

Induction and Mentoring Pilot Programme: Early Childhood Education

By Teachers, For Teachers

Val Podmore with Clare Wells

Executive summary

Background and methodology

The early childhood education (ECE) induction and mentoring pilot programme developed by New Zealand Kindertangens Inc. Te Putahi Kura Puhou o Aotearoa (NZK) was one of four sector-specific pilot projects funded by the New Zealand Teachers Council (the Council). The ECE pilot aimed to:

- Trial the Council's *Draft Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring Programmes and for Mentor Teacher Development in Aotearoa New Zealand (Draft Guidelines)* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2009).
- Trial models of support for Provisionally Registered Teacher (PRT) induction and mentoring.
- Establish models of successful induction and mentor teacher development, working with a draft version of the *Registered Teacher Criteria* finalised in late 2009 (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2010).
- Build a body of knowledge and resources to support the implementation of the *Draft Guidelines*.

The ECE pilot programme ran for one year. It included more than 100 mentors and PRTs from five kindergarten associations in three regional areas: Dunedin–Southland, Nelson, and Wellington–Ruahine. For the most part, participants worked in kindergartens. Mentors employed by Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association (NZCA) joined the Wellington–Ruahine mentor group. In Nelson, teachers working in early childhood education and care centres were part of both the mentor and PRT groups. Senior kindergarten teachers had the leadership role in each of the regional areas, co-ordinating activities, facilitating workshops, supporting focus group interviews, and working alongside mentors and PRTs in their ECE centres and networks.

The pilot was overseen by a national advisory group comprising senior teachers, an independent advisor, representatives of NZK, NZCA, and New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa, and the researchers Val Podmore and Clare Wells. The advisory group met a number of times during the pilot to monitor progress, receive feedback, and discuss and explore the key issues and trends emerging from the research.

Workshops

The central feature of the ECE pilot was a series of workshops held throughout 2009: in February, May, July, and October. The mentors and PRTs came together in the first regional workshop and mostly met in their own networks thereafter. Teacher education providers and teachers from the schools sector also participated in some of the regional workshops. Between workshops, senior teachers worked with the mentors and PRTs in their own regions to build on the outcomes of the workshops and to identify the issues and emerging themes that may be included for discussion and debate in the following workshop.

Research

The ECE pilot programme addressed the following key research question:

- How does the ECE induction and mentoring pilot programme make a difference to the mentors' and PRTs' learning and teaching?

Key data generation tools included: observations of workshops (to record discussions and key themes and issues) and focus group interviews (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001; Stewart, Shandasani, & Rook, 2006). Ten mentors and 10 PRTs from each of the three regions took part in initial focus group meetings in February 2009; between seven and 10 of the same participants took part in each of the follow-up focus groups in July 2009. In addition, all workshop participants were invited to provide feedback and feedback was also sought from members of the pilot's national advisory group.

The findings summarised

The main findings of the ECE pilot affirm the value of the workshop series and provide insights on mentors' and PRTs' experiences with the *Draft Guidelines* and draft *Registered Teacher Criteria*.

Building relationships and making time to talk emerged as two critical elements of effective induction and mentoring pilot programmes. Open and honest communication, respecting the views of others, taking risks, and setting clear expectations are all key elements of a trust-based relationship. Goal setting, "courageous conversations", seeking and giving feedback, creativity, generational differences, and mentoring models were among the topics explored at the workshops. For mentors in particular, focusing on these aspects was important. While many mentors felt they had skills in these areas, it became evident as the pilot progressed that they needed to enhance them.

Mentors commented that the *Draft Guidelines* provide a useful focus for PRTs' work with mentors. They suggested some points of clarification in regard to the wording of the *Draft Guidelines*. Mentors found the draft *Registered Teacher Criteria* useful when working with PRTs towards full registration.

Members of the ECE pilot advisory group reflected on the research findings and worked collectively to identify those attributes of the pilot programme that constitute success factors for induction and mentoring in ECE contexts. These attributes included:

- The pilot, developed in synchrony with early childhood values, was consistent with the principles of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and included socio-cultural approaches and team collaboration.
- The ECE pilot programme was developed “by teachers, for teachers” and this contributed to increasing confidence among the participants.
- The pilot was fully supported by kindergarten employers and implemented across associations and geographical regions.
- A nationally-designed approach to regional workshops overseen by a central advisory group contributed to a consistent and sustainable process of induction and mentoring.
- The process emphasised the value of networking and taking time to “unpack” the draft *Registered Teacher Criteria* and *Draft Guidelines* and the importance of shared understandings.
- The pilot programme included “exemplary” planned professional development for PRTs, “hooking teachers early in their careers” and influencing wider teaching teams. It “tapped into an energy for more”.
- Collaboration was a major strength of the formalised and focused professional development opportunities offered to mentors and PRTs.
- The pilot programme as a whole and the workshops specifically delivered consistent quality amidst regional diversity.
- Participants focused on benefits for students through enhanced teaching and learning.

Sustainability and transferability

For ECE, barriers to participating in the pilot programme did not relate to differences in teaching and learning between services: the model developed for and through the ECE pilot programme was sufficiently robust to be relevant to teachers in any setting. The barriers were issues such as the appropriate use of available funds to support participation in an induction programme.

The ECE pilot model relied on bringing people together to share ideas and discuss issues, learn from and support each other, and more broadly to build a professional learning community both for mentors and PRTs. The collaborative model is transferable and the content of the workshops is relevant to mentors and PRTs across the education sector. The pilot experience indicated that issues mentors and PRTs have around expectations of the process and of their roles are the same across services.

Furthermore, the ECE pilot programme model includes a plan for professional development that focuses on supporting mentors and PRTs over a sustained period of time. This may require ECE services, and in particular early childhood education and care centres, to commit to sustained professional development rather than to “one off” opportunities, as is likely to be the case at present.

The sustainability of the induction and mentoring programme, particularly for teachers in education and care services, will rely on managers and committees being better informed about teacher registration, on funding to support participation, and on appropriate professional development programmes and opportunities being available. The removal of the target for 100% qualified and registered teachers in teacher-led services by 2012 and recent cuts to the Ministry of Education professional development budget have the potential to undermine effective induction and mentoring programmes.

On the other hand, the sustainability of the induction and mentoring programme for kindergarten teachers is assured. NZK associations are committed to employing 100% qualified and registered teachers and will look for ways to realise that commitment.

Recommendations

Drawing on the research findings and informal feedback from mentors and PRTs, the advisory group made the following recommendations to support effective induction and mentoring programmes in the ECE sector.

Resource development

- That mentor and PRT development programmes focus on the draft *Registered Teacher Criteria* and *Draft Guidelines*, identifying teaching strategies against each (perhaps in the second or third workshop of a four-workshop series).
- That the Council clearly set out its expectations, both for content and process, and particularly for the level of documentation required.
- That the level and use of funding available to services to support the registration process is clarified.
- That the relationship between the draft *Registered Teacher Criteria*, the industrial professional standards, and teacher appraisal is clarified.
- That guidelines on entitlements and expectations (for mentors, PRTs, employers, and other teaching staff) are produced.
- That a package for employers be produced and sent to them when a PRT applies for registration.

Information distribution

- That more information on induction and mentoring be available via the internet.
- That these online resources are available for teacher education providers to pass to their students in their final year of study.

- That “Introduction to the profession” days be held for graduates during the post-exam time.
- That opportunities be identified to present the ECE pilot research findings and initiate discussion on induction and mentoring.
- That an annual PRTs’ conference for teachers across the education sector be held nationally or regionally.
- That a meeting be held with teacher education providers to present the findings of the ECE pilot, highlighting the connections pre- and post-graduation and expectations of PRTs.

Policy areas

- That there be accountability for funding and monitoring of expenditure tagged to supporting PRTs to become fully registered.
- That the possibility of excluding teachers undertaking registration-related activities from the “staff hour count” policy requirements be explored.
- That mentors and PRTs be provided opportunities to undertake professional development.
- That the possibility that staff other than those employed as a registered teacher can maintain registration and therefore be available to be a mentor be explored.