

Teaching Today, a podcast from The Teaching Council

Season 2, Episode 3: Mentoring and induction

Narrator:

Allison Hess

Guests:

Brylee Schubert – provisionally certificated early childhood teacher

Sumandana Chand – provisionally certificated early childhood teacher

Jacque Sokolov-Pearson – Tuakana Teina mentor and fully certificated teacher

Shelina Somani-Pene – Tuakana Teina mentor and fully certificated teacher

Barbara Watson - teacher, mentor, PLD facilitator

Brylee Schubert: There are some days that were just so difficult and overwhelming that I really considered walking out the doors...

Sumandana Chand: I couldn't handle the work pressure and I was quite stressed in my first month of teaching here. I was taken away with all the planning and documentation and procedures and policies of the NZ education system. I got so stressed in the first month I felt like going back home. I even said to my friends that I was going back home that I couldn't handle it anymore. Everything seemed like a gigantic mountain in front of me and I was there like a helpless creature in front of the mountain."

Narrator: The first years of teaching are exciting and can be exceptionally challenging. Some days it's an adrenaline-fueled rush of lessons, meetings, and new relationships. You just heard two provisionally certificated early childhood teachers who were ready to leave the profession. What turned it around for them? Having a structured, personalized induction and mentoring programme with the support of a passionate and experienced mentor teacher.

Brylee Schubert: I felt like I had a counsellor and that was amazing, she was able to help me stay with it. Take it one step at a time, realign what is important to me, take a deep breath and that it's OK to feel these things but just to draw me back to what I value and what's important. Times where I felt completely undervalued and



unsupported, she was there to offer that.

Sumandana Chand: My mentor Shelina has been very supportive, understanding, caring, encouraging and considerate in everything she does. She has become my biggest strength in ECE. Frankly speaking I haven't seen a personality like her. I was so depressed during my first month of teaching ECE here but when I met her I saw a sign of hope. She has those magical techniques that she juggles so well with so much respect towards every individual she meets at our centre – whether that's the centre manager, the children, the babies or the other teachers. She is just so good. I admire the way she challenges me with questions and the very big thing I admire is the way she makes me think of answers for my own questions.

Narrator: These two provisionally certificated teachers were matched with their mentors through the Council's Tuakana Teina Induction and Mentoring Pilot. In this episode of Teaching Today we investigate some ideas of what makes an effective mentor and the impact it has for early childhood educators. We talk with two very successful mentor teachers, Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson, a teacher of over 30 years and a mentor of 10 mentees - or pia as we'll be calling them throughout the show - and Shelina Somani-Pene, a teacher of 7 years and mentor to 13 ECE teachers. The two pia you heard at the top of the show are Brylee Schubert and Sumandana Chand. We were also lucky enough to get some time with Barbara Watson, a PLD facilitator, experienced ECE leader and mentor and who recently completed a PhD looking into mitigating the barriers to effective mentoring.

So, when we visited the mentors and teachers in their Auckland centres the thing that was so great was their understanding of how effective induction and mentoring can achieve so much. This is one of the mentors, Jacquie.

Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson: The thing I hear over and over again is that teachers are not feeling valued. So off I went! I think what my hope, my hope would be that mentoring new teachers would be seen to be one of the most important things that we need to be doing because they are the tomorrow head teachers, tomorrow centre managers. They need to be supported and it's been really lovely sharing my 40 years of experience in this field. I didn't think that was necessarily valuable but actually it is really valuable and it's also great that I have been most roles. I've run a centre, run a service, been head teacher, I've worked in kindergartens, I've worked in private, in community-based centres so, I'm able to draw on all of that. Mentoring is actually really, really important and it's different from supervising. It's a different relationship and I think that's one of the barriers that we need to look at how we can get around, because it is a different relationship. I often talk about that I'm next to them, I'm an ally, we have a goal which is full registration and we will probably have to go quite a windy way to get there it's certainly not a straight line, but I am with them every step of the way."

Narrator: And the feeling is mutual. This is Brylee, Jacquie's pia.

Brylee Schubert: I felt a lot more focus and structure just straight away. I was a little bit lost with how to align my paperwork, how to sort it, I really struggled with that. After my first meeting with Jacquie I straight away got it. It was really nice because I had overcomplicated things in my head and was just able to really speak freely to Jacquie in a way that I maybe couldn't have before. Jacquie is extremely reflective and she will always bring you back to your personal values. It doesn't matter how many overwhelming thoughts are going on, she will help ground you there and you feel like you're in a safe place."

Narrator: Values. Everyone kept coming back to values – either their own personal ones or the shared values



of the profession.

Shelina Somani-Pene: One of the strong values I have is actually really valuing what they bring, their identity and who they are. So, with my pia Sumandana our initial learning conversations, which actually a key focus for me was really getting to know who she was, where she comes from, coming from a teaching background in Fiji that was really important for me to understand what she's bringing and for her to understand that what she brings is actually really rich so from there we build on from that. It's a concept of ako, teaching and learning, sharing with one another, learning from one another. I think if you get that right and you really value their identity, down the road the pia when they are actually teaching and practicing they are going to find that of value for their tamariki – that they were valued so hopefully along the way they will see the importance of that.

Narrator: That's Shelina, one of the mentors, speaking about the values she brings to her mentoring style. She also talked about the values that underpin *Our Code, Our Standards* and how they also guide her as a mentor.

Shelina Somani-Pene: We look at whakamana, empowering my learners. For example, empowering them to actually take the next step and take ownership of their teaching practice. We had an example where one of my pia I encouraged them to take the leadership role of introducing the Quality Practice Template within a staff meeting, so actually taking that leadership role. Being empowered by their mentor to say hey you can actually do this and it's going to be collective input from your team, that's one way."

Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson: Having come up through many different roles in the sector I'm really keen that teachers are values, that they grow, that they actually see this work as, that these values that underpin our work are so important. This is spiritual work, we're holding the mana of children, it's an incredibly important job. It's actually one of the most important. That is absolutely part of who I am as a mentor and I bring that every day to the work. It's fundamental. That in itself helps a teacher feel valued. If he or she can feel that, that what I'm doing is truly in my bones important, rather than just the idea that it is important then she will bring that integrity, that manaakitanga to her practice. *Our Code* of values is absolutely where I start because how I am with the teachers is actually how I hope they might be with the child or with their colleagues so, I need to walk my talk and I probably don't do it all the time and that's fine. Coming at it from those values and especially in terms of *Tātaiako*, in terms of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, those things are absolutely rooted in me and so I bring those to the relationship. For me that's absolutely part of all of these values, especially in terms of manaakitanga, and so I get curious and I often talk about. I'm curious about how you marry *Te Whāriki* with your centre philosophy and tell me about that, tell me about what's important

Narrator: Guiding a pia to think and reflect has led to them feeling more confident and empowered. Mentoring has changed from being 'Advice and Guidance' to more educative and reflective. Both of the pia said they were a bit lost when it came to unravelling *Our Code, Our Standards* and applying it to their everyday teaching. But having a plan and some thinking time before a meeting with their mentor has helped it all click into place in their heads. Here's Brylee and Sumandana.

Brylee Schubert: Using the templates and even back track to some of my other work and using the templates, they've helped me clarify what I was doing at the time. I find them really useful. It's not just on paper that it has helped me, it's in my day to day interactions, every little thing I do I seem to have my professional practice or the *Code* running through my head and *Tātaiako* has become a lot more second nature to me. All of that is a result of the pilot. We constantly talk about the *Code, Tātaiako*, and my practice. At times when I've been frustrated or had difficulties, she has helped me see that I just need to align myself with the *Code* and that will see me through.



She definitely helps with putting everything into perspective. You just need that support of someone to break it down, to help you break it down. She won't break it down herself, but she will help you to do that."

Sumandana Chand: In my first month I didn't know where to start and where to end with *Code and Standards* but as I went along with Shelina to discuss the *Code and Standards* now I am in a position to tell others what they actually mean and how I can relate it to my teaching practice. Mentoring is a very good opportunity for all teachers because through mentoring you will be able to go to the next step towards full registration and know what is hapPeneng. To get your folder ready and know actually what you are doing. She has encouraged me to do things, to keep children as your focus and not your folder.

Narrator: Barbara Watson is equally passionate about the possibilities of induction and mentoring. She said it's about so much more than accountability – a mentor isn't a mother or a police officer holding teachers against the Standards, she said.

Barbara Watson: One of the things I often see is teachers, PCTs and mentors, thinking about the induction and mentoring process as an accountability and it is, there's the requirement that teachers come to meet the Standards by the time they apply for their full certificate but it's also a professional growth process, or it should be. As a byproduct of that professional growth the accountability is a natural outflow, if you like, of a strong professional growth focus. I think that as mentors are working with provisional teachers, using the *Code and Standards* actively to identify next steps, to evaluate where they are at in their practice and to identify the next steps so that the process becomes about improving your practice as opposed to just proving you are meeting the Standards. The place of the *Code* is important, not that you have to evidence the *Code* per se but I think it needs to be a focus of discussion and reflection in an induction and mentoring programme because it's about how teachers be on an everyday basis and you can't turn off and turn on being a teacher – those commitments that we carry with us all of the time and everywhere, not just in the centre or in our working hours. I think that's something all teachers need to be aware of.

So, a programme, needs to have a strong focus on every day work of teaching and children's learning. There needs to be time, which is always challenging, designated scheduled time for the mentor and PCT to discuss practice deeply, for them to have reflective discussions, to pull practice apart and put it back together again. Frances Langlon in the *Induction and Mentoring Guidelines* talks about de-constructing, co-constructing and re-constructing practice and I think that's really at the heart of the work. I think it's really important to have some time for formal observation not just working alongside, working together observations but where a PCT gets really good quality feedback about their practice, to shine the light on what they might not be aware of and to be able to have discussions about what that means in terms of moving forwards. A really important part of an induction and mentoring programme is that teacher's practice is evaluated against the Standards rather than seen as either meeting the Standards or not, a polarity or binary view. But the coming to meet the Standards and developing and continuing to develop over time."

Narrator: Improving the outcomes for the tamariki is obviously a big part of teaching in ECE and mentor teachers support their pia to reflect on their teaching practice and develop related goals or set up an inquiry. Mentor Shelina said she and Sumandana started out with rich conversations, she really took the time to get to know Sumandana and what was important to her, what she could bring to teaching and used that as a foundation for co-constructing an inquiry question. Here's the other mentor, Jacquie's take on goals or inquiry.

Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson: So, the initial conversation template is very useful, that takes quite a while to get through in terms of doing it in a real and in-depth way and out of that there's always some juice that comes, of like 'oh I'm really interested in that' or 'I don't feel I'm as developed a is could be and that's something I'm



interested in.' I'm always listening out or indeed will ask 'where is your interest' because the inquiry has to be something the teacher wants to do themselves otherwise it doesn't work. So, I come at the *Code and Standards* I'm bringing in all the time but it's coming at it from the teacher's interest. I don't ever look at the Standards and think 'oh what can I tick off today' - that isn't how I work. It's in our professional relationship and it's in the goals that the teacher has that we figure out how we can meet the Standards."

Narrator: Jacquie also made the point that the inquiry focus is totally connected to a teacher's appraisal, too.

Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson: I always ask, what is the appraisal system within the centre when I meet the centre manager and I say to them I want whatever we do, the teacher and I collaboratively on her inquiry goals that counts towards her appraisal. Because they're all so busy and it's a tough job, working with children for 8 hours a day is tough in itself and then the challenge of making sure teachers have non-contact time is really a serious issue at the moment. So, everything I do I want it to be a part of their appraisal. So, all of that's evidence of her learning and growing and trying things out. That's really important for me because I know as a teacher that wasn't always the case when I was a teacher so I was doing lots of extra work that I didn't really need to be doing. Having come up through many different roles in the sector I'm really keen that teachers are valued that they grow, that they actually see the values that underpin our work as so important.

Narrator: So, we're getting close to the end of the show but to finish off we asked everyone what their advice would be for mentors and pia. This is what they said.

Brylee Schubert: If they are your dedicated mentor and you have a set time allocated per week I think that is really import

Sumandana Chand: We had a few barriers, the major one was our time because our timetable in the centre is such that we cannot fit in the mentoring time properly. So most of the time we used to work after working hours, talk over the phone to discuss our goals and mentoring. Luckily my mentor was so good. Sometimes when family commitments, children get sick, we had to look for some other time or have a phone conversation. Communication is the major part.

Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson: For a mentor, it's really important that she has her own mentor. I need to walk my talk so I have two people. One of whom is a really old colleague who is still in early childhood and the other one is in infant mental health and I have regular times with them. They might be informal but one of them is formal and I take this really seriously and I need to be doing my own work and that is also around continuing to look at my own assumptions about people and different cultures. We have a wide range of culture who are working with children, just as we have a wide range of children who are receiving early childhood education, so there's always things to learn. Walk the talk in terms of the values. If I think back to being a newbie teacher in the late 70s I was well supported and that person who supported me is now 87 I still have contact with her. She was a really important person in my life at that time. What was so beautiful about what she did was she was affirming, so positive about my practice and my possibilities and she asked the tough questions. I had a good role model from her and we need to remember how it was for us when we were fumbling around and we didn't really know what quite it all meant.

In terms of a pia, my advice to anybody who needs mentoring is just go for it. But also: be really choosy. If it doesn't feel as though you can be yourself and share whatever needs to be shared then find somebody else.



Shelina Somani-Pene: For me the advice I'd give is to really value what the teacher comes with, what the PCT comes with, their identity, the knowledge they already have. I say to a lot of the teachers I mentor that may have had some mentoring already I say to them, what you've already had is not to be discounted because there was something along the way that must have been quite rich that informed your practice. It might be something you have just put on the shelf, a few gems that may have been given to you that you have put on the shelf but they might evolve through this lot of mentoring so it's not to discount anything anyone brings, it's actually looking at it through a real growth mindset, looking at it like it's a journey and things happen along the way in due season and just valuing that."

Barbara Watson: One of the things I would like to see mentors support provisionally certificated teachers to do is to reflect on evidence rather than to think of reflection as evidence. Many ECE teachers that I come across think of a reflection, a piece of writing often in a reflective model, is evidence that they meet the standards. Well, in my view, often it's not strong evidence that the standards are met because reflecting is a process not a thing and it should be an ongoing thinking about practice and refining practice as a result of that thinking. What's most important is what happens after the full stop at the end of a reflection not that you've written a reflection. I think that's something mentors need to keep in mind, that reflection doesn't all need to be written down and it doesn't necessarily need to be written in a reflective model but it does need to be a process of thinking deeply about our practice and what that might mean for what we might do in the future. Another thing about using the Standards as a key reference point or measuring stick if you like in a programme is to keep the Te Tiriti o Waitangi Standard on top and a foundation of your practice, integrate it through all areas of practice not just a bolt-on or add-on that you evidence sometimes. Mentors themselves and in their work with PCTs need to support them to think about the Te Tiriti o Waitangi standard as fundamental in our practice, integrated through everything else and when we're talking about our practice and thinking about our practice we need to keep using all of the Standards but perhaps Te Tiriti o Waitangi in particular as a what else does this Standard tell us about what we might need to think about in our everyday work.

Narrator: Thanks for listening and thanks as always to our contributors Jacquie Sokolov-Pearson, Shelina Somani-Pene, Brylee Schubert, Sumandana Chand and Barbara Watson. Send us what you're thinking to letstalk@teachingcouncil.nz and check out our mentoring and induction resources on our website and check out our other episodes while you're there!



