He Kupu
The Word
Volume 7, Number 4 – October 2023

Transforming mentoring approaches in Initial Teacher Education in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa.

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Research highlights that power relations are embedded into all social interactions of individuals and groups (Burr, 2015; Christie, 2014). Those in positions of power exert influence within dominant discourses with their status and position which then proceed to confirm these discourses. Understanding the complexities of power and the part power plays in mentoring relationships is important for lecturers mentoring student teachers in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand. My research investigates the impacts power has on the student and lecturer mentoring relationship in ITE in early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Using interviews as data collection I was able to explore the reflections of what lecturers in ITE in ECE in Aotearoa think and say about power when mentoring student teachers. The ideas considered are gathered from the research I completed towards a master's degree that studied power relations in the student teacher and lecturer mentoring relationship (Polley, 2022). The research provides valuable insights into the discourses of power and how discursive practices within institutions such as ITE could create negative perceptions of power. Embracing Kaupapa Māori could transform the future of mentoring relationships by reducing power imbalances. Considering a communities of practice model can decrease the traditional hierarchical approaches of power that are reinforced in ITE.

Introduction

The topic of mentoring students during their Initial Teacher Education for early childhood education, is of interest to me within my own specific teaching and learning context as a lecturer of Open Polytechnic / Te Pūkenga. My master's research has given me the opportunity to examine the power relations that might occur in student and lecturer mentoring relationships (Polley, 2022). My ideas for this study were generated through attending student teacher practicum visits which started my thinking about how the teachers perceived me in my role. As the visiting lecturer, undertaking these observations and assessments on practicum visits, I spend time in different centres developing relationships with associate teachers and other teaching team members. I wanted to know more about this and began thinking about power disparities in the relationships between myself and the students (Brouwer et al., 2017). I wondered how students and other lecturers perceive mentoring in this context and what they think and say about power relations in mentoring, questioning if other lecturers may relate to my

thoughts. These thoughts developed from an apprehension of going into centres and being perceived by others as having power over the student. I have always been interested in a relational approach, wanting to know more about authentic relationships between students and lecturers. I began to wonder if my role as a visiting lecturer reinforced unequal positions of power, wanting to know if by understanding more about the complexities of power and the part power plays in mentoring relationships these relationships could be transformed.

The importance of the context of Aotearoa New Zealand is included below as our country's history has significantly impacted on relationships and education and this must be considered when developing understanding and knowledge around power relations in mentoring relationships in early childhood education. The foundation of Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural context is the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 (Hudson & Russell, 2009). Te Tiriti o Waitangi is significant for my study as it supports the unique identity of Aotearoa New Zealand and is crucial for understanding partnerships and power sharing, linking to my research topic of mentoring relationships and power relations. For the purposes of this study, I will be referring to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which desired to uphold Tino Rangatiratanga (sovereignty) and look after the Mana (honour) of others arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand in the future (Consedine & Consedine, 2001; State Services Commission, 2005). Mana means an individual's honour and presence and within the Māori worldview Māori acknowledge that everyone has mana (Hook et al., 2007).

In Te Tiriti, Māori and the Crown agree that our country would be a place for Māori and Pākehā to stand together, demonstrating a commitment to partnership and respect (Consedine & Consedine, 2001). Smith (2012) believes that the history of colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand resulted in the undermining of Māori in many circumstances including education. A Māori worldview considers the mana of all, this supports my research that seeks to understand and transform the power relations that exist in student teacher and lecturer mentoring relationships. Due to the loss of Māori culture and resources through colonisation, we must continue to work towards honouring the rights of Māori whānau and children today, and we are obliged by our promise to Te Tiriti to ensure that Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination) is reserved by Māori (Ritchie & Rau, 2008).

The below literature review will outline some perspectives on power, drawing on the context of power in a student and teacher mentoring relationship. Following this will be the methodology and the main discussion which considers: the socially constructed ideas around power in mentoring relationships in ITE in ECE; and how collaborative approaches can transform mentoring relationships in ITE in ECE in Aotearoa.

Literature Review on mentoring relationships between mentor and mentee.

Promoting positive power relations.
Distributed leadership refers to the removal of traditional hierarchical structures when leading, along with learning now being recognised as a social process, rather than an individual process (Waniganayake et al., 2012). Similar features of leadership can be linked to mentoring and the removal of hierarchy in these roles is evident in recent literature.

Brouwer et al. (2017) supports the idea of reducing power in mentoring relationships, suggesting a shared learning approach instead. This literature highlights the importance of choice for both mentor and mentee, encouraging mentees to seek out mentors that fit their individual beliefs, moving from the responsibility being on those in formal roles (Brouwer et al., 2017). Brouwer et al. (2017) suggest the shared learning approach to mentoring connects with Māori philosophies of education that derive from collective ambitions. While shared leadership and learning are currently used in many ECE centres in Aotearoa New Zealand, a shared learning approach to mentoring relationships in ITE would challenge the formal processes of assessment that are required by ITE programmes. Challenging these traditional hierarchies could transform ideas around power.

Hudson (2016) suggests power and control are evident in the dynamics of mentor and mentee relationships, which position mentees as passive. Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) emphasise that the view of the mentoring relationship should be that of "a collegial learning relationship instead of an expert, hierarchical one-way view" (as cited in Hudson, 2016, p. 30). Aspden (2014) claims that reciprocal relationships can be very challenging to achieve when practicum assessment requirements and outcomes can influence authenticity of discussions, and relationships between mentor and mentee can be governed by power implications.

Institutional power is constant in organisations that facilitate mentoring relationships and understanding this is integral to understanding the power and control present in mentoring relationships (Christie, 2014). Christie (2014) highlights that many institutional mechanisms currently function that dictate the formal aspects of mentoring, for example the institution arranging the matching of mentors and mentees and institutions setting the agenda for mentor training. Burr (2015) suggests that critical discourse analysis in research is important as it supports researchers to examine how discursive practices maintain power within social contexts. Discursive practice refers to the way social practices are given meaning through language. Shared meanings and understandings shape reality which can be taken for granted (Burr, 2015). Namely the way certain language and practices confirm differentiating levels of power, and the individualised approach to constructing knowledge within a western academic context. These practices contradict the Māori approach to knowledge

acquisition, which focuses on the collective (Smith, 2012). This is also supported by research that reveals that culturally responsive pedagogy is where power is shared (Berryman et al., 2018).

Fostering a collaborative approach.

Communities of practice value a shared learning approach with a focus on improving the skills and growth of the group through the sharing of knowledge (Wenger, 1998; Heta-Lensen & Dunham, 2013). Pohatu, (2013) and *Tātaiako* (Ministry of Education, 2011) both highlight the importance of shared ideas and reciprocal relationships. Pohatu (2013) indicates the need for respectful and collective learning relationships, while *Tātaiako* considers the interconnectedness and partnership of teachers, Māori learners, whānau and iwi (Ministry of Education, 2011). Relationships that are fostered with community are essential to Communities of practice and such relationships are equally important in Te Ao Māori principles and values and as Roe Bubar (2013) states "pre-contact indigenous societies were spaces where clan, family, and community were central and individualism was discouraged" (as cited in Kovach, 2018. p. 223).

Communities of practice provide opportunities to work together both purposefully and collectively (Wenger, 2000). Farnsworth et al. (2016) and Wenger (1998) define Communities of practice as learning partnerships that relate to any area of human enterprise. Communities of practice is an approach that considers learning to be a social process rather than an individual one. This approach considers that knowledge does not sit with an individual but rather through mutual engagement and direct participation of the social learning systems that individuals operate in. This can be applied to mentoring as experts induct novices assisting their understanding of the many teaching and learning concepts, language, and skills within the shared culture of the community (Warren et al., 2021). Te Ao Māori principles and values present similarities to Communities of practice theory where both consider the collective approach and what everyone contributes to the whole. The Te Ao Māori principle of whānaungatanga supports ideas of collectivity, connection, and reciprocity (Smith, 2012).

Integral to Māori leadership and learning success is the sociocultural approach where all members of a community of practice are viewed as leaders. Tamati et al. (2008) asserts "for Māori at least, leadership and learning are best fostered in the context of whānau, where all members of a community are viewed as leaders, in their own right and their way" (p. 1). The holistic approach where all are considered leaders underpins Māori leadership practices, resulting in the overlapping of roles and responsibilities (Katene, 2010).

Clarkin-Phillips (2011) acknowledges a collaborative approach, stating that "distributed leadership grows and strengthens communities of practice" (p. 23). This is backed with further research that highlights how leadership for learning is associated with efficient communication and collaboration,

between various roles (Colmar et al., 2015). While Clarkin-Phillips (2011) considers distributed leadership within an early childhood setting, such an approach could be considered for an initial teacher education setting where negotiating new approaches to leadership create a shift in the balance of power.

Tensions in the mentor/mentee relationship.

In his Australian study Hudson (2016) suggests that mentors and mentees must acknowledge power differences in mentoring roles, which is recognised as well by Clarkin-Phillips (2011) whose research highlights how a distributed approach to leadership considers power relations. Hudson (2016) gathered evidence to support mentors in developing positive mentoring relationships, specifically looking at how mentors in their positions of power can form positive relationships with mentees. Whilst this study was led in Australia, research conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, also points to the importance of understanding the power imbalance between mentor and mentee (Brouwer et al., 2017; Clarkin-Phillips, 2011; Warren, 2014). As mentoring becomes more popular in tertiary programmes, further understanding of the power relations which exist in the mentoring relationship is needed. Through learning more about the specific contexts of mentoring and ways in which mentors and mentees construct their roles, power imbalances could be reduced.

Warren's (2014) research examined power relations and the construction of roles and ways individuals within discourses act that reflect values, beliefs, and assumptions of discourses. Warren (2014) investigated discursive practices within the relational professionalism discourse of two recently qualified early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Warren's (2014) in-depth findings of the two participants acknowledges that they engaged in discursive practices within the restraints of the discourse and within systems of power relations. The participants identified tensions in relationships that were not trusting and positive, particularly when the participants' colleagues had authority over them. Suggested is the need for opportunities for critical reflection. This will enable and empower early childhood teachers to adopt strategies such as agency and assertiveness to negotiate tensions within their professional relationships, working towards collaboration and the reduction of power imbalances.

Due to power imbalances in the mentor/mentee relationship, mentees may be reluctant to question certain practices for fear of affecting the mentor's evaluation of the mentee's progress. Bradbury and Koballa (2008) identify this source of tension as a real concern for those in mentoring relationships. The authors state the mentee "may be unwilling to question the practices of the school or mentor teacher for fear of fracturing the relationship or affecting the mentors' evaluation of their progress" (as cited in Hudson, 2016, p. 32). Robertson's (2009) research also highlights potential power relations in mentoring relationships, suggesting that focus needs to be on encouraging a collaborative culture.

Highlighted in the literature reviewed above is the idea of mentoring relationships that focus on mutual receptivity and caring and the need for mentors to adopt a relational pedagogy. A distributed approach focuses on shared decision making, moving away from the theory of leaders holding all the power and shifts from solitary leadership to a collaborative approach to leadership (Fullan, 2011). Literature on distributed leadership has links to a collaborative approach to mentoring and I have drawn on this literature. It is clear that power relations in mentoring relationships are present and hierarchical approaches that position mentors as authoritative, and superior must continue to be addressed in the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Methodology

I conducted my research using a qualitative methodology and led individual semi-structured interviews with three previous lecturers from the same ITE programme in Aotearoa New Zealand. A qualitative approach values the importance of relationships, and social complexities, meaning "the fields of study are not artificial situations in the laboratory but the practices and interactions of the subjects in everyday life" (Flick, 1998, cited in McNaughton, et al., 2010, p. 68). My research reflects participants ideas alongside my own experiences as a visiting lecturer for ITE in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mutch, 2013).

Findings and Discussion

The findings from my data confirm the presence of power in mentoring relationships, and data shows the lecturers' understandings are shaped by power relations. Communication where respectful and reciprocal relationships are established can reduce power relations, which is an important finding in understanding power and mentoring relationships. When those in mentoring relationships are mindful of the power that is present in mentoring relationships, thought can be given to the ways power is maintained and woven throughout our social constructs of mentoring, early childhood education and ITE. The lecturers that participated talked about mentoring relationships needing to be authentic, respectful, and collaborative. Participants' understandings of these relationships are of nurturing and supporting partnerships. Participants consider Te Ao Māori theories significant in mentoring relationships and conclude that Manaakitanga can shape these mentoring relationships to establish authentic connections and provide care and support. The findings suggest that by embracing the collective values of Communities of practice along with Te Ao Māori principles, power can be reduced transforming traditional mentoring approaches in early childhood education in ITE in Aotearoa. The following discussion reveals two key themes that emerged: (i) the challenges of power; (ii) the

mentoring relationships between student and lecturer are enhanced when collaborative approaches are embraced.

Challenges of power

The lecturers interviewed all recognised that power relations influence mentoring relationships they have with the student teachers. When lecturers talked about challenges in individual interviews, they considered that the hardest ones to navigate are the ones where there are issues with the student teacher passing the practicum. Assessment visits that involve the lecturer and student teacher can leave the lecturer feeling challenged as the lecturer holds the power to pass or fail the student teacher. Lecturer two acknowledged in the data that she "was very aware she was in a position of power".

The lecturer participants all recognised positive relationships as being key to reducing power and if they are established, then these issues are likely to be less problematic. The findings of my research show that when lecturers communicate, they must ensure that the student teacher feels supported and encouraged whilst the lecturers are also being honest about concerns. Being clear about what the lecturer wants to see from the student teacher and supporting them is important, so the student understands what is expected is evident in findings. Lecturer three highlighted she is always "trying to help students see that's what I am wanting." Being able to project to the student teacher that the practicum experience is a learning process, and for some students it takes longer was key with lecturer one stating "students react differently."

Challenging conversations can leave student teachers feeling vulnerable and threatened and it is important that "you have to be on their side" shared lecturer two, especially if it feels negative for the student teacher. Some teams are difficult for the student teacher to fit into. Therefore, the communication with the student teacher must be sympathetic, and as lecturer two suggested "understanding and knowing each other" must happen. It was also shown in findings that previous lecturers did not want to be held in high esteem as they felt the "student can be very scared" (lecturer two) and she just wanted to "be able to be real" with the students (lecturer two).

The lecturers that participated in the research all acknowledged that power was unavoidable because of the requirements set by the ITE program. The lecturer is in the position of making the final decision on the student teachers practicum and therefore the power relationship between student and lecturer cannot be escaped. However, an important finding from data revealed that the lecturers did not want to be held in a position of power but rather work alongside the student teacher.

The importance of supporting the students to be themselves as early childhood teachers is a finding from data. When lecturers think and talk about mentoring relationships and power, they see their purpose to "support the student to grow and develop and increase their understanding" (Lecturer one). The importance of getting to know the mentee and developing opportunities to understand them, and what they want from the practicum is evident from the data, and when this occurs power imbalances can be reduced.

Deepening relationships through an honest approach where the lecturers recognise the power that exists and acknowledge it, is evident in the findings. The data reveal that while power is obviously influential, previous lecturers want the mentees to feel comfortable and implement strategies to reduce this power imbalance and deepen relations further. Data from lecturer one such as "help them relax" and "to see them as naturally as possible" acknowledge the way relationships are grown.

This empowering approach deepens the relationship and what lecturer three says suggests that while "there is a power relationship that you can't escape", by giving as much information to the student as possible helps. Lecturer three said "I talk to the student about my role and what I am going to be doing and give them as much information so that they can see what I am doing and why I am doing it." This develops trust and respect and develops good relationships. Such relationships do try to balance the power that exists and sit well with the concepts of Manaakitanga. Within understandings of Manaakitanga, if genuine love and respect are shown then an individual's Mana is enhanced. When participants think and talk about mentoring relationships, Manaakitanga is important. When considering the power relations in mentoring relationships, Manaakitanga is critical as it reduces power imbalances, positioning all in the relationship as equally deserving of respect and care.

The contradictions and tensions in the lecturer mentoring role are evident and this complexity derives from mentors being both a support and guide and the assessor at the same time. The lecturer participants acknowledge the presence of power and the challenges that this dual role brings. Aspden (2014) claims that reciprocal relationships can be very challenging to achieve when practicum assessment requirements and outcomes can influence authenticity of discussions, and relationships between mentor and mentee can be governed by power implications.

The data reveal that when thinking and talking about power in mentoring relationships all three lecturers acknowledge the influence of power, with one saying, "the student is powerless" (lecturer one). Lecturer two shared she did not try to pretend power does not exist and would be honest and "acknowledge it up front."

Another lecturer said although she does not talk about power, she has always been aware that is what happens within relationships between the student teacher and the lecturer (lecturer three). While this showed a variance in what was communicated to student teachers, all three lecturers interviewed agreed that when communicating, honesty was vital for deepening mentoring relationships using a range of approaches that all support transparency. These reflections around power relations add insight into the impact that power can have on the student and lecturer mentoring relationship.

Collaborative approaches

To build others' ability, motivational practices must be in place, where everyone's contribution is valued and heard (Clarkin-Phillips, 2011). The need to build confidence and empower others supports working collaboratively therefore challenging positions of power being imposed (Hudson, 2016; Warren, 2014).

The data reveal that lecturers want to empower the student teachers to bring with them what they know into the mentoring relationship and support student teachers to have autonomy and mana. Sharing their experiences and being confident to contribute the knowledge that they bring with them was revealed in data with lecturer one saying, "it is important to recognise students as individuals and the strengths they have."

Institutionalised power operates, with the lecturer perceived as expert and the student as inexperienced (Fullan, 2011). Similarities can be identified between leadership and mentoring, and the data confirms that mentoring relationships can reduce power imbalances if collaboration is embraced. A Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) theoretical framework can be considered when thinking about a collaborative approach to mentoring relationships, and findings from the data recognise the importance of the contribution of all within their diverse roles. The data revealed the importance of not making assumptions and taking the time to get to know what the students' strengths are and enabling them to contribute these (lecturer three). The lecturers that participated all acknowledged the need to work in collaboration with the student recognising that they can learn from the student. Lecturer two supports this saying "it's about everyone working together in their own strengths and valuing what anyone brings."

The data reveal that the lecturers interviewed see the process of mentoring as a collective approach that involves the reflection and contribution of others to achieve success and the development of new knowledge. Power imbalances are reduced with this approach, where mentoring can be considered as a shared effort taking the responsibility off the individual lecturer, and empowering others to contribute. The data also suggested that by working together and allowing all space to contribute

lecturers can establish an adaptable and inclusive approach to mentoring relationships. Shared responsibility addresses power disparities and recognises the contribution of all which is an important finding towards understanding power relations in mentoring relationships. These experiences from the lecturers interviewed suggest that lecturers do think power relations are present in mentoring relationships, and this power can have an impact on mentoring relationships. However, they believe this power can be reduced when collaboration and trust is developed between student and lecturer.

Conclusion

Mentoring is constructed within social norms and the power that mentors have over mentees within mentoring relationships can be harmful or helpful (Hansman, 2003 as cited in Hudson, 2016). The findings in this study did indicate a power difference, with the power lying with the lecturers in the mentoring relationship. However, lecturers want to make students feel at ease and ensure they are supported in a way that develops connections and allows them to communicate honestly and freely, reducing feelings of intimidation and power and creating collaboration.

The results suggest that lecturers are mindful of power and want to ensure that students are the best versions of themselves. It is acknowledged in the findings that while power exists the lecturers try to do their best to help students feel at ease, balancing the role of both confidant and assessor.

Students know and understand the processes of engagement and assessment that are required of them on practicum, and this includes the power relations that are enacted through the ITE institution. Still, if we can understand power as positive, recognising the social constructs that are created, we can challenge them and change them, influencing mentoring relationships positively, working within a space that embraces Te Ao Māori principles and values and encourages collaboration and connection.

While literature suggests a successful approach to reducing power imbalances in mentoring relationships is for all to be treated equally, this is challenged by the socially constructed ideas around power that still exist in Aotearoa New Zealand's education system (Brouwer et al; 2017; Cameron, 2007; Hudson, 2016). Lecturers in mentoring relationships in ITE in early childhood education need to ensure they reflect on the existence of power within different social and cultural practices, examining their own ideas and assumptions.

Lecturers must take Māori ways of knowing and being into account and enable traditional Te Ao Māori principles and values like Mana, Whanaungatanga and Manaakitanga to underpin mentoring relationships, creating humility and inclusivity (Smith & Ritchie, 2015). The Te Ao Māori value of Manaakitanga, focuses on loving others, with Mead (2003) affirming "all tikanga are underpinned by

the high value placed upon Manaakitanga […] being very careful about how others are treated" (p. 29). Manaakitanga is important, and for student teachers to feel cared for and respected in mentoring relationships, commitment to this Te Ao Māori value is vital for the lecturers that participated in this study.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to those participants that willingly gave their time and stories in this research. Thank you to Dr. Alison Warren for your advice, support and feedback.

Glossary

Iwi:	A Māori tribe
Mana:	An individual's honour and presence
Manaakitanga:	Love and compassion
Māori:	The indigenous culture of New Zealand
Te Ao Māori:	The Māori world
Tiriti o Waitangi: The Treaty of Waitangi:	New Zealand's founding document
Tikanga:	Customs, practices, and values
Tino rangatiratanga:	Self-determination, autonomy
Whānau:	A holistic approach to family that is wider than immediate family members
Whanaungatanga:	Relationships

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