RESEARCHING COACHING IN YOUR OWN SCHOOL:
NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS OF BEING TEACHER, LEADER AND RESEARCHER

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• Case Study 1: Deb’s PhD research on Cognitive Coaching in her school – Focus, context, purpose, method, findings, challenges, implications.

• Case Study 2: Alex’s research on GROWTH Coaching in his school – Focus, context, purpose, method, findings, challenges, implications.

• Implications for those looking to research coaching in their own context.

• Questions
Deb’s PhD focus - Phenomena

What shapes teacher and leader identities.

What learning transforms beliefs and practices of teachers and leaders.

How leaders lead teacher learning. What influences school change.

student learning

professional identity

school change

professional learning

student achievement

teacher quality
Deb’s research questions

In what ways might teachers’ and school leaders’ experiences of professional learning (trans)form their sense of professional selves; and in what ways might school leaders’ professional identities, perceptions of professional learning, and strategic intentions, shape and be shaped by the culture and enacting of professional learning in a school context?

Coaching related ...

• How might a school-based coaching model interact with teachers’ identities, practices, and professional growth, and with school culture?

• What role might middle and executive school leaders play in the embedment of a school-based coaching model?

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### Conceptual bricolage

#### Belief systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>This study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is there that can be known?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social constructionist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relativist: Reality is multiple, multivocal, shifting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realities &amp; meanings are constructed through language and story.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phenomena is a focus. Autoethnographic lens.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>This study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the relationship of the knower to the known (or knowable)?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pluralistic, Subjective, Reflexive.</td>
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Deb’s research context - An independent Australian school

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Deb’s context - A teacher growth / professional culture intervention

• **PROCESS:** Literature review & proposal 2012
  → Pilot years 2013-2014

• **MODEL:** AITSL Standards & Danielson Framework for Teaching
  + Low-inference lesson data
  + Cognitive Coaching conversations

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Deb’s participants

- Leaders
- Teachers
- Researcher

Participants: 1 researcher; 4 of 11 teachers, 2 withdrew; 11 of 20 leaders

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Deb’s method

- Narrative inquiry
- Semi-structured narrative interviews
- Hermeneutic analysis; deductive and inductive
- Ethical decision-making

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Deb - Challenges of narrative inquiry

- **Readable**: compelling reports
- **Interpretive & communicative**: making meaning from valid, reliable and authentic stories
- **Ethical**: protecting participants

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Deb – Ethical considerations

- Respect and justice
- Risk and benefit
- Merit and integrity

See the National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research & university ethics boards

Emic: within
Etic: from outside

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“Ethics should underpin every single step of research, from the first germ of an idea to the last act after dissemination. And ethical problems require ethical decision-making - which allows for creativity.”

(Helen Kara, 2015)
Ethical method

- **Informed consent**: letters and consent forms.

- **Relational protection and confidentiality for teacher participants**: confidential communication, independent interviewer, and de-identified authenticated transcripts.

- **Interview protocols**: a narrative and coaching approach.

- **Anonymous surveys** to gauge impact of relationship and research experience.

- **Protecting anonymity**: composite stories with equal participant weighting.

- **Separate and distinct streams** for school and research.

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Deb – Findings – The Individual

• Coaching can be an identity-shaping experience with unexpected and far-reaching impacts:
  • building relationships;
  • inciting and shaping conversation and reflection;
  • shared language of teaching and professional conversation;
  • shifting professional learning culture; and
  • coach as an enacted identity; a way of being.

• The combination, of being a coach and being coached, can facilitate empowerment, professional growth, and changes in beliefs and practices.

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Coaching can be part of a research-supported, evidence-informed positively-driven school initiative.

Cognitive Coaching and the Danielson Framework for Teaching can be congruent tools for positive teacher and organisational growth.

Coaching in schools requires a slow bottom-up approach to change, an organisational culture of trust, and coaching relationships free from judgment or power inequity.

Coaching is not a stand alone solution.

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Deb – So what? Now what?

- Importance of school context and relationships, including trust, rapport and emotion.
- Believe in the capacity of coachees, and focus on positive, collaborative, self-authored learning experiences.
- Research different coaching approaches in different coaching contexts.

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Alex’s PhD context

• Co-Educational Catholic Secondary School in Melbourne’s West

• Approx. 1200 students and 90 staff

• Improving a culture of student achievement

• Introduction of the GROWTH model aimed to promote conversation around learning & teaching

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Alex’s reasons for the study

• My role working with teachers and pedagogy

• Support for implementation of teacher strategies

• Seeing teachers come to “light-bulb” moments

• What effect is this having and what evidence do we have?

If I give you advice and it fails, you will blame me. I have traded my advice for your responsibility and that is seldom a good deal (Whitmore, 2009).

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Alex’s research question and method

• What effect does the coaching model of professional development have on the building of teacher capacity?

• Can coaching be a catalyst for pedagogical and cultural change? How does the model tackle the building of the teacher’s capacity to address challenges teachers face every day?

• Mixed Methods approach and Guskey’s (2000) evaluation model

• My hypothesis is that coaching helps to conceptualise teaching practice, it helps teachers reflect on their work and the coach helps them to gain feedback supporting them on their implementation of strategies building teacher capacity

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Challenges of a mixed methods approach

• Developing multiple tools to capture the story

• Linking the “numbers” and the “story”

• Analysis of different data

• Limitations and strengths of both qualitative and quantitative

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Teacher capacity

Teacher Skills

Teacher Knowledge

Teacher Dispositions

The capacity of the teacher heavily influences student achievement (Youngs & King, 2002).

(McDiarmind and Clevenger-Bright, 2008)

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## Guskey’s Five Critical Levels of Professional Development Evaluation Model

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation level</th>
<th>What is measured</th>
<th>How will information be used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participants’ Reactions</td>
<td>Initial satisfaction with the experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participants’ Learning</td>
<td>New knowledge and/or skills of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Organisation Support and Change</td>
<td>The organisation’s advocacy, support, accommodations, facilitation and recognition of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Participants’ use of new knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Degree and quality of information application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>Cognitive performance and achievement, affective attitudes and dispositions, psychomotor skills and behaviour</td>
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(Guskey, 2000)

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“Coaching has helped me to look at myself as a professional and how I can be the best educator that I can be. My coach has a very open nature, so I didn’t feel that there was a judgement happening, it made me feel a lot more comfortable in communicating the exact nature of my difficulty.

I didn't feel that she was going to think I was a bad teacher or anything like that.”

Yoss

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75% of participants stated that coaching has helped them learn more about their teaching practice
“Coaching is an open conversation, it is an opportunity to develop ideas as opposed to being told what to do, staff whether they realise it or not, have started to shift that conversation. I don't need someone to tell me how to do it, the conversation prompts the ideas I have that will work for me as opposed to a way that works for them.”

Gemma

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85% of participants found that having a coach helped them implement strategies
Alex’s findings - Skills

“I think sometimes there can be a bit of a culture of, “Just don’t say it. Just talk about the good stuff,” so you look really good, so then you’re not going to get into trouble. And so I think the more we have these conversations, the more people are starting to see it’s not a bad thing.

This isn’t about you getting into trouble, this is just about improvement.”

Sam

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“Being challenged by my coach whether my class has learnt something and how well they have learnt it, really made me think about what evidence I had to prove it.”

Mark

86% of participants agreed that coaching helped them to set goals focused improving classroom practice.
Alex’s findings - Dispositions

Refocusing the culture on learning and teaching …

“Collegiality is developing and coaching overall has helped to nurture a growing professionalism, in younger staff it has helped them to develop more confidence in themselves.”

_Malcom_

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95% found coaching has placed a focus on improving the pedagogical culture of the school
Alex - Challenges in researching my school

• Resisting the challenge to reveal participants

• Assuring participants of their anonymity

• Power imbalance

• Stepping back and looking at things objectively

• Being aware and continually addressing your own bias

• Time
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Implications – Researching your own school

• Ethics is key, especially protecting participants

• Insider research comes with benefits and challenges

• Coaching in schools is a deeply human experience; it’s emotional and cognitive

• Coaching and research are susceptible to power imbalances.
QUESTIONS?

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