

## **An Experiment in Culturally-based Mentoring for Maori and Pasifika Apprentices, NZ**

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Most of us have been helped by some sort of informal or formal mentoring in our lives – or have provided it. Over the last five years of working to research, establish, train and build mentoring for apprentices I have seen how apprentices have benefited from this support. It improves confidence in the apprentices and impacts positively on job retention and the successful completion of study. And it builds positive leadership qualities in mentors.

### **The problem: High drop-out rate of Maori and Pasifika apprentices at ETITO**

Many young apprentices face barriers to completing their apprenticeships. As school leavers, they may not manage independent learning well. Or they may have issues with literacy. Migrants, if they can secure an apprenticeship, may struggle with an unfamiliar language and culture. Due to historical inequities, Maori and Pasifika people make up a large percentage of New Zealand's underclass and may face any or all of these barriers to learning. In 2011- 2012, the Electro-technology Industry Training Organisation<sup>1</sup> (ETITO) decided to mentor its first year Maori<sup>2</sup> and Pasifika<sup>3</sup> apprentices to overcome barriers to a successful apprenticeship. ETITO understood that Maori and Pasifika apprentices were not being recruited at the same rates as European apprentices, and that the drop-out rate was high, sometimes 50%.

### **Maori and Pacific mentors from the local community are meant to support the apprentices**

ETITO believed that in order for Maori and Pasifika apprentice retention and completion rates to increase, a mentoring initiative would need to include a cultural element. The ITO developed an ambitious “cultural / community” mentoring pilot which was to run for year one of the apprenticeship. Mentors were experienced electricians or tradespeople in allied trades. Mostly their ethnicities reflected those of their young Maori and Pasifika apprentices (one was European), and they were drawn from the same two local communities that the apprentices were drawn from in south and west Auckland. Drawing Maori and Pacific mentors from the local community was expected to help build apprentice trust in the mentor, and would give mentor and learner greater access to each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) set up qualifications and support (but do not carry out) apprentice training.

<sup>2</sup> Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand.

<sup>3</sup> “Pasifika” refers to all people in New Zealand who came from (or their family came from) any of the islands in the Pacific Ocean north of NZ. These islands include mainly Samoa, Fiji, Cook Islands, Nui and Tuvalu.

It was important that the mentors were not in a position to exercise power over the apprentices. Except in one instance, they were not supervisors or bosses, but experienced trades people who cared for the wellbeing of young Maori and Pacific apprentices.

The mentor group were trained over two days, three months apart. Central messages of the first training were that trust is vital, that mentoring should have clear goals that are checked off with learners, that mentoring should support apprentices regularly with face-to-face meetings to manage learning issues and that mentors should be prepared to act as advocates for the apprentices. The mentors were required to visit apprentices face-to-face at least once a month and to contact them regularly by text, phone or email.

### **Apprentices choose their own mentors**

Ten young apprentices were chosen for the pilot. They were introduced to all the ETITO selected mentors at a three day launch / induction event at a country retreat south of Auckland. While the apprentices worked hard over the three days, relationships were also being built with each other and with managers, through communal activities and socialising. Each apprentice was given the opportunity to choose his own mentor at end of the weekend, in a speed-dating type selection process. Apprentices were then placed with a large electrical service company working with a range of small contracting businesses.

Apprentices talked about feeling privileged and grateful to be selected for the programme and acknowledged the duty they felt to honour their mentors and do well as a result of this selection.

*I look at this opportunity with the back of mind of say who knows maybe this will be the first and the last opportunity for Maori Pacific and I take it.*

Some apprentices also recognised that they owed a debt to future generations of Maori and Pacific apprentices.

*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.*

The mentors met with their apprentices away from the workplace, where they could talk freely over food and drink. Despite discussions in the training about working 1-1 with their proteges and keeping confidentiality, there was evidence that mentors in this project were swapping notes about their proteges in ways that added value to the support that was being offered. This sharing of information was a means of mentors gaining support from each other. In this project,

two mentors worked together regularly and met with apprentices as a group, as they each had two apprentices to mentor. Collaborating improved the support they could offer.

**Barriers: expectation from families, lack of cultural capital, unsupportive workplace culture...**

Because of the requirement to distribute earnings to family and church, many Pasifika families preferred their young people to be earning high wages, and therefore there was sometimes parental resistance to apprenticeships, where only the minimum wage is offered in the first year. The one European mentor had learned that his apprentice's family was taking his apprentice earnings, leaving him no money for public transport, lunch, and learning expenses (he needed to get his drivers' licence). The mentor did not feel confident to visit the family on his own, so he called on a Maori mentor and together they talked with the family, providing information about their son's apprenticeship, and eventually finding a solution that suited the family as well as the apprentice.

Lack of cultural capital in terms of the workplace culture is a further barrier – there are few role models in Maori or Pacific families who can show new young apprentices what to expect. In only four cases, members of apprentices' families had worked in a trade (one of these was the electrical trade). The mentors, as electrical or allied tradesmen, were able to help apprentices to cope with unsupportive trade workplace cultures and to keep them focused on their goals. Other examples of mentor assistance included help to get a driver's licence and to keep a placement with the electrical service company while an apprentice was immobile; work through a debt crisis; negotiate with polytechnic course tutors where the apprentices had not completed the pre-course work required before entering the apprenticeship. One mentor was able to support an apprentice when he was considering leaving and this resulted in him continuing much more enthusiastically with his apprenticeship.

...the stuff we talked about, all I can say is he really changed my perspective on this apprenticeship in a positive way...made me look at the big picture...changed my attitude...now things are great.

**...and literacy: how to fill out log books**

A significant language / literacy related issue emerged for two recent Pasifika migrants - they had no idea how to fill out their log books or what the education-related jargon meant. The pages below show how the apprentices were required to describe each job they did ([fig 1](#)), and then match it to a unit standard ([fig 2](#)). More than 25 pages similar to [fig 2](#) were to be found at

the back of the log book and it was the responsibility of each apprentice to read each page and decide which unit standard best matched the job they had just written up.

Mentors might have been able to help their proteges with this. However, it became clear that they didn't know how it all worked either – the log books had been different when they had gone through their apprenticeship! This was a lesson in ensuring that the mentors were not too distant in age and training from their proteges. It was also a lesson in the importance of clear-language resource development.

Fig 1

DAILY WORK RECORD	
APPRENTICE NAME:	DATE: 15-07-2011
HOST COMPANY: HENRY ELECTRICAL	SUPERVISOR:
WORKSITE: STEEL MILL	
DESCRIPTION: INDUSTRIAL	
WORK DONE:	U.S. No.
* mount panel board extension of PLC - (prepare & drill holes etc)	593/ 2020
* Repair & wire and Replace new light bulb.	16412
MATERIALS USED:	

Fig 2

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## APPRENTICE ASSESSMENT GUIDE

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### SELECT AND INSTALL ELECTRIC SWITCHBOARDS

*Unit Standard: 5931 v4*

*This unit covers the selection and installation of electric switchboards in domestic or commercial buildings.*

#### **Assessment Requirements**

You will need to select and install at least two switchboards (one MEN main switchboard plus one distribution board) in either commercial or domestic buildings. You can complete each part of this unit on the same job or different jobs.

When carrying out this assessment you will be expected to:

#### **Switchboard Selection**

You will need to choose a switchboard to match the electrical and switchgear requirements of the job from drawings and from consulting the customer. The choice of switchboard needs to consider the number and size of cable entries, the number and type of circuit breakers, switches and other devices, the earth and neutral bar size and current rating, and requirements for doors, locks and separate compartments for control and metering equipment.

You will be expected to know the requirements for fire-proofing switchboards, restrictions on the location of switchboards; special requirements for metallic enclosures, damp situations, dusty atmospheres, hazardous areas and outdoors; and any differences between switchboards for domestic and commercial locations. You also need to know the limits on where you can install a switchboard, the height above ground and height of the main switch.

### **Results: higher retention rates**

At the completion of the one year mentoring project, only one apprentice had withdrawn (to go on to higher education) and only one had lost his position with the electrical company (this apprentice experienced a break in mentoring). This reflects an 80% retention rate – much higher than previous recorded rates. In two years' time, completion rates are likely to have increased for this group. We believe that with ongoing mentor development, mentoring will make a lasting difference to the success of apprentices from different cultural backgrounds.