



Pilot professional mentoring program for early childhood teachers progress report

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PILOT PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS PROGRESS REPORT - DECEMBER 2011



PROGRESS REPORT DECEMBER 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.1 <i>Background</i>	<i>3</i>
1.2 <i>Aim</i>	<i>3</i>
2. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	4
2.1 <i>The Mentoring Model.....</i>	<i>5</i>
2.2 <i>Workshops.....</i>	<i>7</i>
2.3 <i>Resource Packs</i>	<i>10</i>
2.4 <i>Website.....</i>	<i>10</i>
2.5 <i>Recruitment</i>	<i>12</i>
2.6 <i>Evaluation.....</i>	<i>12</i>
3. PROGRAM ROLL OUT	14
3.1 <i>General Recruitment Process.....</i>	<i>14</i>
3.2 <i>Demographics (Based on responses to the Pre-Mentoring Program Evaluation PMPE)</i>	<i>18</i>
3.2.1 <i>Mentors.....</i>	<i>18</i>
3.2.2 <i>Mentees</i>	<i>19</i>
3.3 <i>Pre-Mentoring Program Evaluation (PMPE).....</i>	<i>20</i>
3.3.1 <i>Mentors</i>	<i>20</i>
3.3.2 <i>Mentees</i>	<i>20</i>
3.4 <i>Mentor Training Day.....</i>	<i>20</i>
3.5 <i>Shared Learning Day 1.....</i>	<i>21</i>
3.6 <i>Online Forum.....</i>	<i>21</i>
4. ISSUES ARISING	21
5. THE NEXT STAGE	22
6. CONCLUSION	23
7. APPENDICES	23

TABLES & FIGURES

Figures

Figure 1: The Mentoring Model.....	Pg. 6
Figure 2: Mentoring Communication Model.....	Pg. 6
Figure 3: Screenshot of the Homepage of the Pilot Professional Mentoring Program for Early Childhood Teachers.....	Pg. 11
Figure 4: Website Design.....	Pg. 11

Tables

Table 1: Mentor Training Day Content.....	Pg. 8
Table 2: Shared Learning Day 1 Content.....	Pg. 9
Table 3: Shared Learning Day 2 Content.....	Pg. 9
Table 4: Evaluation Tools.....	Pg.13
Table 5: Mentor Recruitment Summary.....	Pg. 16
Table 6: Mentor Demographics Cohort 1.....	Pg. 18
Table 7: Mentee Demographics Cohort 1.....	Pg. 19

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides details of the progress to date of the first cohort to undertake the Pilot Mentoring Program for new to the profession or professionally isolated early childhood teachers across the state of Victoria.

1.1 Background

The *Pilot Mentoring Program for Early Childhood Teachers* builds on recent DEECD mentoring programs provided to recipients of Incentives for Early Childhood Teachers in Long Day Care in 2008/09 and 2009/10, to help teachers adapt to the challenges of delivering a funded kindergarten program in a long day care setting. Funding for the mentoring program for early childhood teachers was announced in the 2010 –11 Victorian Budget and Victoria University in partnership with Deakin University successfully won the tender to deliver the program over an 18 month period, commencing in June, 2011.

The Pilot Mentoring Program addresses a current workforce need for new or isolated early childhood teachers to access support from an experienced colleague. Many of these teachers will be the only degree-qualified teacher employed in their service. It also provides an opportunity for experienced early childhood teachers to take on leadership roles that enable them to share their knowledge within the profession. It begins with a Mentor Training Day for mentors only and then incorporates three Shared Learning Days where mentors and mentees attend together. By the end of December 2012, the program will have been delivered to two cohorts from across Victoria (360 early childhood teachers - 'mentees' in total). The program for the first cohort began on Monday 5th September, 2011 with the first Shared Learning Day taking place on Friday 21st October, 2011. The progress of this first cohort is the subject of this report.

1.2 Aim

The program aims to increase early childhood teachers' access to mentoring relationships. The focus of the program is around pedagogical discussions and the issues that are raised regarding leadership in early childhood settings. The program is built upon the following outcomes:

- Ensuring that early childhood teachers new to the profession have access to regular, targeted support from experienced colleagues;
- Developing a shared understanding between the early childhood teacher and the mentor, of the nature of mentoring and what constitutes good practice in mentoring;
- Providing opportunities for experienced early childhood teachers to develop their mentoring skills, and to develop their own practice through the mentoring relationship;
- Encouraging the early childhood teacher to reflect upon their pedagogical approach to learning and teaching for children from birth to five years assisting them to develop and deliver quality early childhood programs (informed by the VEYLDF and the National Quality Agenda);

- Assisting the early childhood teacher to understand their role in implementing the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and Transition: A Positive Start to School;
- Developing the skills and confidence of new and isolated early childhood teachers to deal with challenges experienced in their setting or context;
- Supporting the early childhood teacher in identifying local networks with other early childhood teachers in similar settings; and
- Building the capacity of leadership within the early childhood field.

2. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

On signing of the contract the Mentoring Project Team developed and implemented Ethics and Communication protocols, recruitment procedures, advertising material, program descriptions and application forms. The resulting documents (which are listed below and included as Appendices A - G) were made available to stakeholders for comment, amendment and approval. A generic email address was created dedicated to handle and respond to Pilot Mentoring Project enquiries (EC.Mentoring@vu.edu.au). As the Program unfolded strategies were devised to address difficulties and shortfalls in recruitment of Mentees and questions relating to eligibility of Mentors and Mentees. It was decided that a Monthly Project report (see Appendix H), provided to DEECD and team members, would be one of the mechanisms used to provide an update on tasks completed; issues/questions arising; risk management strategies and progress of work plan.

DOCUMENT NAME		APPENDICE
1.	Communication and risk management strategy pilot state-wide professional mentoring program early childhood teachers 2011-2012	A
2.	Recruitment Process pilot state-wide professional mentoring program early childhood teachers 2011-2012	B
3.	EC Mentoring Flyer	C
4.	Program Description – Mentor	D
5.	Program description – Mentee	E
6.	Application form – Mentor	F
7.	Application form – Mentee	G
8.	Mentoring Program Monthly Report	H
9.	Mentor Training Day Agenda	I
10.	Shared Learning Day 1 Agenda	J
11.	Pre-Mentoring Program Evaluation (PMPE)	K
12.	Feedback form (Training Day)	L
13.	Post-Mentoring Program Evaluation (PoMPE)	M
14.	Information to Participants involved in Research phase	N
15.	Consent form for Participants involved in Research	O
16.	Acceptance of offer – Mentor	P
17.	Acceptance of offer - Mentee	Q

2.1 The Mentoring Model

There is now available a body of literature suggesting that greater chance of change in practice is possible when individuals in an organisation:

- receive on-going staff development over an extended period of time;
- are involved in assessing their own learning;
- have opportunity to apply their new knowledge and skills in work settings, and
- have a trusted 'other' with whom to discuss their developing practice.

The program being piloted addresses these points and has been designed with the understanding that beginning early childhood teachers, as well as those working in areas where access to professional learning is restricted, would benefit from a mentoring program that supports their reflective practice in planning context-appropriate programs through the implementing of an action research inquiry project evolving from the VEYLDF. These teachers would also benefit from working with more experienced teachers as they consider their own professional learning journeys. The research emphasises a significant role for mentoring in the support of these teachers, and describes the characteristics of effective mentoring programs. These characteristics include: employment of a variety of strategies; the creation of face-to-face and/or on-line communities of learners; provision of training, support and reward for mentors; the involvement of university lecturers; the adoption of collaborative approaches to mentoring that emphasise beginning teachers' individuality, agency and meaning-making. These characteristics have been embraced in the design and delivery of the mentoring program.

The following forms of delivery are features of the program:

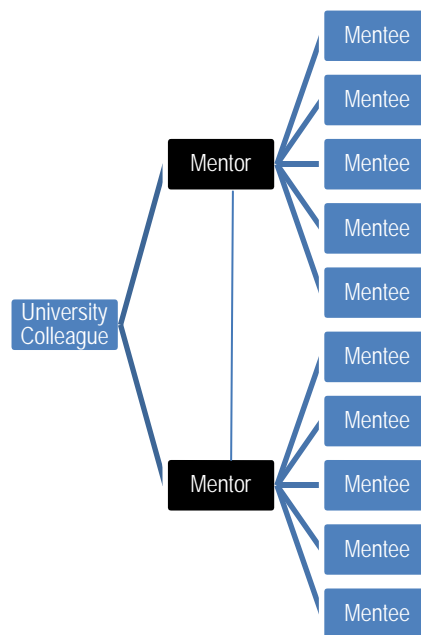
- One day training for Mentors and ongoing support from University Colleagues;
- Face-to-face intensive workshops with Mentors and Mentees (2 x full day sessions plus a half day showcase / celebration session);
- Purpose built on-line forum accessible throughout the program;
- Informal contact as arranged by the Mentor and Mentee i.e. phone calls, email;
- Mentor visits to Mentee (4 visits throughout the program).

Other features include:

- Introduction to a Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) which can be used as an ongoing professional development resource after the life of the project by both Mentee and Mentor (as it includes a tool to assist with long term planning for professional learning);
- Participation in an Action Research project;
- Acknowledgement of the important role of Mentors (payment, training and support).

The Mentoring Model implemented is taken directly from Victoria University's Kinda Kinder Model where it has been operating successfully with pre-service teachers since 2006 (see Figure 1). In the model each Mentor is allocated no more than five Mentees to mentor. Mentors are also supported in this model by University Colleagues (members of Victoria University and Deakin University Early Childhood Teams). Interactions between all parties involved in the program happen through the purposely designed Mentor Training Day, Shared Learning Days, site visits and online forums.

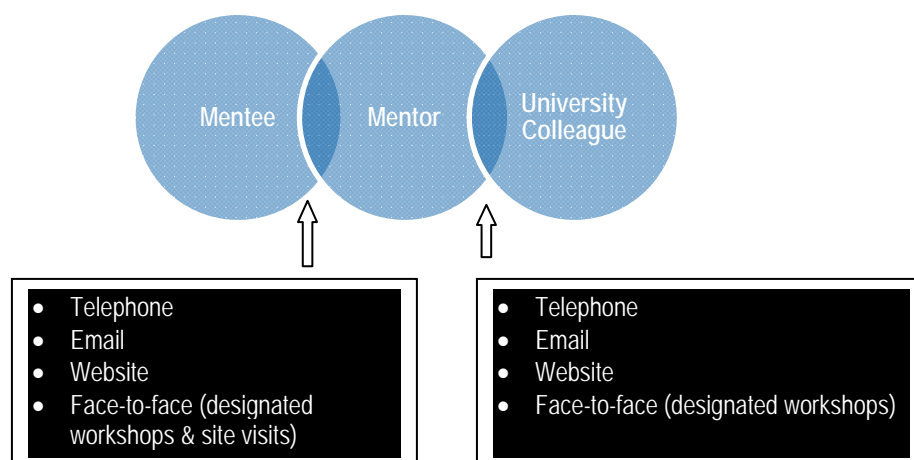
Figure 1: The Mentoring Model



This model allows various access points where communication can take place between all parties involved. For example for mentees to feel supported there was a need to design the model so that it would allow for both formal and informal communication between Mentees and Mentor, but also between Mentees themselves. Mentors can also be supported by University Colleagues and other Mentors. Figure 2 outlines the forms communication takes within the program.

What has also been developed is a set protocol outlining expectations around the minimal contact expected at all levels of the model however, it is acceptable that parties concerned (i.e. mentors and mentees, mentors and university colleagues) may like to make additional contact arrangements that go beyond these expectations. The planned individual site visits provide personal contact between the individual early childhood teacher and the mentor. These are arranged to best support the Mentee and continue the discussions around the action research project.

Figure 2: Mentoring Communication Model



Two key aspects of the program are the involvement of Mentees in an action research project, and the use of a Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) (Raban, Nolan, Waniganayake, Brown, Deans & Ure, 2007). Their inclusion will be explained next.

Action Research

Many questions are raised for teachers through their day to day work to which they devise their own theories. Personal theories help to bring a problem into view and assist teachers to take a more systematic approach to investigating issues. This leads to a tentative guiding hypothesis for research purposes. This is the beginning of the Action Research cycle where teachers test their theory by collecting 'evidence' (data), analysing and interpreting the data, and developing a further plan for action. It is about developing a general plan, implementing an action and then rethinking, reflecting, discussing this which leads to replanning, understanding and learning. Therefore, the Action Research spiral provides teachers with a practical guide and illustrates how to proceed with inquiries. It is a model for research conducted by teachers and for teachers and is dynamic and responsive and can be adapted to different contexts and purposes. Action Research does not stand outside the normal practice of teachers. What it offers is a more systematic way to assist teachers to reflect on their practice and work from a more evidence informed base. In the Pilot Mentoring Program, Mentees choose an aspect of their work which will become the focus of their individual action research. They then receive guidance from their Mentors with this research, who are supported by the University Colleagues and the other Mentors involved in the program.

SAM

Both the Action Research project and SAM offer participants the opportunity to develop skills as reflective practitioners. SAM guides participants in their reflections on their own professional development as they consider their past, present and future. They are asked to consider their beliefs and values and how these influence their work with young children and families, their current profile mapped against theoretical perspectives, along with developing an Action Plan for their future professional learning. SAM incorporates opportunities for guided reflection, self-directed learning and interactive discussion. By working through SAM, whilst also conducting an Action Research project, reflection on one's own development is firmly in the focus and will lead to a richer understanding of practice.

2.2 Workshops

Mentor Training Day

The program begins with a training day for mentors where they are introduced to mentoring and what this entails. Roles, relationships and key mentoring skills are outlined along with discussion about the proposed mentee list (See Table 1). A guest speaker outlines research into the mentoring process to stimulate discussion amongst the participants. (see Appendix I for the Agenda).

Table 1: Mentor Training Day Content

Content
<p>Participants explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring theory (including stages) and define mentoring; • benefits of mentoring for novice teachers; • mentoring roles such as advising, tutoring, supporting, facilitating, modelling, nurturing and guiding; • the notion of mentoring as being a developmental relationship; • key mentoring skills such as emotional intelligence, relationship building, active listening, effective communication, reflective conversations and providing feedback. <p>The program involves participants in hands-on activities, and small and large group discussion. A guest speaker talking of their experiences of mentoring and being mentored is also included as part of the day.</p> <p>NB. The day concludes with mentors being shown the draft list of their proposed mentees for comment.</p>
Evaluation
<p>Participants complete an evaluation of the day</p>

Shared Learning Days

Shared Learning Days combine theory, input from experts, targeted activities (utilising Quality Tools), facilitated discussion, sharing of workplace practices, planning and reflection. Each Shared Learning Day is structured so there is time for self-reflection and group reflection for both mentors and mentees, thereby ensuring everyone has time to consider their own professional learning journey.

Shared Learning Day 1

The first Shared Learning Day enables participants to get to know the university colleagues, mentors and fellow early childhood teachers. The concept of mentoring is 'unpacked' and Mentees are teamed up with their Mentor. Participants hear from guest speakers who have successfully implemented the VEYLDF and their experiences of this. Part of the day focuses on teacher identity and philosophy introducing the teachers to the Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) which they will use to guide their reflection relating to their professional development between workshops. This workshop also identifies aspects that the teachers see as impacting (both positively and negatively) on their work and individual action research topics are set. (see Appendix J for the Agenda).

Table 2: Shared Learning Day 1 Content

Content
<p>Participants explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring theory (including stages) and define mentoring; • benefits of mentoring; • the notion of mentoring as being a developmental relationship; • theory and practice of Action Research; • their engagement with the VEYLDF and the NQS; • the self-assessment manual (SAM). <p>The program involves participants in hands-on activities, and small and large group discussion. A guest speaker talking of their experiences of implementing the VEYLDF and the NQF is also included as a stimulus for participant discussion.</p>
Evaluation
Participants complete an evaluation of the day

Mentors are separated from Mentees to undertake a session that focuses on development of skills to assist Mentees to critically reflect on their practice. Content also covers the use of reflective conversations, active listening, using "I" messages and how to manage difficult conversations. Discussion and role plays form the method of delivery for this session.

Shared Learning Day 2

This workshop involves a more in-depth look at each participant's action research project and how this is impacting not only on their own practice but also the practice of (or relationships with) others in the centre. Professional growth of both mentees and mentors is further enhanced through the use of Quality Tools to aid reflection on practice. Time is taken to consider how support networks can be developed beyond the life of this current project.

Table 3: Shared Learning Day 2 Content

Content
<p>Participants explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their understandings and engagement with action research; • their progress with individual action research projects; • challenges and enablers to their further development as teachers; • ways to connect / network for the future. <p>The program involves participants in hands-on activities, and small and large group discussion.</p>
Evaluation
Participants complete an evaluation of the day

Showcase / Celebration Session

This session acts as a way to highlight the journeys of each early childhood teacher. Each participant is asked to provide a summary of their project and what they have learnt throughout the program (i.e. Mentees will report on their Action Research projects and Mentors will reflect on their development as a mentor). These will then be used in a presentation during the Celebration Session allowing themes / issues to be grouped together and providing an overall sense of the life of the program. By working in this way every participant's achievement will be acknowledged in a supportive and professional way where they can feel part of a larger learning community/professional body. Evaluation is also completed at this time.

2.3 Resource Packs

For this program a Resources Pack has been developed. This is given out at the first workshop the participant attends (i.e. Mentors – at the Mentor Training Day, Mentees – at the first Shared Learning Day). The Resources Packs are similar except that the Mentor Pack has a few extra resources which are relevant to their personal development of being a mentor. Additional resources are added to these Resources Packs at each workshop. The Resource Packs consist of the Agenda for the workshop, a copy of the PowerPoint to be used in the workshop, program descriptions for both Mentees and Mentors, activity sheets to be used during the workshops, a Mentoring Agreement to be negotiated between individual Mentees and their Mentor, Mentor Visit Log sheets to record the site visits and progress of the action research projects, the Practice Principles for Learning and Development take from the VEYLDF, documents outlining the Validation process and the standards, a variety of readings relating to the VEYLDF, reflective practice, current issues in the early childhood field, mentoring, coping with educational change, and action research studies.

2.4 Website

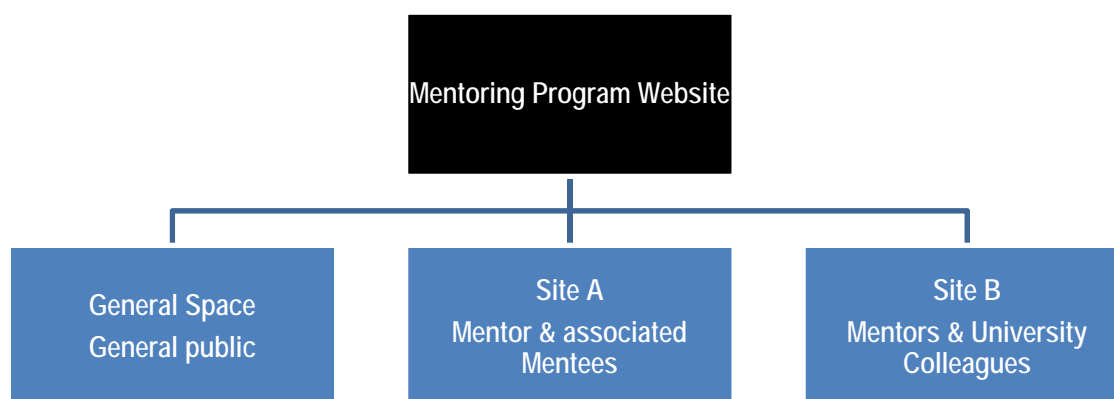
It was decided by the project team that a purpose built website would be the most practical way to disseminate general information about the program and enable forums to take place in between workshops and face-to-face site visits. The website (<http://www.earlychildhoodmentoring.edu.au/>) allows the promotion of the program along with differing levels of access for the participants (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Screenshot of the Homepage of the Pilot Professional Mentoring Program for Early Childhood Teachers



The On-line Forums act as discussion spaces where questions and comments can be viewed and replied to. These forums act as a community of learners where all involved in the program (early childhood teachers, mentors, university colleagues) can come together and engage in dialogue. At times this forum is used to post interesting readings or artefacts to stimulate further discussion. The website design can be viewed in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Website Design



The *General Space*, which is accessible to the general public contains:

- General information about the program and the team
- Housekeeping information
- Dissemination of ongoing resources i.e. links to relevant websites

Site A is password protected and accessible only by each Mentor and their Mentees. It is a space where each Mentor and their Mentees can share experiences and discuss the action research projects between the scheduled site visits and workshops.

Site B is also a password protected space where Mentors can reflect with each other and University Colleagues on their mentoring experiences. This space can act as a site for further mentor training (if required) and debriefing of issues as they arise. It enables Mentors to receive ongoing support throughout their involvement in the program.

2.5 Recruitment

Mentors

Mentors are trained early childhood teachers with experience of working in the early childhood field who, once nominated, are validated by the DEECD. Those showing an interest in becoming a mentor in the program are asked to submit an Application Form (see Appendix F) which outlines their qualifications, current work details including location and hours, experience of working in the field as well as service types, professional development recently undertaken, previous history of either being mentored or mentoring, understanding and engagement with the VEYLDF and NQS. These applicants are also asked to give reasons for wanting to be involved in the program, what they are hoping to achieve from participating, what characteristics makes a good mentor and mentee and what they consider are the most pressing issues that a new to the profession or professionally isolated teacher could face. The applicant must also acknowledge whether they have discussed their involvement in the program with their employer.

Mentees

Mentees are new to the profession or professionally isolated early childhood teachers. Those showing an interest in taking part in the program are asked to submit an Application Form (see Appendix G) where they document their work details including location and work hours, their experience, any professional development undertaken recently, any opportunities they have had to be mentored and the reasons why they want to participate in the mentoring program. They are also asked to record what they are hoping to achieve by being involved in the program, and what characteristics they consider make a good mentor and mentee. As with the Mentor form, the Mentee applicant must also acknowledge whether their employer is in agreement with them participating in the program.

2.6 Evaluation

Formative evaluations are being conducted throughout the program, including the collection of evidence that measures:

- Participant satisfaction with the overall program;
- The quality and effectiveness of program materials and activities;
- The effectiveness of the professional development days;
- The knowledge and skills acquired as a result of participant learning.

As well as the more formal evaluation surveys and Mentor Visit Logs, the content of the discussions in the on-line forum along with the materials generated during the workshops provide useful information in evaluating the program. Table 4 outlines the evaluation and is followed by a brief description of each evaluation tool developed for the program.

Table 4: Evaluation Tools

Evaluation	<p>Qualitative data is being collected from the program for monitoring and assessment purposes and will take the form of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre Mentoring Program Evaluation (PMPE) • Evaluation of Mentor Training Day • Evaluation of effectiveness of Shared Learning Days 1 & 2 & the Celebration / showcase day • Materials generated through discussions conducted during each scheduled shared learning day • Documentation produced as a result of working through the Practitioner Profile from the Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) • Website postings • Action Research projects • Post Mentoring Program Evaluation (PoMPE)
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Pre Mentoring Program Evaluation (PMPE)

This tool collects information from participants relating to the reasons why they applied to be part of the mentoring program, their expectations and aspirations of the program, their understandings of mentoring and what they consider essential characteristics and skills of a good mentor, along with their previous experience of mentoring. (see Appendix K).

Evaluation of Mentor Training Day, Shared Learning Days 1 & 2 & the ‘Celebration Day’

The tools developed to collect information about these workshops ask about the overall quality of the workshops, most valued aspects, suggestions for improvements, rating resource materials, rating facilitators’ presentation style and flexibility in meeting participants’ needs, time allocation, suitability of location of workshops, and what has been gained from the workshops. (see Appendix L).

Post Mentoring Program Evaluation (PoMPE)

This tool collects information from participants relating to what they have gained from participating in the program. It focuses on documenting the impact on their practice as well as the ramifications this has for themselves as professionals within the early childhood field. They are asked to restate their understanding of mentoring and whether this has changed and why, and to list what they now see as essential characteristics and skills of mentors and what effective mentoring can look like in the early childhood field. (see Appendix M).

At the first workshop participants attended (either the Mentor Training Day or Shared Learning Day 1) they were invited to take part in the evaluation aspect of the program. They were provided with an Information Sheet which outlined the aim of the evaluation, what they would be asked to do, what they would gain from participating in the evaluation process, how the information would be used and the

potential risks of their involvement (see Appendix N). Those participants choosing to take part then signed a Consent Form (see Appendix O).

3. PROGRAM ROLL OUT

3.1 General Recruitment Process

Recruitment for the program commenced on 25th July, 2011, on receiving final approval of processes and documents. By mutual agreement, email communication was sent by the Project Coordinator and DEECD to specific stakeholders. The Project Coordinator, on behalf of the Mentoring Project Team, targeted the following stakeholders: Early Childhood Australia; Geelong Kindergarten Association; Gowrie Victoria, Bastow Institute; Victorian Institute of Teaching; Municipal Association of Victoria; Australian Education Union; Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies; and current Victoria University students studying the Graduate Early Childhood Teacher program. DEECD's email communication was sent to QLT Managers for dissemination to licensed services. Email communication included general information regarding the program, Early Childhood Mentoring flyer, Program Descriptions and Application Forms (with the closing date for applications being Friday, 19th August, 2011). The Mentor Training Day was scheduled for Wednesday, 7th September, 2011 (this was subsequently re-scheduled to Monday, 5th September) and the 1st Shared Learning Days were scheduled for Geelong on Tuesday, 13th September; Melbourne Central on Thursday 15th September; and Burwood on Friday, 16th September, 2011.

Initial interest in the program came from early childhood educators interested in applying as a Mentor, with only minimum interest shown by those eligible to be a mentee. As the recruitment period progressed we sought advice from DEECD on a number of issues and we were also able to highlight the following concerns including:

- Clarification of eligibility for both Mentors and Mentees (qualifications; years of experience etc.);
- Process and timelines for approval of selected applicants particularly in relation to DEECD Project Manager liaising with Regional Offices' to confirm Mentor's suitability;
- Availability of additional information regarding new Kindergarten programs and Kindergarten Cluster Managers to enable Victoria University administration staff to make personal contact;
- Strategies to be implemented to address the shortfall in Mentee applicant numbers (extend closing date for applications, reduce number of locations);
- Insufficient notice given for Mentors and Mentees to apply for the Program.

At the initial application closing date 58 Mentor and 5 Mentee applications were received. After consultation within the Project team and DEECD the application closing date for Mentees was extended to Wednesday, 31st August, 2011 to allow for additional recruitment processes to be conducted. These included:

- Victoria University and DEECD sent email communications to all original addressees confirming extension of closing date for Mentee applicants;

- Victoria University employed two administration staff to telephone Kindergarten Cluster Managers and Long Day Care Centres and Kindergartens to confirm details of the program and to re-send information where this had not been received;
- Victoria University created an 'early childhood mentoring program page' accessed via the Victoria University website to help publicize the program;
- Deakin University developed and mailed a personal letter to 130 recent Early Childhood graduates; and
- Victoria University mailed a personal letter to Early Childhood graduates from their 2010 cohort.

This additional communication enabled us to converse with both teachers and Managers with the following feedback:

- The program was welcomed and much needed;
- Information had not previously been seen;
- Information was received too late;
- Teachers / Managers were too busy to forward information on or to read and apply.

Mentor Recruitment

Mentor applications for the 2011 cohort were accepted until Wednesday, 24th August, 2011. The applications were assessed by the Mentoring Project Team against the following criteria:

- Have a heightened sensitivity to the personal needs and professional issues facing beginning teachers in the early childhood profession;
- Have a demonstrated passion for teaching and learning;
- Demonstrated knowledge and experience across a variety of sectors/learning spaces (including experience sharing / mentoring);
- Have developed valuable networks and partnerships within and across communities;
- Active participation in on-going professional and personal development; and
- Demonstrated understanding of and experience with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and the National Quality Framework (NQF).

Table 5 provides a summary of numbers and additional selection information

Table 5: Mentor Recruitment Summary

	Numbers	Additional information
Number of applications received for 2011	58	
Number of applicants who were not selected for shortlisting	21	Based on information provided in their applications, the applicants failed to convince the selectors that they had the required level of experience in the field and / or with the framework
Number of applicants selected for shortlisting for DEECD approval/ endorsement	37	
Number of applicants approved by DEECD	34	DEECD advised that three applicants should not be offered a Mentor role based on their Region's recommendations regarding availability; suitability and professionalism. These applicants were subsequently advised by the Project Coordinator that they had not been selected to participate in the 2011 cohort
Number of applicants offered Mentor role	34	All applicants accepted the position, however three applicants requested their positions be held over to 2012 due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ill health (own) • Caring for relative • Mentor located in regional area for which no Mentee applications were received

As the total number of Mentors was only 31 (which fell short of the 36 places allocated for the 2011 cohort) the Project Coordinator, on behalf of the Mentoring Project Team, requested and received approval from DEECD to hold over the shortfall in Mentor numbers to 2012. The number of Mentors for 2012 will be 41 which will also meet the increase in the expected Mentee numbers.

Communication was made with all successful Mentors (both phone call and email); an Acceptance of Offer form (see Appendix P) was completed and signed and 31 Mentors attended the Mentor Training Day on Monday, 5th September, 2011. One Mentor subsequently advised that she was withdrawing from the program as she felt her knowledge of the government initiatives was lacking and this would impact on her ability to mentor.

Email communication was sent to 24 applicants advising them that their application for the Mentor program in 2011 had been unsuccessful.

Mentee Recruitment

Following the initial low number of Mentee applicants, contact was made by Victoria University and Deakin University academic and administrative staff via mail, phone and email with specifically identified new and isolated early childhood teachers who were identified from a DEECD report.

The Project Coordinator on behalf of the Mentoring Project Team requested and received approval from DEECD to hold one Shared Learning Day for 2011 in Melbourne CBD on Friday, 21st October, 2011. This

request was to ensure the most efficient use of resources for the smaller number of confirmed Mentees which at 11th September, 2011 totalled 41.

Email communication was sent to DEECD QLT Managers advising change in Program dates.

Email and personal communication was held with confirmed Mentors and Mentees advising them of the change in the Shared Learning Day date and venue location. Unfortunately, this resulted in a number of Mentees requesting their positions be held over to 2012, therefore late applications were accepted from Mentees until early October, 2011.

The personal contact approach (documented earlier) resulted in a final number of 44 applicants being assessed as suitable to participate in the program as a Mentee. Personal and email communication was sent to all successful Mentees. Final breakdown of Mentees for 2011 follows:

- 44 Mentees were accepted; completed an Acceptance of Offer form (see Appendix Q) and attended the 1st Shared Learning Day on Friday, 21st October, 2011;
- 10 Mentors attended to meet with their allocated four or five Mentees;
- Two Mentees were unable to attend on the day due to personal reasons. Both Mentees have subsequently had communication or met with their allocated Mentors to continue in the program; and
- 15 applicants who were offered a position to start with the 2011 co-hort requested their positions be held over and will commence with the 2012 co-hort.

3.2 Demographics (Based on responses to the Pre-Mentoring Program Evaluation PMPE)

3.2.1 Mentors

Table 6: Mentor Demographics Co-hort 1

Number of years of experience (includes long day care, kinder, others)		
	Number	Percentage (out of 31)
not specified	8	26%
0-10 years	5	16%
11-20 years	7	23%
21-30 years	7	23%
31-40 years	3	10%
over 40 years	1	3%
Total	31	100%
Qualifications		
	Number	(Percentage N/A) (some have multiple qualifications)
B Ed/ Teaching/ Arts	23	74%
Dip Ed/ Teaching	19	61%
Grad Dip	9	29%
M Ed	2	6%
Cert IV Training and Assessment	4	13%
Assoc Dip	1	
TITC	1	
Adv Cert	1	
Cert III	1	
Expertise with computer and technology		
	Number	Percentage (out of 31)
Fair	7	23%
Good	18	58%
Excellent	6	19%
Total	31	100%

3.2.2 Mentees

Table 7: Mentee Demographics Co-hort 1

Number of years of experience (includes long day care, kinder, others)		
	Number	Percentage (out of 42)
not specified	7	17%
0-5 years	13	31%
6-10 years	6	14%
11-15 years	11	26%
over 15 years	5	12%
Total	42	100%
Qualifications		
	Number	(Percentage N/A) (some have multiple qualifications)
B Ed/ Teaching/ Arts/ Social Work	39	93%
Diploma Children's Services/ Community Service/ Childcare/ Teaching	23	55%
Certificate Childcare	2	
Grad Dip	4	10%
M Ed	2	5%
Cert III	3	7%
Cert IV Training and Assessment	1	
Assoc Dip	1	
ECE Equivalency	1	
Integration Aide	1	
(With both Bachelors + Diploma Children's Services)	17	40%
(With both Bachelors + Postgrad)	6	14%
Expertise with computer and technology		
	Number	Percentage (out of 42)
Poor	1	2%
Fair	12	29%
Good	19	45%
Excellent	10	24%
Total	42	100%

3.3 Pre-Mentoring Program Evaluation (PMPE)

3.3.1 Mentors

Mentors applied to the program because they had the skills and knowledge to share with new graduates or beginning teachers and wanted to give back to the community. They were also interested in becoming mentors for their own professional development – to expand their leadership and communication skills, develop mentoring skills, connect and share with other professionals and be able to reflect on their own practice. A couple of respondents mentioned remembering when they were new to the profession and so wanted to help new graduates transition into the profession. They also wanted to access support for themselves (from their own mentors). They were looking forward to meeting their mentees and networking, and building professional relationships with other teachers. Most were looking forward to the program, but a few expressed concern about developing relationships with their mentees (that is, working with 'change-resistant' mentees, whether they have the skills that their mentees need, or apprehensive about success as a mentor) and the time commitment to mentees (balancing life-work balance).

3.3.2 Mentees

Mentees applied to the program for personal and professional development. Most expressed looking forward to the networking opportunities that the program will provide, to learn about other programs and build professional relationships with other teachers in the field. They were also looking forward to having a mentor – for the chance to collaborate and learn from a more experienced teacher in order to improve their practice and gain more skills. Many used the word "overwhelming" as in "This is my first year as the sole teacher in a preschool...it is rather overwhelming" or "Was feeling overwhelmed with my position." Another expressed hope that the program will ease her feelings of being alone and isolated. They were also hoping to gain more understanding of the new frameworks, standards, universal access, and so on, from the program; grow as a teacher, gain insight and feedback on their practice; and be reflective of their own practice. However, many did express concern at the time commitment expected – especially for the action-research project: "I already have mountains of work to do at the moment!!!" Many also wanted to feel more confident (this word was used several times) about their role as teacher, for example, "To be less stressed, more confident and articulate."

3.4 Mentor Training Day

Number of responses: 31

Overall quality of Mentor Training Day: All respondents rated the overall quality of the day as either 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

Level of satisfaction for venue, facilitation, resource materials, hospitality/ catering, and location, ranged from Good to Excellent (mostly Excellent) but there were a couple of complaints about the acoustics in the room. Everyone found the structure of the day flexible, with times allocated to different aspects of the day appropriate. Comment was also made about the day having a good flow to it and that there were opportunities for discussion.

The respondents saw the most valuable aspects of the day as the networking opportunities, sharing of experiences with other professionals, clarification on expectations regarding participation in the program, and the passion of participants and presenters. Some suggested reducing repetition in the program and the forms, more advanced notice of training dates and venues so as to have time to organise themselves, and more theory on mentoring and good practice. Overall, they had positive outcomes from attendance in the training day, including gaining a clearer understanding of the program and the mentor role; gaining increased motivation/ enthusiasm/ energy/ confidence/ commitment towards mentoring; and gaining a good base for contacts, resources and directions.

3.5 Shared Learning Day 1

Number of responses: 50
(Mentors: N=10; Mentees: N=42)

Overall quality of the day: 49 respondents rated the day as either Excellent or Good, with only 1 rating it as Fair.

The ratings for venue, workshop facilitation, resource materials, hospitality/ catering and location were mostly 'Good' or 'Excellent'. There were only a few 'Fair' votes: on venue (4 votes), location (8) and hospitality (1), and a comment on the amount of travelling involved to get to the venue.

The majority of participants found Susie Rosback's (guest speaker) presentation as the most valuable aspect of the day. They also found the networking opportunities valuable, as well as the group work, sharing of experiences and discussion on frameworks. Many wanted more information regarding the action-research project. There were also complaints that the room was noisy/ loud, and a suggestion to have smaller tables for better discussion. Many were happy with the times allocated to the different aspects of the program and the flexibility allowed in the day. The gains mentioned from participation in the day included: meeting mentees, clarification on expectations, networking opportunities, Susie's ideas, and "A start of something positive."

3.6 Online Forum

The website went live on Friday, 21st October, 2011. Log-ins were provided to all University Colleagues and current participants in the program (10 Mentors and 44 mentees) which resulted in on-line forums being utilised by some groups within 24 hours.

Log-in details will be provided to the 20 Mentors who attended the Mentor Training Day but who have not received an allocation of Mentees. This will ensure that they can continue to be involved in the Program and gain some idea of what to expect when they have Mentees allocated. This is also important to show their input is valued and to enable them to feel part of the community of practice.

4. ISSUES ARISING

There are two issues which have arisen during the roll out of the program for the first cohort these being the recruitment of Mentees and the Action Research Project.

While the recruitment of mentors in the first stage was very successful, recruitment of mentees for Cohort 1 was more challenging. One factor may have been that we were attempting to recruit at a busy time when teachers may have been focused on end-of-year activities, including the writing of Transition

Statements. The low numbers of mentees recruited for Cohort 1 means that 316 Mentees will need to be recruited for Cohort 1. This will be a challenge, but it is expected that it will be easier to recruit participants at the beginning of the year.

We are also mindful of the feedback from Mentees relating to their unease of participating in Action Research and what that entails. As such we intend changing the way the Action Research component of the program is introduced for Co-hort 2 along with the way it is framed at the workshops. It will now be explained as a critical reflection process and the term 'Action Research' introduced once the concept of critically reflecting on an aspect of practice is understood. We see this as a way to allay fears about the Action Research project as more work and something that sits outside of their practice.

5. THE NEXT STAGE

The next stage of the project is now being organised, including the identification of dates and venues for both cohorts as follows:

Cohort 1:

- 2nd Shared Learning Day: one day in the month of March
- Celebration Day: one day in the month of June

Cohort 2:

- Mentor Training Day (Mentors only): late 22nd February (to be confirmed by DEECD) in Melbourne CBD (tentatively booked with Deakin Prime, Bourke Street Melbourne)
- Shared Learning Days: five locations – two in Melbourne CBD; one in Geelong; two in Regional areas (Gippsland and Ballarat)
- 1st Shared Learning Day: one day in the month of March
- 2nd Shared Learning Day: one day in the month of June
- Celebration Day: October / November

Advertising material, program descriptions and application forms have been updated. The Project Coordinator, on behalf of the Mentor Program team, targeted the following stakeholders: Early Childhood Australia; Geelong Kindergarten Association; Gowrie Victoria, Bastow Institute; Victorian Institute of Teaching; Municipal Association of Victoria; Australian Education Union; Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies; Universities: Deakin University; Australian Catholic University; RMIT; Victoria University; Monash University; Ballarat University and the University of Melbourne for dissemination to 'soon to graduate teachers'. Email advice has been sent to DEECD's Project Coordinator for dissemination to QLT Managers with licensed services. Email communication included general information regarding the program, Early Childhood Mentoring flyer, Program Descriptions and Application Forms with the closing date for applications being Friday, 20th January, 2012. The Training Days are scheduled for:

The recruitment of Mentors and Mentees for Cohort 2 will continue until February. Based on experience from the recruitment process for Cohort 1, some new strategies for recruiting mentees in particular have been implemented. Experience from the first stage suggested that relying on organisations and management personnel to pass on information to potential participants was not effective, at least within a tight timeframe. Consequently, individual telephone contact with potential mentees is one of the strategies being used for recruitment of the second cohort. Another strategy that is being used is targeting

graduating students from undergraduate and postgraduate early childhood education courses at Victorian Universities. For example, over 100 students graduating from the BECE and the Master of Teaching at Deakin University, have been sent invitation letters and information packages by both email and post. Victoria University students graduating from the Bachelor of Early Childhood Primary course have been sent invitations by email.

In regard to the Mentor Training Day for Cohort 2 in 2012, this session has been planned and budgeted as being jointly run by VIT and the Victoria University/Deakin University Early Childhood Team. This arrangement is awaiting confirmation by VIT and the Department.

Formative evaluation and qualitative data will continue to be collected in the next stage of the project, and Monthly Reports will be provided to the DEECD regarding progress.

6. CONCLUSION

This has been an interesting, and at times challenging project to get off the ground, and we acknowledge the support and guidance we have received firstly from Jennifer Jackson, then Briony Grigg from the DEECD.

7. APPENDICES