



Mentoring Investigation Report

Mentoring a colleague to support them in the process of applying for an Endeavour Language Teaching Fellowship

Background information

Mentor teacher(s) name: *Brent Bloffwitch*

Mentee teacher(s) name: *Clare O'Reilly*

School: *St Columba College, SA*

Language: *Indonesian*

Year level: *Years 1 – 4*

School or class context

St Columba College is a Reception (Foundation Year) to Year 12 College founded in both the Catholic and Anglican traditions. It is the first college of its kind. The College is located in Andrews Farm, approximately 45 minutes north of the Adelaide CBD. There are more than 1400 students enrolled at St Columba College. Indonesian is offered to students in Reception all the way through until Year 12 (Stage 2) at a Continuers level. The Indonesian program is a compulsory subject for study from Reception until the end of Year 9. Despite the fact that the overall number of students studying Indonesian in Australia and South Australia is decreasing, the number of students choosing to continue their learning of Indonesian past the compulsory year levels is increasing at St Columba College.

St Columba is a College with high expectations for both students and staff. Teachers are expected to implement rigorous teaching and learning units of work at all levels. Currently, in our Primary School, we have three teachers implementing the Indonesian language and culture program. Each of these members works part-time. One teacher is 0.4 FTE, 0.2 FTE and the third, 0.6 FTE.

Students in the Primary School receive one 45 minute lesson a week in Reception – Year 2. Students in Years 3 and above receive two 45 minute lessons per week.

One of the teachers in the Primary School is teaching Indonesian for the first time in her short teaching career. She has had no formal training to teach Indonesian and has not studied Indonesian at a tertiary level. The teacher has, however, studied Indonesian at a school level and completed Stage 2 Indonesian in 2006. As a result, the teacher initially lacked confidence in her own abilities to teach Indonesian, because of the length of time between her study and use of the language. This teacher is provided with support in developing her Indonesian teaching skills and language skills by the other members of the Indonesian teaching faculty.

As Coordinator of the Indonesian faculty, I was pleased to be able to be involved in this program, to consider mentoring relationships within my work context.

Goals of mentoring program

Goals of the program were guided by some key questions:

'What various modes of communication do I use with my mentee? Do these modes contribute to effective collaboration and respectful and efficient feedback?'

Goals identified were to:

- Examine and reflect upon the relationship that develops between mentor and mentee in a mentoring relationship.
- Work collaboratively with one of the early career teachers in the Primary School to develop her knowledge, skills and understandings of Indonesian language and culture teaching pedagogies and methodologies.
- In the process, develop her awareness of professional learning opportunities such as the Endeavour Language Teaching Fellowship (ELTF) scholarship program, and mentor her through the application process.

Design

- Meet regularly with the mentee face-to-face
- Establish a professional dialogue via email
- Direct the mentee to the ELTF scholarship website to familiarise herself with the necessary information pertaining to the role of the participants, the objectives, applicant criteria and application process etc.
- Assist the applicant to seek a supporting statement from the school principal
- Collaboratively work together to complete the online application form
- Attend information sessions in Adelaide re: 2013 ELTF
- Participants to complete reflective practices questionnaire

Implementation

After many chats with my Key Contact and thinking over the possibilities for this investigation, I made the decision to analyse communication techniques between the mentor and mentee and to evaluate the effectiveness of various modes, while at the same time assessing the level of the respectful nature of feedback and communication.

To initiate the mentoring partnership, I met with Clare informally and discussed the MoRe LEAPS project with her and flagged the idea of working together on this investigation. As Clare is new to the field of language teaching and has little knowledge of the AFMLTA, Professional Standards Project, ELTF and other such organisations and projects, it was important that I shared my knowledge with her and provide her with as much information as I possibly could in a concise, yet fulfilling manner. By the end of our conversation, Clare had agreed to partake in this investigation.

I should mention that although Clare and I work at the same school, we teach on different campuses. So, after meeting with Clare on my campus and discussing the initial plan of the investigation, I followed-up our face-to-face discussion with an email containing the relevant links for Clare to source information herself about the AFMLTA and ELTF in particular.

A week later, I emailed Clare to see if she had any questions about the project or about the ELTF. From here, we made a time to meet face-to-face and discuss the next stage of the investigation.

Clare and I attended an ELTF meeting and heard from a speaker from AusTraining International about the application process (which was to become our focus) and also heard personal stories from past participants of the program.

From here, Clare and I discussed how we would proceed. Clare took control of the process at this point, deciding to download the PDF application form and investigate the questions and required documentation to complete her application. Once she had drafted her responses, she emailed them to me and asked me to provide some feedback in some cases, as well as to help better direct her answers in others. Clare also

phoned me to inform me that she had emailed her responses through. Within twenty-four hours, Clare had my responses and was able to re-draft some of her answers, as well as to structure others which she had previously been unable to complete.

Clare sent her responses through to me after a second drafting and from here, I encouraged her to make sure that she had the relevant and necessary documentation (passport, birth certificate etc.) copied, certified and scanned electronically ready to complete the online application process, which she completed herself.

Data gathered

The most interesting and relevant aspects of data for this investigation are Clare's initial and final responses to the questions in the ELTF application, as well as my feedback to her. Excerpts are provided below, with my comments in bracketed red text which relate to bolded sections of her responses:

Response 1

Describe the learning activities, both professional and personal, that you have undertaken to continue to develop your abilities as a user and teacher of your focus language. (1,500 characters or less)

I have been practicing Indonesian since Primary school. I extended my studies throughout my high schooling and ended up choosing Indonesian as one of my year 12 subjects.

For my entire schooling career I have been an avid Indonesian learner. My primary school days allowed me to develop a young passion for the language and desire to participate somewhat in the Indonesian culture. Being taught by an Indonesian person deepened my respect for Indonesian language and Indonesian people. My passion had developed, deepened and was so rich that by the time I arrived at secondary school, I couldn't imagine not studying Indonesian through until the end of Year 12.

[What do you think of this instead? We want to promote your passion for the language and culture here and really sell yourself!! ☺ I think it's also important to note here that you are teaching Indonesian without formal qualifications but seek EVERY opportunity to improve your own competencies etc.]

I started teaching Indonesian this year, teaching at a primary school level and am constantly seeking support and professional development from my co-ordinator and language teacher colleagues. Every day, I am increasing my knowledge through internet research, books, television and online programs. I am also currently undertaking an online Indonesian language course through a company called E-Lingual.

[Excellent!! Can you expand a little more on this? You attended INDOfest, you're a member of INTAN, you attend all INTAN and Catholic Ed language workshops and conferences (or, at least, you will!) ☺ You have also planned a trip to Bali, haven't you? On this trip, of course, you'll be updating your cultural understandings, seeking to improve your language skills and shopping for authentic teaching resources to enhance your dynamic curriculum.]

Final Answer:

I have been practicing Indonesian since Primary school. I extended my studies throughout my high schooling and ended up choosing Indonesian as one of my year 12 subjects.

For my entire schooling career I have been an avid Indonesian learner. My primary school days allowed me to develop a young passion for the language and desire to participate somewhat in the Indonesian culture. Being taught by an Indonesian person deepened my respect for Indonesian language and Indonesian people. My passion had developed, deepened and was so rich that by the time I arrived at secondary school, I couldn't imagine not studying Indonesian through until the end of Year 12

I started teaching Indonesian this year teaching at a primary school level and am constantly seeking support and professional development from my co-ordinator and language teacher colleagues. Every day, I am increasing my knowledge through internet research, books, television and online programs. I am also currently undertaking an online Indonesian language course through a company called E-Lingual.

I am currently teaching Indonesian without any formal qualifications, however, I am always seeking every opportunity to improve my competency, knowledge and confidence in my career.

Response 2

An integral role of an ELTF Awardee is the promotion of the value of languages education in Australian schools. Provide at least two examples of how you have promoted languages and languages education in your school or a similar context. (1,500 characters or less)

*In my school I try to be creative and inclusive when promoting language education. So far, I have organised a 'Fruit tasting day' in the primary school for students to try an array of **Indonesian** fruits they may not necessarily get to try **otherwise**. **These activities are widely promoted throughout the school community because I take every opportunity to promote Indonesian activities in the College's newsletter, The Coracle. I received comments that....after the fruit tasting day. Etc.***

[What do you think?]

I have also set up an Indonesian display in the front office of my school. This takes up the whole side wall and is the main attraction when you enter into the office. I have decorated the board with student's work samples and reasons why learning a language is important and beneficial for students.

[Good! What else have you done? It says 'at least 2', so let's give them more! Perhaps the classroom displays of language signs and authentic Indonesian realia?]

Final Answer:

In my school I try to be creative and inclusive when promoting language education. So far, I have organised a 'Fruit tasting day' in the primary school for students to try an array of fruits they may not necessarily get to try. I received comments that the fruit tasting was a great experience not only from other classroom teachers, but also the student's after the fruit tasting day.

I have also set up an Indonesian display in the front office of my school. This takes up the whole side wall and is the main attraction when you enter into the office. I have decorated the board with students work samples and reasons why learning a language is important and beneficial for students. Students work is often hanging up not just in the Indonesian room, but also in their classrooms so students do not think that learning Indonesian is just reserved for the Indonesian room in their lesson once or twice a week. If students are surrounded by it inside and out, it will more likely be responded to in a positive manner during their lesson times.

These activities are widely promoted throughout the school community because I take every opportunity to promote Indonesian activities in the College's newsletter and in classrooms.

Response 3

The ELTF provides an intensive, in-country language immersion experience in a group situation. One of the objectives of the program is to strengthen networking among language teachers nationally and in each State/Territory. Successful participants require adaptability, a strong commitment to the objectives of the program and to ensuring positive outcomes for all involved.

Describe how you would effectively represent the ELTF program as an ambassador both in-country and on your return to Australia. (1,500 characters or less)

No initial answer...

[This question here requires you to state that you will represent Australia in an official capacity to the greatest of your abilities whilst engaged in a professional learning program. You will participate in all activities, behave in a culturally appropriate way at all times and with all people, be punctual, committed to learning, sharing ideas, complete all requirements of the program etc.]

Final Answer:

I will represent Australia in an official capacity to the greatest of my abilities whilst engaging in a professional learning program. I will enthusiastically participate in all activities and behave in a culturally appropriate manner at all times and with all people. I will be punctual, committed to learning, sharing ideas, and

complete all requirements of the program.

Upon my return to Australia, I will uphold my responsibilities of sharing my knowledge and experience gained from the ELTF program not only within my school, but also within the wider community (INTAN members etc).

Outcomes and evaluation

This investigation provided the following outcomes:

- An application for the Indonesian Endeavour Language Teacher Fellowship was constructed through a strong mentoring relationship and was successfully submitted (and resulted in the award of a scholarship)
- The mentee developed the confidence to communicate with various authority figures in her professional community, i.e. principal, program officer at Austraining International, colleagues and the media. This was a significant step as there had been some previous anxiety about such engagement
- A heightened understanding and awareness of in-country professional development opportunities for language teachers amongst the school and wider community was established- there were benefits across the faculty and into the wider community of the school
- I developed a better understanding of mentoring relationships and communication strategies beneficial to successful mentoring partnerships, which I can use in future practice
- A stronger professional relationship between the mentor and mentee was developed- with a focus on a particular task, it became easier to be involved in discussions and there were reasons to communicate regularly, which were beneficial beyond the mentoring task

This investigation links closely to the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2012) in two domains:

Professional Engagement

Domain 6:

6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice

6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice

Domain 7:

7.4 Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities.

In addition, the mentoring project linked with the Professional Standards for Lead Language Teachers of Languages and Cultures (AFMLTA 2012) in the following ways:

Language Pedagogy

- They (lead teachers) work with others to identify needs and opportunities for developing knowledge of teaching and learning practice and theory

Professional Relationships

- Lead teachers of languages and cultures provide leadership in their professional communities through informal and formal relationships in their schools, their profession and the wider community
- They work to establish professional relationships which benefit the quality and appreciation of teaching and learning of languages
- They actively participate in establishing and working within mentoring relationships and establish pathways to support early career and pre-service languages and cultures teachers

Interpreting the data

Throughout this mentoring process, it was interesting to note that Clare was enthusiastic about getting feedback regarding her responses in a prompt manner. By her sending me information via email and following that up with either a phone call or text message indicated not only her willingness and eagerness to participate both in this project and gain a place in the ELTF program, but also to have her work recognised, constructively critiqued and for feedback to be supplied promptly. One can assume that prompt feedback indicates the other's willingness to participate in an open dialogue but it also demonstrates a real

professional courtesy; knowing someone has invested a lot of time in completing an important task and having to wait lengthy periods for feedback is disheartening for the mentee, and to some extent, disrespectful on the mentor's part.

There are three examples of the various types of feedback given to Clare as part of this investigation. In Response 1, Clare had supplied a concise answer to the question. Whilst the application stipulated a character length, I encouraged Clare to promote herself and her enthusiasm in a lengthy way by adding more information and being slightly more assertive in her response. To do this, I was careful to use her original answer as the base for my re-working of the first part of her answer, giving her the opportunity to use, adapt or discard my elaboration. In the second part of her first response, I praised her work and gave her yet more suggestions to promote herself and her actions around language education to a greater extent. I chose to provide feedback in this way because I felt it important to validate the answer Clare had provided, but also wanted to ensure that the final answers submitted for the application were mostly Clare's work and words.

Response 2 gave me the opportunity, again, to suggest ways of re-wording and extending the response to be both specific to an Indonesian context, as well as to provide as much information as possible. It is with this answer that Clare was asked to think about other activities she could provide as evidence to answer the question in greater depth and detail, so I posed questions and gave some examples as a hint to help her along the way. It's here that I was not trying to put words onto paper for Clare, but wanted to prompt her thinking in particular directions that enabled her to answer the question as a whole.

In the third response, Clare was unable to answer the question without guidance and support. Having the courage to admit that she couldn't answer the question is evidence of the good supportive relationship we had established and built upon through this process. She was not scared or timid in any way to admit her defeat of this question and to seek advice from me as her mentor.

Having access to various modes of communication, including phone, email and face-to-face meetings, expanded the opportunities for dialogue and also reduced some of the human barriers that exist in a power-imbalanced relationship. Initially, the power imbalance favouring me as the mentor was evident, but soon was reduced once Clare had immersed herself in the investigation and became more and more knowledgeable about the AFMLTA and the ELTF. The power balance, or imbalance, became more neutral once Clare had submitted her online application and all communication with AusTraining International and the program coordinator was directly with Clare. This prompted Clare to willingly and openly share information with me almost as soon as she received news from the program. Perhaps it can be said that Clare's quick relaying of information parallels the quick turn-around of feedback and advice that was modelled to and with her in the earlier stages of this investigation.

As an aside, Clare's confidence and ability to interact and communicate with people in various positions grew in strength. During the early phase of this investigation, she was daunted by the fact that she had to seek a principal's supporting statement for the application. However, after communicating via email with me, we drafted an email to the principal to seek their support which Clare then sent. Upon the principal's request, Clare and I were both asked to meet with the principal and discuss the application. In this meeting, where the power imbalance between Clare and another person involved partially in this investigation was at its greatest, Clare moved from seemingly meek and mild into providing clear, concise answers and was (appropriately) moderately assertive with the principal. This emerging confidence in communicating with others was developed with a grounded understanding of what the program was, what the benefits are and, most importantly, with the support from a mentor in helping Clare gain the knowledge, understanding and being able to effectively communicate this to and with others.

Clare was accepted into the 2013 Indonesian ELTF Program and has completed various interviews with local media interested in her success.

Reflective summary

I have very much enjoyed working through this mentoring partnership project and am continuing to look for ways in which to extend this further in other areas with other people and to continually develop the relationship established. As such, in my own practice, I will continue to:

- Maintain efficient and effective communication with all staff using a variety of methods in which to do so depending on the nature of the context and what is deemed appropriate

- Continue to promote professional learning opportunities to the staff within my faculty, but also to the wider community of languages and cultures teachers
- Dedicate specific time to work with individuals and cater to their needs
- Work with staff to develop their understanding of the Standards – AFMLTA and AITSL
- Promote the success of languages and cultures teachers in the public eye of the community.