

Implementation of a mentoring programme in a New Zealand polytechnic environment

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There is a range of literature regarding the implementation of mentoring programmes for supporting the practices of academic teachers in the higher education environment (Barrett, 2002; Harrison et al., 2005; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Kanuka, 2005). The implications of mentoring as a professional development mechanism to support the academic practices of teachers informed a pilot study funded by Ako Aotearoa, the New Zealand Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) in Palmerston North, a New Zealand polytechnic. Using action research methodology, the study involved implementing a formal institute-wide mentoring programme positioned within a six step mentoring model and sought to identify if mentoring enhanced cross-campus communication, created collaborative networks that encouraged the sharing of teaching best practice and provided a mechanism for building leadership capabilities. Each of these concepts strategically aligned with UCOL's teaching and learning goals. Thematic and narrative data analysis approaches resulted in several key findings which highlighted how the mentoring model had helped to determine essential programme components and had provided a framework in which to situate mentoring as an organisational support mechanism for teaching and learning practices. Changes in learner-centred teaching approaches, increased reflective practice and the development of a leadership capability framework for UCOL indicated that mentoring is a practice that supports teacher professional development. It was evident that the creation of a space for sharing of teaching best practice was critical and that a centralised programme coordination function was essential as an integral component of an institute-wide mentoring programme.