

Teaching Today, a podcast from the Teaching Council

Season 2, Episode 4: Induction and mentoring through a Māori Medium lens

Interviewer:

Nicola Chase

Guest:

Evelyn Tobin

Evelyn Tobin: Greetings. My name is Evelyn Tobin. I am a descendant of Pōmare and therefore from Ngāti Manu, Ngāpuhi as well as Te Aupōuri and Te Rarawa. I am here today to talk about my experiences as a mentor in the pilot induction and mentoring programme known as Poutoko-Pia, or Tuakana-Teina, and based on He Hāpai Ō for those teachers who are just starting out on their career pathway to becoming teachers (with full practising certification), tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou.

Nicola Chase: What inspired you to take part in the Tuakana Teina pilot?

Evelyn Tobin: I have two reasons as an answer to this question. Firstly, my commitment to those who are taking this career pathway to become teachers, so that they develop into experienced, competent practitioners, and in time become leaders in their schools, and principals. Secondly, because most types of Māori medium schools have small student rolls. As a result, it is difficult for principals to dedicate one teacher from their staff as a mentor for provisional teachers who have recently graduated from initial teacher education institutions. In summary, to support and assist them.

Nicola Chase: Give us some insights into how you have successfully incorporated the individual needs of pia and also the unique kaupapa philosophy of their kura in your role as a mentor?

Evelyn Tobin: That's a great two-sided question! For most, the learning need of provisional



teachers arises from their being unaware, of still learning, of not yet realising. And then there is the operational side that relates to their school.

Let me address the first aspect ... by taking dedicated time to conduct open to learning conversations one is able to examine the young teachers' thinking - What is that about? How does one progress forward? as a continuation of learning for them. What relevant research exists? And what resources do I have to help them and other related guidance?

Secondly, to carefully examine the school charter. The reason for that focus is because therein lies the programme guidelines for everyone in any given school year.

The majority of mentoring support over one and two years results in outcomes for provisional teachers. They grasp at learning throughout the programme, they develop with experience, they discover what works, and gather evidence of outcomes. Perhaps after two years they are well prepared to make renewal application to upgrade to their full practising certificate. And yet, there is no issue to extend into their third year of teaching service. That relates directly to provisional teachers as the drivers of their own learning.

Secondly, there are the matters that exist in the school. In my opinion, the provisional teacher has pursued a position at that school and therefore, needs to fit into the culture of the school that operates to serve its whānau community. Absolutely, the teaching and learning programme is relevant and appropriate to them and must relate to them.

Nicola Chase: Please describe any specific examples of honouring the values of the teaching profession.

Evelyn Tobin: Yes indeed, the teaching profession is values laden!

And so if we examine the values that have been set out to follow, there is whakamana whereby the poutoko strives to empower the pia towards becoming an experienced teacher; to give prestige to their school because ultimately that is their learning environment; to maintain the authority of their principal and school leaders because they are skilled, experienced and knowledgeable teachers in their school; and to validate the whānau, the child and their parents, and the wider whānau community of the school. At the end of the day, the greatest cultural value has to be the affirmation of the child, and as such the stance of the teacher is paramount.

The second value to consider is pono. In fact, if the mentor is not truthful to oneself then whatever one says is a fabrication. By one's truth, then every teacher can observe a role model to emulate, which simply reinforces the purpose of being truthful. Another dimension relates to the pia, that they are truthful to oneself and in the fruition of time make the personal commitment to providing quality teaching. If the pia is mentored and supported appropriately the likelihood is that they will enjoy a long engagement in the teaching profession.



Third there is manaaki, and what makes that value stand out? It is based on the urgings of one's status and influence, so how can that be developed? The main ingredient is compassionate and heartfelt aroha. Through a belief in the value of the cooperative work between the poutoko and the pia; the pia extends manaaki to the poutoko, and vice versa in respectful reciprocity. This extends to the school that expresses manaaki to them both and arranges release so that focussed time can enhance the shared learning.

There are so many examples of manaaki. One that is directly related to the child occurs every single day while they are learning in terms of their manaaki for their teacher, and for the kind of ideal person who provides their learning at any given time.

And the final value is whanaungatanga that relates directly to those aspects of collaborative and cooperative connection of one to another. If those linkages and connections are well established and bound by whakamana, pono, manaaki of one to another then it is inevitable that this grows, develops and can last for one's lifetime.

Nicola Chase: Tell us about how the goals/inquiry that you have developed collaboratively with your pia may have informed the learning of both them and the wider team in their kura.

Evelyn Tobin: That is a very deep question because it could assume that the pia already understands the purpose of setting and developing learning goals, and of developing teaching as inquiry and those associated professional focal points, after all, these are usually aspects of one's continued learning.

It would be fair to say that most teachers are learning about these aspects within the context of school and classroom practice. So how does that effect the concurrent learning? Firstly, it requires focus on the identified needs expressed by the pia and the combined efforts to ensure these are enabled and achieved.

Let us turn our sights to the preparatory work required in the Poutoko-Pia endeavours, to pose focus and inquiry questions, and to advance open to learning conversations. This is no mere chit-chat, but rather expansive and in-depth probing and then to summarise any outcomes and findings into a report. This allows for further reflective consideration by both the poutoko and the pia.

Nicola Chase: In your mentoring role, how are the *Code and the Standards* for teachers incorporating into your work?

Evelyn Tobin: This is a vitally important aspect of the mentoring effort. The *Code and Standards* provide the framework for achievement by teachers through actual classroom teaching practice. Firstly it is important that one understands - What is the nature and function of these? Where did they derive from? The short answer to that, is that they were designed by teaching professionals, that is, by teachers across all settings. They have not been imposed by the government which means that we should be collectively championing



and implementing them with one another to reach the heights of our profession.

How should we incorporate them into our work? Firstly by engaging in open to learning conversations that introduce new thinking, by feeding and nurturing that to its many possibilities, and to also foster new knowledge and over time achieve broad and in-depth understandings.

For my part, I see the *Code and Standards* as fundamental to the role of the poutoko in one's efforts for one's pia. And in response, this has to be the main learning for the pia.

In conclusion that the pia gains the capability to gauge one's own realisations of the standards in their own teaching practice. From that to expand and enhance their self-awareness in one's teaching role, to progress and develop their skills, knowledge, and practical applications; to admire and be inspired by the privileged position of the teacher who has powerful potential to truly influence the life of a child during their formative years.

Nicola Chase: Talk us through innovative ways of ensuring learning conversations take place when there might be some barriers in mentoring?

Evelyn Tobin: I am most fortunate to have never experienced any such barriers in my mentoring role due to the high levels of collegial support, and the extensive preparatory work that permits us both to have time and space for our collaborative learning.

If I were to identify a barrier I would first highlight any whanaungatanga weakness or incompetence to engage or commit to the shared learning. What would be the cure for that situation? I would suggest straight and honest talking with one another to protect and retain the relational trust necessary for the combined commitment. Another barrier is time itself. On occasions circumstances arise that may affect the whānau, the pia, or even the poutoko. Such things as bereavement, as sickness, and those unexpected events that may occur that simply cannot be left unattended. Once again, by maintaining open, shared communications and by keeping aware of one another's needs with compassionate, kindness and dedication that one can always find a resolution.

One piece of advice I would offer is that we should avoid seeking out barriers, but instead be vigilant to possibilities that may happen by chance, and to address them then.

Nicola Chase: Give us one gem of advice to assist mentors?

Evelyn Tobin: From my perspective, do not wait, do not hold back! You have skills, you have knowledge that can be responsive and supportive to growing future teachers. Therefore, being mindful of your own circumstances and your own support systems and structures, perhaps it is opportune for you to consider engaging in this work to be steadfast for someone else. The main reason is to look to the support you could offer, and consider how that contributes to the desires and aspirations of your own school.

Nā reira e tātou mā, at this time we reach the end of this presentation. It is hoped that you have taken part in and listened to the very end so that you are able to harvest useful ideas



that may lead you to assist and nurture others.

May life shower you in generous kindness to guide you, your school, and to our most treasured children that they may grow and thrive as truly noble people.

Tihei mauri ora!

