Māori and Pasifika Apprentices' and Relational Mentoring: A success story for The Skills Organisation

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Background

In the 1980s massive downward trends in employment followed New Zealand's loss of British markets and the international oil crisis. Apprentice recruitment decreased alongside general trends in recruitment. In 1991, with the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework, qualifications became competency-based (rather than time-based) and modular. Industry training organisations (ITOs) were established in 1992 to set national industry standards, ensure the quality of training, and arrange training with tertiary education provider institutions. For ITOs, apprentice retention and the completion of industry qualifications became significant issues, particularly for young Māori and Pasifika. In 2002, apprenticeship coordinators were introduced, in part to reduce the drop-out rate of apprentices and, more specifically, to facilitate apprentice placement and to mentor apprentices and employers[1]. These dual responsibilities were in conflict. Firstly, the coordinators were required to support employers to resolve employment relationships that could potentially impact on the development of trust between the coordinator and apprentice. Secondly, coordinators often held positions as assessors, an authority role that was counter to a mentoring role. As well as these conflicts within the role, its effectiveness was often compromised when face-to-face contact was limited by the travel distance between coordinator and the apprentice's work site. In 2005, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) introduced the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)-funded Learning Representatives Programmme. This programme identified workers who could be trained to mentor their fellow-workers. Learning representatives were usually experienced workers who were not in a position of authority over the learner/worker. These two factors facilitated the growth of trust. Their role was to support the worker (for instance, where there were literacy issues) and encourage him/her to progress with learning. Funding for this role ceased in March 2013.

Māori and Pasifika in apprenticeships

In 2003, Māori represented 14 *per cent* and Pasifika people represented 1.9 *per cent* of Modern Apprenticeships (McGregor & Gray, 2003). Key recommendations of the 2003 discussion paper prepared by McGregor and Gray for the Human Rights Commission were that more focus should be placed on supporting Māori and Pasifika learners. However, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) statistics for December 2010 show that there had been only a very small increase in apprenticeships for Māori and Pasifika over the seven-year period. Only 16 *per cent* of Māori and seven *per cent* of Pasifika

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[1] www.tec.govt.nz/Learners-Organisations/Modern-Apprenticeships-Coordinators-MACs/Role

young people were engaged in apprenticeships and traineeships. Within the electrical trades, the percentages for Māori have actually decreased slightly: Māori apprentices and trainees make up 13 *per cent* of the total for the industry. Pasifika make up just nine *per cent* of the total.

Approach to mentoring

The Skills Organisation (Skills) formally the Electrotechnology and Telecommunications Industry Training Organisation)) was concerned at the low levels of recruitment, retention and achievement for Māori and Pasifika. Managers believed that these families lacked knowledge of the electrical trade and therefore were not encouraging their young people into the trade.

> *...most [Pasifika] parents have come out and done labouring work and the story of trades hasn't been told well enough to differentiate between labour and trades. For Māori it's similar but the Māori community overlooked trades with scholarships geared towards university.*
> [Manager]

Work & Education Research & Development Services (WERDS) was commissioned to work with Skills to develop an effective model of mentoring for Māori and Pasifika apprentices, to provide two initial professional development workshops for the mentors, and to support and monitor the programme over the following year of the pilot. WERDS and Skills understood that an innovative and effective approach was needed in order to make a real difference for this group of apprentices. We worked collaboratively to include three unique elements:

1. a culturally appropriate approach
2. linking with the apprentices' local and ethnic communities
3. ensuring the mentors brought high 'trade knowledge' to the relationship.

To address the first two elements, the mentors selected for the programme were mostly Māori or Pasifika, and were part of the apprentices' local and/or ethnic communities. The third element was trade knowledge. While the mentors included qualified electricians, what was important was that mentors understood the building trade environment. So a small number of these mainly Māori and Pasifika mentors were drawn from elsewhere in the building trades.

The mentoring programme drew on international and New Zealand research (see, for example, Billet, 2003; Ka'ai, 2006; Clutterbuck & Lane, 2004; Connor & Pokora, 2007; Hipes & Marinoni, 2005; Holland, C., 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Hook *et al.*, 2007; McManus & Russell, 2007; Ragins & Verbos, 2006; Ratima & Grant, 2007). It also learned lessons from professional development and practice (including apprenticeship coordinators, learning representatives and WERDS' work with apprentice mentoring through ITOs). We understood that what counted as effective mentoring sat within a relational framework of regular face-to-face meetings, trust, confidentiality and holistic support, in which issues of power were absent or 'parked'.

The international literature review on mentoring (Holland, 2009a) favoured relational mentoring (the ability to develop empathic, empowering processes through emotional bonds that create personal growth, development and enrichment for both mentors and proteges) and this approach accords with Māori and Pasifika world views. The Māori word *ako* refers to a reciprocal teaching and learning process and implies a more equal and personal relationship between two people in the process than in Pākehā educational traditions (Metge, 1984). Indeed, the Māori word for mentoring is *awhina*, which means friend or helper; thus to mentor is not to have a power relationship between mentor and mentee, but a friendship. Other concepts, identified by Ka'ai (2006) and reproduced in Greenhalgh *et al.* (2011) also suggest a preference for a relational approach in learning by Māori: *manaaki* (hospitality and mutual support), *aroha* (concern for others), *mahi tahi* (working together as a group), and *tuakana teina* (seniors helping juniors and reciprocated).

Method/Design

The approach to mentoring development adopted by Skills and WERDS was socio-cultural, since it was important for mentors to understand that issues faced by apprentices were not only individual (personal), but were often organisational, social and cultural (environmental). We also wanted to draw lessons for the professional development of future mentors working with Māori and Pasifika apprentices, and so in a cyclic action-reflection process, we:

- provided an initial mentor professional development workshop
- monitored and supported ongoing practice by phone, text messaging and email
- fed new information into a further workshops
- provided written guidelines and ongoing individual and group support.

This combined teaching/research process is a further embodiment of the meaning of *ako* (Metge, 1984), where both teachers and students engage in learning and teaching.

The mentors we worked with were tradesmen who ran their own contracting businesses or worked with Skills. Although the mentors held positions of responsibility, they had no authority over the apprentices with whom they worked. As part of our relational approach we took part in several social functions with the mentors and apprentices. These included the Skills launch and dinner at a three-day retreat (described below), and social gatherings held throughout the year. Because a research element was threaded through the programme, there were other opportunities to learn more about learning issues for apprentices and mentors as the programme developed.

The pilot

The pilot was launched by Skills and the training and employing organisation, the Electrical Apprentice Training Company (ETCO), at a three-day retreat at ETCO's training centre south of Auckland. While such introductory training sessions were common practice, features of this particular session were different. Apprentices knew they had been selected to be part of a mentoring pilot, and they spoke appreciatively about this opportunity at the final dinner. Mentors spoke also about what

they could bring to the apprentice experience, several mentioning the advantage of sharing the same cultural background. Apprentices then had the opportunity to ask mentors questions individually, in a 'speed dating' matching arrangement, where mentors stayed sitting and apprentices moved around the room. The process was respectful and non-hierarchical.

As a way of tracking progress with their mentors, the apprentices were interviewed in small focus groups four weeks after the retreat, and then interviewed individually at four-monthly intervals during the year. In addition, Skills and WERDS set up a locked Facebook page for apprentices to discuss their experience of mentoring.

In order to learn about the different experiences for mentored and non-mentored apprentices, we attempted to interview a comparative group supplied by Skills. Unfortunately, only three apprentices were contactable and willing to participate, so a useful comparison between mentored and non-mentored apprentices was not possible. Further, retention and achievement data that would have enabled a comparison of success rates was not available to WERDS for analysis. Therefore, WERDS was only able to gather anecdotal evidence from managers that recruitment for Māori and Pasifika was very low prior to this intervention, and that the drop-out rate for Māori and Pasifika had been high compared to the national average, which was around 50 *per cent*.

In addition to the retreat, three opportunities for mentors and apprentices to meet socially as a whole group were provided throughout the year of the pilot: a barbeque, a hangi (earth-cooked meal) and a Christmas function. They were hosted by the Skills management team, and included the WERDS mentor trainer/researcher, mentors and apprentices. These social gatherings were important opportunities to build trust and to provide extra mentor and apprentice support. The informal group and individual conversations that took place at these gatherings supplemented data from the formal focus groups and interviews taking place at the beginning, in the middle and at end of the project.

If mentors were to provide effective relational support to apprentices, it would be important to take a relational approach to mentor support. As discussed above, the elements of relational mentoring resonated in the cultures of the mentors, and thus were readily accepted.

Mentor training workshops

The two workshops, held a little over three months apart, constituted only the formal learning component. The 'learning period' spanned twelve months. Between and after the workshops, mentors were guided to practise their new skills and to bring their experiences, questions and learning back to the group via email, phone, social media and social gatherings.

Workshop one
In workshop one, we explored the value and importance of mentoring and discussed both traditional and relational approaches. We examined mentor knowledge, attributes and skills, and discussed facilitators and barriers to on- and off-site learning. We discussed the steps in setting up and maintaining effective mentoring. At the end of this first session, the mentors were eager to get started and to develop a strong mentoring relationship with their apprentices.

Workshop two

The second workshop, conducted a little over three months after the first, reviewed and strengthened what the mentors had learned and how they had applied this during the practice period. We reviewed the reasons for regular and frequent face-to-face contact initiated by mentors, and practised deep questioning and active listening techniques. We discussed the skills mentors could share, such as the application of mentors' knowledge and skills to difficulties apprentices seemed to be experiencing with 'paperwork'.

Practice periods between and after the workshops

During the practice periods between and after the workshops, mentors shared apprentice issues with other members of the mentor group in order to gain advice and support from each other. This sharing strengthened each mentor's ability to mentor his individual apprentice effectively. Confidentiality was observed in that the members of the group did not share apprentice issues with others outside of the group, including employers. In another instance of shared support, two mentors, responsible for two apprentices each, combined forces and mentored their apprentices in a small group. In a third example, one mentor sought help from another, who was known in the apprentice's church community, to explain the apprenticeship to his apprentice's family.

The Māori and Pasifika mentors observed that, while they had gained strength from a Māori and Pasifika cultural lens on the work, apprentices sometimes were disadvantaged in traditional apprenticeship learning situations. For instance, the mentors commented that while speaking up and asking for help was comfortable for Pākehā apprentices, Māori and Pasifika apprentices were culturally disinclined to call attention to themselves.

> *I think European kids if they don't get the help they want they start to kick up blue murder. Pacific Islanders are used to being the underdogs. They'll put their head down and go away.*
> [Non-mentored Pasifika apprentice]

Apprentices were sometimes reluctant to ask for help even from their mentors. Yet, without mentor persistence, apprentices often floundered. One such apprentice lost his job. This example emphasises the importance of regular face-to-face meetings and sensitive, deep questioning and listening techniques.

Other activities were strengthened by mentors' deep knowledge of Māori and Pasifika world views. For example, Māori and Pasifika mentors demonstrated a particular ability to advocate for the apprentices, when tutors misread their actions, as described below.

> *[Māori and Pasifika learners] look down at the ground as a sign of respect*
> [Mentor]

> *I just put my head down and shut up. They tell us to put up our hands. When we do, they swear at us!*
> [Student]

The fact that mentors took part in apprentices' communities (e.g. church, sport, social services) was important to apprentices in terms of both trust and accessibility. Apprentices felt they could open up more (and more often) to the mentors, because they mixed with them socially.

> *I see [XXX] the most. I see him around at the park, his house, I just go and talk to him, at sports. If I want to talk I just call him and if he wants to meet...Mostly talked to him about my family, how they are treating me, and how they think about what I am doing. He just makes sure I'm on track and not mucking around.*
> [Mentored apprentice 2]

Reciprocity, in terms of giving back, was very important to apprentices who had been mentored. Most of the apprentices interviewed at the end of their first year felt they had received a gift in mentoring, and wanted to reciprocate by mentoring others.

> *Sometimes it brings me to tears because that's what I want to do in the future. I want somebody to trust me and if I move on and be successful, I want to mentor.*
> [Mentored apprentice 3]

As apprentices worked with their mentors, they came to see the value of having someone they could trust to stand beside them.

> *Planning seemed so easy when you talk about it in a positive way. Sounds more positive than with all the ifs and buts. Just being myself, all the ifs and buts fade away when I talked to him.*
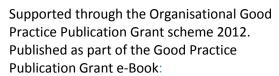> [Mentored apprentice 4]

Results: Relational mentoring

At the end of our one-year professional development, monitoring and review process, we found that eight out of 10 apprentices on the programme stayed in their apprenticeship and continued with their study (one left for higher study, one lost his job). According to Skills management, this was an outstanding result for Māori and Pasifika apprentices compared to earlier years. More importantly, interviews with mentored apprentices show that only one of the eight successful apprentices had considered leaving his apprenticeship during their first year. He changed his mind directly as a result of mentoring support.

Our approach to professional development includes interwoven teaching and learning, guided practice, and research components. This combination is vital to the further improvement of mentoring for apprentices, especially as apprentice mentoring is relatively new in New Zealand in comparison to other countries. As a result of this combined process, we have been able to continually improve the effectiveness our professional development programmes for mentors, and to offer some insights to others working to improve apprentice learning and achievement for Māori and Pasifika.

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