

Leadership Coaching Programme Case Stories Series



The series is a curated collection of stories that describe leaders' experiences and learning from the Leadership Coaching Programme (2023/2024). The programme was a multi-component 10-month professional learning and development (PLD) that involved being coached before learning to coach others. Leaders were also supported through a book club focused on Wayfinding Leadership and access to online modules to support their use of coaching.

The coaching models used in the programme are referred to as the leadership coaching framework and practice-based coaching – both are co-constructed models of coaching.



The Early Learning Team at Massey University (Early Years Research Lab and Tātai Angitu) worked in partnership with the Ministry of Education to offer the Leadership Coaching Programme. We thank all the leaders for their amazing mahi and commitment to the programme. A very special thank you to leaders who graciously gave their time and told their stories to share some of the insights, learning, and outcomes for practice.

The stories are based on real examples from a wide range of early learning services. We have aimed to keep stories short, engaging, and written in plain language. Where possible, we have emphasised the voices of the leaders, kaiako, and PLD facilitators to share their experiences in their own words.

1. Culture, Connection, and Coaching:
Creating Space for Pacific Kaupapa
2. Practice-Based Coaching to Support
Focused Professional Growth
3. Coaching and Data-Informed Feedback:
A Value-Added Approach
4. Group Coaching:
Connection and Vulnerability
5. The Difference of a Specific Focused Goal
6. Leading Together, Learning Together
7. Developing a Leadership Identity
8. Pedagogical Leadership:
A Renewed Sense of Purpose



Culture, Connection, and Coaching: Creating Space for Pacific Kaupapa



Epenesa (Epe) is the centre leader at Malamalama Moni Aoga Amata EFKS (Samoan Early Childhood Education) in Te Papaioea, Palmerston North. When Epe saw the information about the Leadership Coaching Programme she was interested because the book *Wayfinding Leadership* was part of the programme. Epe felt this would offer an opportunity to explore leadership in a way she could relate to, because of the programme's connection with Pacific views of leadership.



Epe told her friend Ana about the programme. Ana is the centre leader at Lalanga Mo'ui Tongan ECE Centre in Palmerston North. Ana was unsure about the programme and its focus on coaching. For Ana, "Coaching was a new strategy for Pacific Islanders and mostly associated with sports and performance ... with a focus on someone checking to see if you were getting it right." Ana was concerned coaching might not be a good fit for her setting. For Epe, the word coaching was more neutral, and she saw it as an extension of the ways kaiako coach or support a tamaiti in their learning.

Being friends and professional supports for each other, Ana and Epe decided, "Why not give it a go!" Ana and Epe had each taken on leadership roles in their settings and service. They were keen to grow their leadership knowledge and practice and importantly, grow and support their staff.

Culture

As the programme got underway, Ana and Epe met Kayla, their coach. As a PLD facilitator, Kayla has a strong focus on implementation of curriculum through a Pacific lens and draws on her own culture as a Tokelauan and Pākehā woman to make connections across Pacific contexts. Quickly, Ana recognised that the coaching in this programme was not about performance or being judged, but that Kayla was there to support and help her with the things she wanted to focus on. Ana felt she could let go of the image of trying to be the perfect leader and that it was safe to acknowledge things she wanted to work on.

This programme is not about changing you. It's not telling you that this is what I should be doing. It's for me to see, it is for me to be the best I can be and that's through learning all these strategies that have been given. I have to choose which one suits me, suits my audience, suits my community, suits my culture, and I think that's the best part.

This in turn increased Ana's feelings of confidence, knowing there was support for her to

address the complexities of her leadership role, including understanding and connecting to culture. As Ana explained,

Unless you understand our culture, you don't understand our values, but you know, [Kayla] understood where we were coming from. She was actively supporting us, and she knew the commitment as a Pacific Islander – you're committed to your job, to your parents, to your church, to your community. It's a whole heap of commitment and it's time consuming ... She understood that we were busy and she came prepared.

Connection

At the January meeting with Epe and Kayla, Epe suggested they call Ana and the three of them meet together, optimising their time with Kayla and continuing to strengthen how they support each other professionally. For Epe, this created the space for connection and shared learning. "In leadership sometimes you are left by yourself, and you do feel alone sometimes. And it was good to actually speak to both of them in the sense of 'have you gone through this?' and getting that practical feedback and support."

Kayla knew that the leadership coaching framework is intended to be responsive and flexible and so she followed Epe and Ana's lead to meet together for their future visits. Kayla sought to create a genuine space for talanoa around leadership while also supporting Epe and Ana to grow their own coaching skills through goals and action plans.

Reflecting on their time together as talanoa, Ana said:

I'm glad you are referring to it as talanoa, because that's exactly what we did. We talked about everything. We put everything on that table, we didn't hide any problems and it was safe because I was comfortable to talk about the issues we were having at our centre and Epe was as well because we both know that what we talked about here stayed here. But that wasn't the point. We weren't comparing issues. We were looking for a solution, so the only way we could get a solution was to be honest and transparent and put it all on the table. With Kayla's help, we came up with solutions and that's what we did.

Epe added to the reflection:

Very important issues too, and sometimes you don't get that time. This gave us a space to be able to have time and actually focus on some of these issues because sometimes you just get caught up and sometimes, you're right in the middle of it. And it's nice to have other people's perspectives on it ... Also, Pasifika are very community orientated and group orientated, and it was really nice to have that as a group.

Looking back, both Ana and Epe felt that the support of the programme and the space for talanoa "came right at the time when we needed it most with our centres." The programme created a space for their own well-being as well as solutions for their centres.

Coaching

Moving forward, Epe and Ana are extending their coaching skills to support their staff. Ana has changed the way she views coaching. Sometimes she describes entering a situation and saying to herself: "What would a good coach do?" Her answer, "It's someone who actively

supports you. Coaching is about encouraging you to do your best."

As Ana describes,

I have to think like a coach instead of a supervisor. So instead of just saying right, you need to do this and do that, now it's more like I want the best out of her instead, I want her to start thinking about herself in her role and for me stop giving directions. And for her to find her own feet in our programme.

Similar to her own initial reluctance to use the word coaching, Ana is aware that her staff share feelings about the word coaching and being judged. To help her staff gain confidence with coaching processes, Ana has been focusing on coaching her staff as a team, through support and encouragement and by drawing on four core Tongan values – the four golden strands: Faka'apa'apa (respect); loto tō (humility); tauhi vā (nurturing relationships); and mamahi'i me'a (loyalty/passion).

And so it's good to draw on those [values] and then use that to coach them as a coach. Just like, "Let's have a look at this value here. How can we strengthen our centre with our four core values, what do we need to do?"

For Epe, coaching always felt like a safe space for support, building on her awareness and strength of relationships. Epe talked about Vā as the space for things or relationships.

It's very, very important because sometimes you are not the person to step into that space, or sometimes you are the person to step into that space. And so I think knowing that and building that relationship with when you're coaching someone or with your team is very important because they're either going to let you in or they won't, and so usually time is really, really important for building or forming that relationship.

In her own coaching, Epe has found the programme helped her be more intentional.

I met up with my person that I was coaching. We made the time and you definitely do need to make time for people. We were making space and making it intentional to do this practice because sometimes you get a whole lot of things going on. It's like you don't even know where to start. The [practice-based coaching] gave us a starting point and a focus.

Key Messages

- Cultural connection and understanding supported leaders to engage in ways that were responsive to their ways of working and being.
- Together, the leaders and their coach, created a space for talanoa to address important issues; while also making time for focused coaching and to create meaningful action steps.
- Drawing on the collective by being together and working together strengthened each leader's ability to work on their personal goals.
- Coaching was not about "getting it right" or being judged but about actively supporting team members to grow teaching practice and confidence.

Practice-Based Coaching to Support Focused Professional Growth



Claire is an experienced leader at Andersons Bay Community Kindergarten in Ōtepoti, Dunedin. Claire describes herself as a value-driven and “quiet” leader who promotes distributed leadership within her teaching team. This story is about Claire’s shifts in leadership practice during the Leadership Coaching Programme, especially her experiences of learning to use practice-based coaching to support one of the kindergarten’s kaiako, Abby. Abby has been teaching and working with Claire for about 5 years. Claire describes Abby as a dedicated and reflective kaiako.

The Coaching Partnership

Within their coaching partnership, Claire and Abby focused on teaching practices from Kōwhiri Whakapae. First, they discussed which aspects of Kōwhiri Whakapae were most relevant to their local curriculum, including to their group of children and learning priorities. Based on what mattered in their kindergarten, Claire and Abby selected specific teaching practices from Kōwhiri Whakapae as a focus for coaching. They collaborated to identify Abby’s strengths and opportunities for growth across the teaching practices. They also linked the strengths and opportunities to Abby’s professional growth cycle.

Based on strengths and opportunities, Claire helped Abby craft specific teaching goals. The first goal involved reflecting on the nuanced ways sunhat rules are applied in day-to-day teaching. Later, a second goal focused on teaching decisions in situations of children’s peer conflicts.

Claire and Abby worked together to make each goal focused and achievable. To ensure goals were specific, Claire and Abby drew on the analogy of “boulder, rock, pebble,” that Claire’s own coach Helen had shared with her to help break bigger ideas down into something more achievable and focused. From each focused goal, they developed an action plan and worked out specific action steps.

Using the action plan as a guiding document, Claire and Abby worked through multiple cycles of focused observations and coaching conversations. The focused observations involved the gathering of data which were specific and relevant to the goal. In their coaching conversations, Claire and Abby unpacked and analysed the data to support reflective discussion and feedback.



From Mentoring to Coaching

A shift in Claire's leadership practice came through the use of practice-based coaching. The processes of practice-based coaching, including learning to give constructive feedback, added a layer to Claire's extensive knowledge and experience as a mentor.

Claire noted that mentoring emphasises reflection; supporting people to reflect on their own teaching. Practice-based coaching also involves reflection but key differences include the focus on specific teaching practice goals and data-driven conversations that include constructive feedback. Claire reflected that the clear process of linking reflections and feedback to what was noticed in the observation meant there was always something specific and focused to connect the "noticings" to.

To extend the tools used for focused observation and support data-informed reflection and feedback, Claire tried out video observation. Video proved to be a powerful way to gather specific details and nuances of teachers' practice and the impact that practice was having on outcomes for children. As Abby explained, through focused observation, including video observation, there is "a snapshot of your teaching to then have some evidence to have a conversation with."

A key for Claire was to stay focused on the teacher's goal and action plan. Being more focused was a shift in practice for Claire. She commented:

I liked how it was focused. I've done quite a lot of observations in the past with students mainly and it's all very much just everything. I've done a lot of just running records, and [the practice-based coaching focused observation] is so much more valuable for that feedback process. Really, they're specific and so that you can both know what's being looked at and what's being observed, and so, the analysis of that is just so much deeper.

Building on the impact of PLD that is focused on teaching practices, Claire reflected:

The in-depth focus on practice and quite a small goal can really change practice, and then that has such great outcomes for tamariki. Watching Abby working with the children, I could just see everything she's thinking about and making those decisions about how to respond to different children, and what strategies to use. And you can see their learning progressing with that great teaching. The team being supportive of each other makes a huge difference for tamariki as well.

Abby believes that practice-based coaching has given her time to focus on an aspect of teaching and see the outcomes for the children.

Having gained knowledge, confidence and experience using practice-based coaching, Claire plans to continue coaching other kaiako in her team. Having been coached, Abby has gained experience and learnt strategies that she plans to apply to her work and collaboration with other teachers.

Bringing the Team Into Focus and Accelerating Growth

Claire believes the Leadership Coaching Programme has supported her to be more intentional and prepared, by focusing on small and specific steps. She feels this has helped her facilitate team discussions more effectively, fostering greater progress for herself and the teaching team.

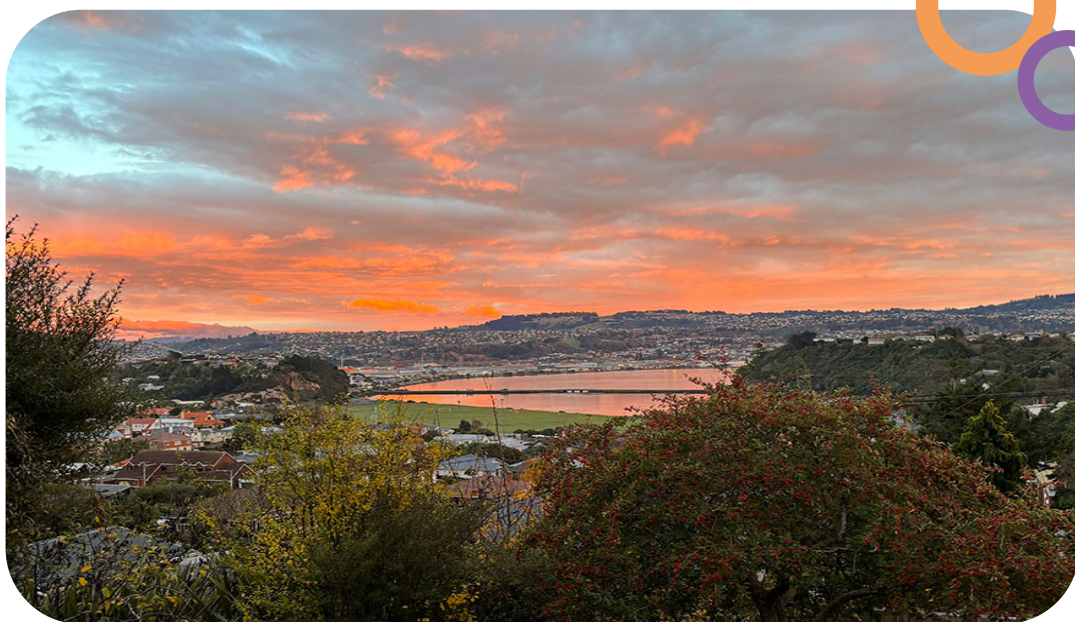
One of the ways Claire collaborated with her team was to always include an action step that involved talking with the teaching team about her work in the Leadership Coaching Programme, and inviting the team's input into her leadership goals. For Claire, this was a specific way to support distributed leadership. Sharing with the team was an action step Claire encouraged Abby to use to support collaboration and growth across the team.

In Claire's words:

The coaching and how we've defined it in this programme is quite focussed on strategies and very much focussed on practice and improvement. The iterative process builds trust and transparency. Making sure that things are small and manageable and having check-ins regularly means that there's a lot of impetus for movement and progress.

Highlights

- Engaging in the Leadership Coaching Programme strengthened an experienced leader's intentionality and added practice-based coaching to her repertoire of ways to support kaiako and her team.
- Specific teaching practice goals and data-driven reflective conversations that included constructive feedback contributed to the success of the coaching partnership.
- The in-depth focus on specific teaching practices, manageable goals, and having an action plan helped grow practice and promoted positive outcomes for tamariki.
- Coaching can be used in a distributed model of leadership.



Coaching and Data-Informed Feedback: A Value-Added Approach



Karen is head teacher at Surrey Park Early Learning Centre in Waihōpai, Invercargill. She is an experienced teacher who moved into the formal head teacher leadership role 6 years ago. Karen is engaged in leading curriculum, leading staff and mentoring kaiako. Throughout the Leadership Coaching Programme, Karen was supported and coached by Helen. Helen has extensive skills and experience as a PLD facilitator, which were complemented by the processes and protocols used in the programme.



Within the Leadership Coaching Programme there are two models of coaching. The first is the leadership coaching framework – this model was used by PLD facilitators such as Helen, to support leaders like Karen. The second is practice-based coaching – this model was used by leaders to support kaiako in their team. The two models share similarities in process but are distinguished by their purpose.

This story is about Karen's experiences of being coached and of being a coach, and the role of data as catalysts for change at multiple levels. In this story, "data" include the information and evidence Karen collected as she worked towards her own leadership goals and the

information that was collected through observation of a teacher's practice as part of practice-based coaching.

Learning to Coach by Being Coached

Previous to the Leadership Coaching Programme, Karen had engaged in leadership training, such as one-off training events or three day conferences. Coaching kaiako is part of Karen's job description but, until the Leadership Coaching Programme, there had been no formal training to teach her how to coach. Karen says, "Unless you've had some intensive training, it's all very well to say you go and observe and then give some feedback, but actually, it needs to be focused and there needs to be steps in place."

Using the leadership coaching framework, Helen and Karen engaged in regular coaching conversations and email contact. Their coaching conversations, which included reflection and data analysis, were focused on Karen's leadership goals and guided by the action plans Helen and Karen had developed together.

As their coaching relationship grew, Helen and Karen gave and received feedback and asked deeper questions of each other. Karen felt that having Helen alongside her at regular scheduled times was useful for her own accountability, as were Helen's follow-up emails which outlined

the main points of their coaching conversations and the next steps.

Helen's coaching also served as a model for Karen when Karen began using practice-based coaching. Karen described how Helen was very transparent and modelled using the protocols during their coaching conversations.

[She would tell me] this was the protocol and this is what she was doing which then encouraged me to do the same with the person I was coaching. I would make sure to have [the protocol] out and explain to [the kaiako I was coaching] and show her that this is what I was doing. It kept us on track and kept us making sure that we covered all the elements that we needed for the coaching.

Specific, Relevant Data Drives Practice Change

Karen and Helen described the use of data as a growth point in Karen's leadership and coaching. Karen explained that a small amount of specific data made a huge difference in supporting reflection on her leadership and her abilities to coach kaiako in ways that strengthen their teaching practices. Specific and relevant data, collected through a focused observation or video of practice, provided the evidence needed to inform feedback and to find the nuanced (but important) moments in teaching that offered a focus for coaching and practice change. Data highlighted specific teaching strategies that Karen and the kaiako she coached discussed reflectively during their coaching conversations. For example, as they watched a video observation together, Karen could point out exactly how the kaiako anticipated a child's potential frustration and provided appropriate support, or they could reflect on how the kaiako had praised a child.

Being Valued, Feeling Valued

Coaching and data-informed feedback not only played a role in strengthening leadership and teaching but had an important role to play in how Karen helped her team feel valued and excited about their practice. Karen and Helen explained how the process of practice-based coaching and the use of data can help kaiako feel valued. For example, Karen noted the importance of observing kaiako, having a professional discussion and providing positive feedback:

Having the work that they do be valued and someone taking the time to notice and recognise that work ... sometimes in the past, people have said, "Can you observe me and give me some feedback?" When that doesn't happen, I guess it makes [kaiako] think, "Was I not worthy of that?" The fact that ... a colleague wants to come and observe and then together, you have a professional conversation ... it just makes [kaiako] feel good and someone gave them some positive feedback. Because in the beginning, it really is all about the positive as you build that relationship. Someone taking the time to come and observe your professional practice. It values you as a teacher.

Helen further highlighted the importance of focused observation and linking feedback to specific teaching practices and children's outcomes.

Value is shown when we are specific. Rather than just saying “that was a great mat time,” collecting data about the specific teaching strategies that made the mat time great, and connecting those with the impact and learning outcomes for children. To be able to see that specific practice and have it acknowledged and valued by a coach, is what Karen has achieved – one of the big outcomes for her and the centre. That’s the stuff that keeps teachers going.

Likewise, when leaders are valued and when value is shown through sustained and specific professional support and feedback – that’s the stuff that keeps leaders going. As Karen described:

For me, one of the highlights is my coach. Having someone as skilled as [my coach] has been fantastic. And the ongoing contact, emails, Zooms and face-to-face has been really good. And the length of the programme has been so good [for] sustaining and building the knowledge over time.

Key Messages

- Sustained and intensive professional learning fosters leadership change.
- Clearly described coaching processes support leaders to use coaching with their kaiako.
- A small amount of data that is specific and focused can make a big difference to help strengthen teaching practice and children’s outcomes.
- Practice-based coaching, especially the provision of data-informed feedback, fosters teachers’ feelings of being valued.



Group Coaching: Connection and Vulnerability



Brooke, Jade and Emily are centre managers for Busy Bees Aotearoa in Te Tai Tokerau, Northland. Brooke and Jade work at centres across the street from each other in Kerikeri. They had previously met Emily, who is the manager at Busy Bees Whau Valley in Whangarei. Each leader had a different ECE background and pathway into leadership, yet they faced many similar challenges and opportunities for celebrations. They have each experienced the pressure on leaders to manage, support, and lead through the multiple complexities of managing ECE centres. The Leadership Coaching Programme offered them opportunities to connect as leaders, exploring leadership and to see how coaching could be used to support and empower their teams.

Throughout the Leadership Coaching Programme, Brooke, Jade and Emily were supported by Shelley (Ngati Kahu ki Whangaroa) who feels at home when she heads north. Shelley seeks out ways for connecting through relationships with people and with places in Te Tai Tokerau or in any rohe she enters. Shelley knew she would need to connect with and build a relationship with each leader. With Shelley's support, each leader set a goal focused on wellbeing and crafted an action plan to support their own wellbeing and wellbeing across their team. As she met with the leaders individually, Shelley sensed an opportunity to extend the individual coaching by adding a group coaching component to foster connection and support across the leaders. Building on Jade and Brooke's existing relationship, Shelley suggested a group coaching meet-up with herself, Emily, Jade and Brooke. The group coaching was arranged at the time when the leaders were beginning to learn how to use practice-based coaching.

When they met, the group spent time connecting and addressing some of the things that were on top for each leader. This was followed by time for each leader's kōrero about their individual goal and action plan for using practice-based coaching. The time together and the time working through each leader's focus was viewed as an invaluable resource and support. Jade, Emily and Brooke benefited from sharing their learning journeys with each other.

For example, Jade noted:

It's really been great getting to know the other managers a lot more and then having them as sounding boards. This has been helpful, you know, I might say something, and they might have another idea of how it can be achieved. Having Shelley connect us and having kōrero as a group, it's been fantastic and we've been able to share our own experiences with one another.

Emily expressed similar feelings.

I agree, the times that we got to meet together in each other's settings were really nice. Listening to each person go through where they were at in their coaching journey, it was like sitting at professional development, because there were all these ideas that that person was working on and I was taking notes because it opened up all of these different avenues that wasn't my priority or focus but areas that I could look at later on. And the

sharing of resources, that meant that we had four of us sitting there with Shelley included and the resources that were shared were really amazing.

Brooke also described the positives.

It's opened the lines of communication with us. Often, especially after the visits we had together with Shelley, the three of us were messaging each other the next day to say "oh we did this or we did that." Or we've sent photos of our action plans or shared articles and things like that. And you know what the surprising thing was, we organised one of the visits down to Whangarei, and me and Jade went down, [and I realised] I've worked for Busy Bees for six years and I'd never been to Emily's centre, so it just bridged the gap straight away and it was nice to visit her space.

They met three times across January, February and March, alternating between Kerikeri and Whangarei for the coaching visits to be hosted in each leader's space. A key aspect of their time together was the ability to be open, honest and, ultimately, vulnerable. In turn, having a safe space and process to connect supported resilience and compassion, and strengthened relationships.

For example, Emily described the moment when she realised:

Oh wow, you're struggling with something similar to me or I should say challenged, but you know [recognising the difficulties with] time management and consistency and it made me feel not so bad about the realities of the mahi that we do. And I think this is a really good starting point to improving it – acknowledging that that's been a challenge for us has been really good for me.

Brooke also described:

[Meeting together] has broken down barriers for us in the sense that thankfully both Emily and Jade, and I are quite open with sharing barriers. Things that are going on in the centres that we're not quite comfortable with, that we want to change, that we're not quite happy so it's been quite nice that all three of us have had this focus, being on this leadership course, to then go actually let's look at ourselves honestly and put us in a vulnerable position and what do we want to work on. And the other two have been amazing at sharing that, and I guess it's just grown our relationship.

Connecting and working as a group has been a unique and special part of the Leadership Coaching Programme for Brooke, Emily and Jade. The support for their learning and collaboration was maximised through the group experience. Prioritising time to meet all together in person meant that they could schedule individual sessions with Shelley online. Yet, this onsite group coaching paired with online personal coaching was not something available to other leaders in the programme.

To understand the viability of a group coaching approach for other settings and situations we explored some of the factors that the leaders felt made their group work. These included:

- Going through a coaching cycle with Shelley as individuals before entering the group coaching helped the leaders to have a sense of what to expect and made them feel

comfortable with the coaching process.

- Shelley's skilled facilitation. Shelley worked very hard to understand and use the key coaching components in consistent and responsive ways for each leader in the group environment while also providing transparency of the process.
- The leaders felt that working for the same company enabled them to be open and more vulnerable about issues in their settings. It is possible that some leaders may feel a reluctance to be as open and honest about issues within their settings when connecting with leaders from different organisations.
- Working for the same company also meant that some of the structural aspects that were affecting them as leaders were shared and solutions generated would work across the group.
- Knowing each other, at least a bit, beforehand was important. Being across the street from each other meant that Brooke and Jade knew each other. For Emily, there was more distance and less existing connection, yet, she described knowing Brooke and Jade well enough that she felt entering into group coaching would be okay.



In the end, Emily, Jade and Brooke all described group coaching as “hugely valuable.” They feel the stronger relationships they have developed will help them continue to collaborate well beyond the programme and they have strengthened their confidence in approaching and working with other leaders.

Key Messages

- Group coaching offers a way to increase learning and access to new resources and ideas, while also having an individualised leadership goal and personalised support.
- Leaders benefit when they can make connections and work with other leaders to share experiences, ideas and resources.
- There are key conditions to consider to help make a group coaching format feel safe so that genuine connections can be made and authentic learning and growth can occur.

The Difference of a Specific Focused Goal



Keelia is the infant and toddler head teacher at Dunedin Hospital Early Childhood Centre, Ōtepoti. During the Leadership Coaching Programme Keelia used practice-based coaching to coach Julia, another head teacher from Dunedin Hospital Early Childhood Centre. This story focuses on the importance of goal setting to support coaching processes and drive change.

Crafting a Goal

At their first coaching meeting, Keelia and Julia unpacked a written strengths and opportunities reflection that Julia had completed beforehand. The reflection was focused on teaching practices from the social-emotional area of Kōwhiri Whakapae. Talking about Julia's written reflection was key to providing a foundation for goal setting. As they talked, Julia and Keelia explored Kōwhiri Whakapae. Julia noticed many of the Kōwhiri Whakapae teaching practices they were drawn to aligned with strengths identified in her written reflection. In that moment, Keelia reminded Julia that setting a coaching goal wasn't necessarily about finding something she was "bad" at but could involve finding something Julia was doing well and could extend.

With support from Keelia, Julia created a goal focused on an aspect of practice that she wanted to continue to strengthen. Keelia asked questions like, "How are we going to do this?" and "When will you find time in the day to explore what you talked about?" As Julia and Keelia talked, the goal became more and more specific.



This was supported by using Kōwhiri Whakapae. Keelia noted:

[Using] the tool of Kōwhiri Whakapae you could actually go into each section and get a [description of the practice] and then find out more. It was really useful [to have] those examples.

Once a goal was developed, Keelia and Julia set action steps for Julia to take to achieve her goal. They agreed on an observation plan for Keelia to observe Julia's progress.

Julia was excited to have a meaningful goal that reflected an area of passion and that would lead to change. Julia said:

It was quite hard to believe that just from that process you were going to come up with this goal. But it was just amazing.

One thing that really stood out was how specifically the goal was focused on teaching practice, which proved to be powerful and which, for Julia and Keelia, represented a shift from previous goals more focused on child outcomes.

Transformation

Goal setting was a transformative aspect of coaching for Keelia and Julia because it made all the coaching components that followed clear and possible. Like the goal and action steps, the focus of the observations was discussed and agreed upon by both Julia and Keelia. The observational focus and subsequent feedback was specific.

Keelia reflected:

I think sometimes you get used to people just saying, "Oh you did a good job." Whereas I could sit down and actually tell Julia the sentences she said that made a parent smile.

Reflecting on the overall goal setting process, Keelia said:

I think one of the things that really sticks out is the idea that it's not necessarily what goal they've chosen when you're coaching or being coached ... it wasn't necessarily about the content that they chose. It was how I could encourage them to delve deeper into that content or make a revelation or build on that.

Keelia knows it is very easy to get caught up in the busyness of ECE and for things to get pushed out without clear timeframes. The goal setting and practice-based coaching structure meant Keelia and Julia could hold each other accountable for the things they said they would do. The timeframes, small steps and tight focus made the goal achievable and enjoyable which promoted accomplishment. Because Julia's goal and action plan were specific and measurable, the success was visible and sustained. Julia and Keelia reflected that sometimes goals can be too big. Big goals cannot be easily achieved, leaving kaiako feeling like they failed when really the issue was the size of the goal.

Keelia and Julia plan to continue using the practice-based coaching goal-setting and Kōwhiri Whakapae resources with their teams. They want all their kaiako setting specific goals and action plans to create meaningful change.



Highlights

- Goals can be focused on a teacher's strengths, with potential to delve more deeply into teaching by growing or adapting strong practice.
- Kōwhiri Whakapae is a resource designed to deepen understanding of key areas in teaching and learning, and it can be used to help set goals focused on enhancing teaching practices.
- Setting focused and specific goals provides guidance, direction and timeframes which support coaching processes and success.

Leading Together, Learning Together



Lisa is an experienced teacher and pedagogical leader at YKids Early Learning Centre, Whakatū, Nelson. Throughout the Leadership Coaching Programme Lisa was supported by two coaches, Shelley and Kayla. This story is about Lisa's shifts in leadership practice.

Relationships, listening, feedback and critical reflection

Lisa has always valued relationships. Through the Leadership Coaching Programme, Lisa realised she had not recently been using intentional strategies to strengthen relationships and empower kaiako. Working with her coaches helped her unpack this realisation further and bring intentionality back into the ways she builds relationships. For example, Lisa described how she now tries to talk less, present information in multiple ways, and make space and time to listen to kaiako. As Lisa began coaching a kaiako from her setting, the practice-based coaching protocols continued to support shifts in her leadership practice. Lisa noted:

The protocols are really helpful. I found them really useful to keep me on track. I'm learning a lot about my strategies, how I give feedback and when to stop talking. I feel like I was speaking for them a lot of the time and filling in the gaps. [Using] the protocol, going through it and thinking, "Oh did you give them time?" And I was like, "No!"

The protocols were also useful in promoting a robust and more critically reflective conversation. Lisa described how she was familiar with the process of observing kaiako and giving feedback, however, the protocols reminded her of specific strategies she could use to support reflection and feedback.

In previous experiences where I've done observation and unpacked it alongside kaiako, I feel it's a little bit across the surface. I found when I was doing my coaching conversation with my kaiako that by reframing the question with guidance from the protocol, the conversation was a bit deeper, more reflective and more critical. That criticality had been missing, so it was really interesting to have a conversation where all of a sudden a teacher was being more critical about what was going on, or we were unpacking at just that next level to what might have been happening had I approached it the same way that I've done in the past.

Lisa pointed out that having a focus on a teacher's specific teaching practice goal also promoted a deeper and more critically reflective conversation. The specific focus helped her to hone in on what was important and relevant during observation and to unpack that area of practice with kaiako.



The leader as a learner

Lisa and the kaiako she coached used Kōwhiri Whakapae as a resource to support implementation of social-emotional teaching practices. Lisa was excited to have the opportunity to use Kōwhiri Whakapae for the first time, and acknowledged that she would be learning about the resource as she used it throughout the coaching process. For Lisa, this was a great opportunity to show that she was a leader and a learner.

It was really exciting to be able to do that alongside my kaiako. In the beginning I said, "I haven't looked at Kōwhiri Whakapae either so we're learning this and we're unpacking it together." Being open about that and having the opportunity to be a leader but be a learner – and just because I'm a leader doesn't mean that I know everything and look we can do this together – is a really useful tool.

Positioning herself as a learner, Lisa also reflected on her experience of helping a kaiako set a goal during practice-based coaching. Lisa felt she had missed the mark when she first helped her kaiako to set a goal. Lisa talked to one of her own coaches about this and, with the coach's support, Lisa went back to the kaiako and they changed the goal.

I was really honest with my kaiako again and said, "Look I think I might have steered you wrong. How do you feel about coming back and just having another wee look at this to see if we feel like we're moving in the right direction." And we tweaked [the goal] a little bit, and then we've carried on which has been really cool. So, it's been an awesome learning experience and learning as I go with the support from my coaches to be able to be like, "Oh I think I've missed something here."



As the programme comes to an end, Lisa plans to continue to use the tools and skills she has developed in other aspects of her mahi, including in centre reviews and for professional growth. Reflecting on her shifts, Lisa said, "It's like a little lightbulb's gone off in my brain. I can do that here and I can do it here. And the team having input in it a little bit more and being more empowered too."

Highlights

- Leaders are learners too.
- Intentional use of communication and leadership strategies promotes effective leader–kaiako relationships.
- Resources that help provide focus, such as protocols and Kōwhiri Whakapae, can support intentionality in coaching and teaching practice.
- Being coached and learning to coach supports leaders to develop a repertoire of skills to use in ongoing ways.

Developing a Leadership Identity

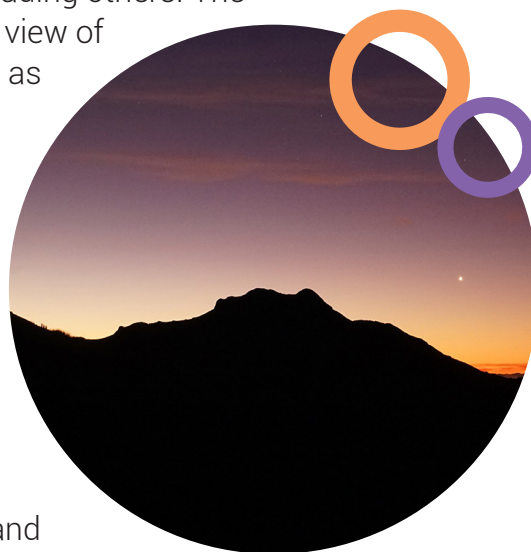


Shenae is a kaiako who teaches toddlers at Kindercare in Papaioea, Palmerston North. Shenae joined the Leadership Coaching Programme to support her aspirations of moving into a formal leadership role. During the programme, Shenae met with her coach, Michelle, for coaching sessions and participated in an online professional book club, exploring the book *Wayfinding Leadership* by Chellie Spiller, Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr and John Panoho.

One thing Shenae loved about the Leadership Coaching Programme was that you did not need to be a centre manager to participate. Entry was open to all kaiako who saw themselves as leaders, whether in a formal position or informally leading others. The programme's view of leadership aligned with Shenae's view of kaiako as leaders. This story is about Shenae's journey as she strengthened her identity as a leader.

Identity Shift

Shenae's leadership outlook has changed because of her engagement in the Leadership Coaching Programme. The programme has strengthened Shenae's understanding of the value of communication and working to uplift the mana of her team, recognising teachers' diverse experiences and expertise. She sees all team members as leaders and strives to create a sense of belonging and empowerment where everyone's voice is heard and the team comes together – this involves creating space to uplift others, stepping back to let others shine. Shenae describes leadership as “not about a crown held over the head of one individual, but rather a result of a collective of all efforts together.”



Learning with a Coach

The shifts in Shenae's leadership identity were supported through her work with her coach, Michelle. Michelle helped Shenae set a goal and specific action steps focused on empowering kaiako to feel confident and competent within their practice. At each coaching meeting, Shenae and Michelle reviewed the action steps and progress made. If something wasn't going to plan or wasn't working, Shenae would touch base with Michelle, and they would problem solve to keep momentum and keep the goal on track. An early action step was for Shenae to meet with kaiako to hear their stories and what was important to them as individuals, identifying the strengths each kaiako brought to the team. This helped Shenae begin creating space for kaiako strengths to shine in the team.

Shenae found the strengths-focused approach to setting and achieving her goal uplifting, refreshing and inspiring, leaving her feeling proud, positive, and with a clear focus of her next leadership steps. A series of significant challenges during the programme meant Shenae practised flexibility and adaptability to achieve her goal, with her action steps changing many times.

The Impact of a Professional Book Club

Participating in a professional book club was new for Shenae. Book club was a great opportunity to connect and learn with other leaders.

The book club was a great opportunity to work within small groups ... it gave us time to listen to different perspectives and share and listen to each other's stories, challenge our thinking, and to look through a different lens and inspire each other through our own individual leadership journeys.

Shenae said the book and book club discussions helped her expand her ideas about leadership. She reflected:

Wayfinding Leadership looked at leadership from a different lens that really got me thinking about leadership not just within ECE, but in a [deeper, broader sense]. Is this what I'm actually doing in the centre? Should I be thinking this way? What are the things I need to be mindful of? How am I inspiring my team? How am I making them feel valued and an important part of the centre and the team? Looking at it that way really made me have a lot of ideas about how I can bring all this knowledge into my team.



Shenae felt strongly that people do not have to have a leadership position to learn and benefit from reading Wayfinding Leadership. Anyone, whether in a formal leadership position or not, can learn from the book.

For Shenae the most valuable takeaway of the Leadership Coaching Programme has been the importance of openness, kindness, communication and truly getting to know her team. She feels once trust within the team is developed, kaiako feel more comfortable contributing and sharing information, and as a result the team feel empowered and inspired. Openness, kindness and communication are important priorities for all leaders, new and experienced, who want to create thriving, cohesive teams.

Highlights

- Leadership in ECE is for everyone! Kaiako are an important part of leading in ECE.
- Networking through a professional book club can provide leaders with opportunities to connect, exchange perspectives, challenge thinking and inspire each other.
- The book, Wayfinding Leadership, offers a view that is grounded in values and supports leadership practices that grow and develop cohesive teams.
- When leadership is focused on building and empowering the team, everyone benefits.

Pedagogical Leadership: A Renewed Sense of Purpose



Sue is the centre manager of the Farmyard Preschool in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington. Sue describes herself as an experienced leader who values relationships with her team, tamariki and whānau. This story is about how the Leadership Coaching Programme helped Sue re-establish her role as a pedagogical leader.

Finding a Space for Pedagogical Leadership

Although all aspects of leadership are important, engaging in the Leadership Coaching Programme and becoming a coach helped Sue to focus on her pedagogical leadership, a focus that had become somewhat elusive amidst the busyness and noise of managerial tasks.

Sue explained how she noticed her constant attention on managerial tasks had made her less aware of the teaching, learning and people around her, as well as less purposeful in her support of kaiako.



I'm conscious now that whenever I walk into any of the environments I'm a teacher first, not the manager. That took me by surprise when I first thought about it a few weeks ago. It was definitely a lightbulb moment because it suddenly hit me ... you walk into a room, and you think, "How many teachers have we got? How many children have we got?" ... checking compliance things. I've started making a purposeful point of going in and sitting in a room, or going in and sitting at the sandpit, or going over to where our rabbits are in their enclosures and the free range area and just spending time and not worrying about the five minutes extra I might be there for.

Sue isn't saying that management is not important. Rather she had realised that to be a pedagogical leader, she needed to find ways to focus on her role of supporting kaiako in their teaching. She explained how she started intentionally prioritising her time and delegating tasks which helped her find space for pedagogical leadership.

[Letting go of] the pressures of being a manager. Not sweating the small stuff too much and being more relaxed and being more open. I've had to learn to delegate within the team ... "I'm doing an observation; can you mind the phone?" That sort of thing. This is my priority. I'm doing an observation. This is my priority. I'm giving feedback. This is my priority.

The Transformative Power of Coaching

Participating in the Leadership Coaching Programme helped Sue make the shifts required to support kaiako and teaching practice. The experience of coaching a kaiako in her team reignited Sue's passion and motivation for leading, providing further momentum for pedagogical leadership.

For me, having gone into the [coaching] role reignited what I get out of teaching because [the kaiako I coached] was my tamariki as it were and I was role modelling how to be a teacher kaiako, and I could see the learning evolving. I thought, "Yeah, that's why I went teaching!" That, for me, is the best bit, that sort of sense that somebody's had the opportunity and you've been able to support them to discover their own qualities as a kaiako. I think seeing the change in practice, and this person went from not saying a word in staff meeting to actually talking about what they were doing in staff hui. It's like, whoa. There was this contribution. There it was, this confidence. Because we'd talked about what she was doing and how well she did it and what the value was for the child, she talked about it in staff hui.



Sue plans to continue to coach kaiako within her team and, after seeing the impact of coaching for her kaiako, Sue hopes the Leadership Coaching Programme expands across the sector so more leaders and kaiako can benefit from experiences like hers.

Highlights

- When pedagogical leadership is prioritised, the focus shifts from administrative tasks to creating a culture centred around teaching and learning.
- When leaders learn to coach kaiako and witness tangible growth in their teaching, a passion for leadership can be reignited.