Good Intentions to Great Results: Implementing Coaching in Schools

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Backdrop: appraisal, evaluation, review...

Appraisal, ‘teacher evaluation’ or ‘performance review’ for teachers has a relatively long history, emerging from the ‘neoliberal turn’ in education in the 1970s and 80s (Bartlett, 1996). As Stephen Ball wrote in 1990 of the growth of teacher appraisal in the United Kingdom over the previous decade:

Appraisal has become one of the prime features of the political reconstruction and disciplining of teachers as ethical subjects in the 1980s. It extends the logics of quality control and performance indicators into the pedagogical heart of teaching. It brings the tutelary gaze to bear, making the teacher calculable, describable and comparable. (Ball, 1990, p. 159)

The development of professional teaching standards has been a key dimension of the creation of the ‘calculable, describable and comparable’ teacher, often linked to the process of teacher appraisal, along with other mechanisms for achieving increased accountability for teachers.

Teaching is *unforgivingly complex*. It is not simply good or bad, right or wrong, working or failing. Although absolutes and dichotomies such as these are popular in the headlines and in campaign slogans, they are limited in their usefulness...
They ignore almost completely the nuances of “good” (or “bad”) teaching of real students collected in actual classrooms in the context of particular times and places. They mistake reductionism for clarity, myopia for insight. (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 4, emphasis in the original)
Coaching is the offer to re-ignite three things:

• Greater sense of agency (not autonomy) and professional formation by way of the window of learning

• Building new norms of practice, shared with others (as part of a vision or strategic direction), but fashioned individually

• Shifts the lens from operationalising a pedagogy to exploring pedagogical options for impact – coaching as action research
Agency, in other words, is not something that people can *have* – as a property, capacity or competence – but is something that people *do*. More specifically, agency denotes a quality of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action, not a quality of the actors themselves.

“A configuration of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present.”

Figure 1. A model for understanding the achievement of agency.

Pause for Thought

What’s clearer now?

If coaching is the answer, what might your question be?

What are you still wondering about?
Conversational Contexts in Schools

- Student academic progress
- Student goal setting & action planning
- Restorative practices
- Behaviour management
- Student leadership development
- Peer support & feedback
- Positive Education

- Teacher professional learning
- Professional reflection
- Teacher goal setting & development planning
- Teacher collaboration
- Classroom observation & feedback
- Use of data

- Performance review & development processes
- Leadership skills
- Leadership functions
- Team operation
- Strategic planning
- Challenging conversations
- Managing mandated processes

- Parents/carer communication
- Community leaders & groups
- School governors/boards
- Liaison with external agencies

The Global Framework for Coaching and Mentoring in Education
Ref: van Nieuwerburgh, C. and Campbell, J. (2015)
Antecedent Conditions

• Context!
• Architecture? – norms, routines, policy, ways of working, structures, points of reference.....
• Culture?

Past Experience + Corporate Memory + High Stakes
= Fear & Suspicion

Clarity Of Intent + Positive Experience + Low Stakes
= Trust + Commitment
If coaching is the answer, what is the question?

• What’s your question? [to which coaching is the answer]

• ‘Speed-dating’ – collect as many questions as you can in 5 minutes

• You’ve just described your point of departure – the ‘platform’ in Solutions Focus coaching terms
Let’s Coach – *Seeking clarity: what’s wanted?*

• If your question has been answered, what would that look like?
  • What would be the benefits of that?
  • What would you notice?
  • What would your colleagues notice? Students? Parents?

• What else? And what else?

• If we were to give this project a name, what would it be?
Let’s Coach – Finding what’s already working

• On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is your ideal outcome of implementing coaching in your context and 1 is that there’s absolutely nothing in place to help it succeed, where are you now?
  • What gets you that high and not lower?
  • What else? And what else?
• When you’ve implemented similar initiatives in the past, what worked for you?
• In the past, what has helped support changes that involved new ways of doing things in your context?
• What else can you do to help get this project moving forward?
• Based on what you’ve said, it sounds to me like you have…. [strengths, positives, resources...]

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Let’s Coach – *Seeking options & movement*

• So, you said you were at a ‘n’ at the moment, what could you do to move this up to a ‘n+1’?
• What’s within your sphere of influence or control at the moment?
• What else could you do to move up the scale by one point? And what else?
• What would one point higher up the scale look like?
• What would be the first tiny signs of progress?
• What else?
Let’s Coach – *First small steps*

- So, what will you do first? Should we write this down?
- What will be your first small steps when you get back to school?
- What else? Then what?
- When will you do that? How? With whom?
- What resource or support might you need to make sure that happens?

- Thinking ahead, how will you need to ‘be’ to see this through?
- How will you sustain the momentum gained here today?
- What’s clearer now?
Four Key Implementation Insights

• Implementation of coaching [in education] is context dependent
• Implementation of coaching evolves over time (and should be expected & allowed to)
• We learn about coaching by experiencing it
• Clarity of intent and authenticity are essential to invite trust
Figure 1: A heuristic for considering teacher appraisal (adapted from Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009)

It’s a journey: choose your own route!
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