative community (Cormier & Olivier, 2009; Humada-Ludeke, 2013). Additionally, Hipp and Huffman (2010) advocate that a PLC requires shared and supportive leadership, shared personal practices, and supportive conditions. And Stoll et al. (2006) describe a PLC as "*A mechanism for capacity building for sustainable improvement*" (p.221). The outer sphere identifies the support mechanisms that enable collaboration to take place.

Figure 1 – Collaboration as a multi-dimensional system of Kaiako support



By the end of the project, Kaiako were working collaboratively and sharing teaching and research strategies with each other. The PLC and peer mentoring partnerships were providing structured opportunities for Kaiako to engage in regular peer and self-review to inform their practice.

Project outputs

As part of establishing the PLC and peer mentoring models at SAE, the following tools were developed. These project outputs may prove helpful for other tertiary institutions keen on developing collaborative skills of their Kaiako:

- A PLC implementation guideline.
- A teaching self-review checklist.
- A peer mentoring reflection tool.

PLC Implementation Guideline

Based on the process and activities involved in this project, and findings from a group of Kaiako engaging in a PLC, a guideline of sequential activities for implementing a PLC is suggested. Figure 2 provides a reflection of the PLC approach that was taken in this project and has been designed accordingly.

The first step in implementing the PLC was the facilitation of a workshop for Kaiako. As this report has highlighted, the workshop provided an essential opportunity for Kaiako to explore the concept and practice of a PLC and peer mentoring as collaborative activities and decide how they would come together as a group of educators in the PLC meetings. The project mentor maintained regular contact with Kaiako via attendance at three of the PLC meetings, and correspondence using Google Docs immediately following each PLC meeting and as reminders for upcoming meetings. Kaiako discussions were documented and uploaded to the Google Docs folder, acting as a reference to key points made or raised and a resource of strategies and ideas that had been shared.

Figure 2 – PLC Implementation Guideline

| Process | Tasks and Activities |
|--|--|
| Training Workshop | Workbook and workshop session plan Peer mentoring reflection form |
| Introductory Email | Reminder of first PLC meeting Reiterate purpose and process of the PLC Meeting agenda and suggested focus |
| Documentation and resource repository | Set up common folder such as Google Docs Folder used to upload meeting discussion points and acts as resource repository |
| PLC Meetings | Six-weekly 1.5-hour duration Scribe takes meeting 'minutes' Meeting leader manages meeting process and group dynamics Rotate leadership role around the group All members have opportunity to share, ask questions, discuss their practice |
| Peer mentoring partnerships | One-hour mentoring meetings held between PLC meetings Tutor reflection on and in practice Trialing teaching & learning strategies Sharing research activities Self- and peer review |
| Correspondence and collection of discussion points, strategies shared, resources | Meeting 'minutes' uploaded to Google Docs folder following each meeting Includes reflective questions for Kaiako to consider for the next meeting Meeting leader responsible for compiling and uploading 'minutes' Resource repository: Peer mentoring reflection form, PLC guidelines |
| Evaluation | Formative and summative (if PLC has an end date) Summative focus group interview Face to face, online, phone, email Regular self- and peer review via peer mentoring partnerships Informal feedback during PLC meetings |

Evaluation was central to this project and a core aspect of the PLC and peer mentoring. It acted as a tool for Kaiako to formatively gauge effectiveness of the meetings and how the PLC and peer mentoring partnerships were supporting them in their practice. Undertaking a summative focus group interview at the conclusion of the project provided another mechanism for Kaiako to discuss and reflect on their experiences in these two collaborative activities and determine the impact of both on their practice.

Suggestions for Future Practice

The PLC and peer mentoring partnerships provided mechanisms for Kaiako to explore their practice and develop pedagogical knowledge and skills. The benefits for Kaiako belonging to a PLC and engaging in peer mentoring would be increased by positioning these two collaborative strategies within SAE's professional development programme.

What is beneficial for an effective design of collaborative strategies that work synergistically? Findings from this project suggest the following:

- A shared domain of interest. In this case, Kaiako teaching and researching in the creative practices in a PTE environment.
- PLC members must be committed and prepared to learn from each other through engagement in the meeting process, discussion and sharing of knowledge and information.
- Kaiako need to regularly engage in peer mentoring to self-review and utilise the opportunity for peer review on practice.
- Peer mentoring provides Kaiako with a conduit to the PLC.

Conclusion

This report was written as a reflection of the approach that was taken in the project to design, implement and evaluate two collaborative tools for Kaiako professional development - a PLC and peer mentoring. Based on Kaiako feedback gathered throughout the project and during the summative focus group interview, the successes of the PLC and peer mentoring partnerships were many, including:

- i) Kaiako interest in continuing to participate in a PLC and peer mentoring
- ii) the connections strengthened across the three departments
- iii) the opportunity to receive mentoring support from their peers
- iv) the sense of belonging to a group of educators with commonalities in teaching and research experiences, knowledge and challenges in their particular field.

As Wagner et al. (2011) state, a PLC provides opportunities for people to learn and exchange ideas within a climate of debate, investigation and evaluation. An important aspect of this is that it takes time and sustained interaction. This project had a finite timeframe in which to design and trial a PLC in conjunction with peer

mentoring to determine if these collaborative mechanisms supported Kaiako in their pedagogical practice. By the conclusion of the project, Kaiako feedback indicated that they had benefitted significantly from participating in these activities and saw themselves as continuing to engage in them in the future. The opportunity to investigate the influence and impact of collaboration on student learning would be an interesting next step as a follow up to this project, and also a key consideration for an organisation intending to implement PLCs alongside peer mentoring as Kaiako development initiatives.

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APPENDIX A – Teaching Self-Review Checklist

1. How do I use appropriate teaching and learning strategies that are effective in addressing individual student learning needs?

| Prompt Questions | Statement | Evidence |
|---|-----------|----------|
| How well do my session plans incorporate a range of activities, resources and modes of delivery that appeal to all learning styles? | | |
| How do I ensure that my students are engaged in their learning? | | |
| How do I monitor student progress and make adjustments for the individual learner? | | |
| How do I integrate literacy and numeracy strategies in the learning content and delivery? | | |
| How are students equipped to engage in learning at the level they are being taught? | | |
| How do I make myself available to support students with their learning outside class hours? | | |
| How do I know what I do is effective for my students? | | |
| How do I support students to become independent, lifelong learners? | | |

2. How do I challenge, inspire and facilitate learning in a variety of contexts?

| Prompt Questions | Statement | Evidence |
|--|-----------|----------|
| How do I give students the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a variety of realistic and current situations? | | |
| How do I ensure that the learning environment is inclusive of a bi-cultural, multi-national and diverse student group? | | |
| In what ways do I encourage students to share opinions from their unique cultural viewpoints, backgrounds and experiences? | | |
| How do I encourage students to value views from perspectives that differ from their own? | | |
| How do I ensure that students from a variety of cultures and backgrounds can relate to the examples and activities that I use? | | |
| How do I actively establish and maintain a safe environment to enable students to share thoughts and opinions? | | |
| What am I doing to be effective in supporting Maori students? | | |
| What am I doing that recognizes Pasifika students' needs? | | |
| How am I effective in promoting international students' learning? | | |

3. How do I incorporate changing technologies and research?

| Prompt Questions | Statement | Evidence |
|--|-----------|----------|
| What choices for open and flexible learning are appropriate for the programme I teach? | | |
| How do I facilitate learning using a variety of technologies, resources and activities? | | |
| In what ways do I engage in research, development and knowledge transfer? | | |
| How can I demonstrate that the material I am using is current? | | |
| How do I search for new developments, resources and research applicable to my field of practice? | | |

4. In what ways do I reflect critically on my own teaching practice?

| Prompt Questions | Statement (what I do and how I do it) | Evidence (describes the quality of what I do) |
|--|--|--|
| How do I apply learning from ongoing professional development and feedback within my discipline/industry and as a teacher? | | |
| What steps do I take to request feedback from students and colleagues? | | |
| How do I integrate feedback from evaluations, peer observation and informal feedback into my teaching? | | |
| How do I seek support or guidance to improve my teaching practice? | | |

5. Summary

| Summary Questions | Statement |
|---|-----------|
| After critically reflecting on my practice, what am I doing that is working well for my students? For example, what are the outcomes for my students? | |
| What are my core strengths? | |
| How can I build on these strengths? | |
| What are the areas that I would like to develop? | |

APPENDIX B – Peer Mentoring Reflection Form

| | |
|---|--|
| Names | |
| Date | |
| Meeting Space | |
| | |
| RESEARCH | Notes from peer mentoring session |
| What research projects am I currently involved in? How are they going? | |
| Are there any barriers that are preventing me from doing that research? | |
| | |
| TEACHING | Notes from peer mentoring session |
| What teaching am I currently involved in? | |
| How are those classes going? | |
| Are there any barriers that are preventing me from being an effective teacher? | |
| | |
| RESEARCH-INFORMED TEACHING | Notes from peer mentoring session |
| What links currently exist between my research and teaching? | |
| What new links could be formed? | |
| What have I learnt from the PLC that could help ensure my teaching is research-informed? | |
| Are there any opportunities to work with other staff to enhance my research-informed teaching? If so, who/what? | |
| | |
| OVERALL | Notes from peer mentoring session |
| What I am learning from the PLC and peer mentoring collaborations? | |

| | |
|---|--|
| What do I really want to know about research and/or teaching practice that I currently feel unsure about? | |
| Is there anything specific that SAE could do to help me become a better research-informed teacher? | |

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