

Mentoring and Coaching for Principals

Ian Paterson

Terminology

There has been a great deal of material written in recent times about mentoring and coaching, most of which makes for a greater understanding of the relevant advantages in developing professional relationships in educational environments, other governmental agencies or business sectors. It may be instructive however to clarify some of the major concepts associated with each process before we suggest some possible activities for retired principals. Bearing in mind, the following ideas may well be within the existing skill set of most educational leaders through a variety of career experiences but there are obvious benefits in gaining an understanding of recent research findings. The skills outlined will give a clearer idea of the nature of the role and the possible enjoyment experienced in any given environment.

Are you coaching or mentoring or does it really matter? A useful way to distinguish between coaching and mentoring is to consider them as part of a conversational continuum whereby mentoring tends to be a relationship between an expert and a novice or a less experienced worker Van Nieuwerburgh (2012). A coach on the other hand may occasionally move to a mentoring role, although the bulk of the time is devoted to collaborative problem solving stimulated by effective questioning (C Munro, 2016). Ideally teachers and leaders have allocated personalised time for professional development and thus have an opportunity for focused, non-judgemental conversations aimed at identifying goals and working out ways forward to inspire enhanced levels of practice.

Professional Partnerships

Jan Robertson (2011) finds a preference for the term “professional partnerships” to lessen the confusion about the two terms: coaching and mentoring. Through her extensive research Robertson (2011) emphasises the importance of reciprocity, relationships and reflection-on-reality. In turn these three concepts contribute to growing trust, respect for difference and informed committed action. Where there is evolving trust there will be a depth of reflection on the reality of the learning context. Changing and challenging held views of knowing and being in leadership and learning necessitates relational trust, reciprocity in the learning process and reflection on the practice created. Robertson further outlines a range of skills needed to conduct professional partnerships effectively. Namely: active listening, reflective questioning, self-assessment, goalsetting and providing feedback skills, all well known to experienced educational leaders committed to professional learning.

Refining your Skill Set

In a more recent article Robertson (2015) clearly outlines many excellent examples of professional conversations which incorporate active listening, reflective questioning and goalsetting and therefore highlights the importance of targeting specific areas in the conversation based on agreed problems or concerns derived from the interaction between colleague/coach/leader and teacher. “Why” questions which focus on student learning and lack of achievement and further questions regarding strategic solutions and evidence of achievement in a given time frame are some great reminders of how to approach a professional conversation with a colleague. The research mentions certain student groups such as indigenous students, gifted students or students with English as a second or third language and outlines very detailed questions to encourage the teacher to reflect on the precise learning problems, associated evidence and subsequently the teaching strategies best suited to improve performance within a suitable

time. Questions are formulated on the reflective teacher experience and how this could be shared with colleagues. In sum, this paper includes numerous outstanding examples of reflective questions that skilfully build professional interactions, relevant to realistic strategies to enhance quality teaching and learning. Furthermore, Henning (2012) argues coaching skills need constant refinement, and leaders should aim to improve their coaching through careful planning, current strategies and structures. For example, it is recommended that school leaders should be connected to sources of ongoing learning. Coaches accredited with Growth Coaching International receive a monthly newsletter and access to updated resources in the GCI website (O'Bree, 2009).

Tertiary Mentoring

Schwille (2008) explores a conceptualisation of mentoring best practice for beginning teachers which goes beyond just emotional support and professional socialisation. It is concluded that much like quality teaching, mentoring that is aimed at assisting pre-service teachers to teach effectively is a professional practice with a repertoire of skill sets that must be learned over time. An excellent structure is highlighted by the researchers, that features the forms of mentoring by temporal dimensions. Thus inside a learning environment (ie classroom) coaching skills would be required by the supervising classroom teacher including actual teacher demonstrations being pre-planned, two teachers combining explanations/questioning steps in a more unplanned fashion and brief conversations depending on the available flexibility within the planned lesson. Outside the "action" would be strategies such as organised times for reflective evaluation of lessons, co-planning lessons, videotape analysis and written reflection on lesson performance based on agreed criteria earlier in the practice. Some local experiences utilising tertiary mentoring skills are outlined in a recent article (Paterson, Principal Future website 2016).

Thus whether it be coaching, mentoring or building professional partnerships, retired principals and their skills set have an ideal opportunity to promote improved teaching and learning and to gain enormous workplace satisfaction.

Contributor details

Ian Paterson (ian.paterson31@gmail.com) 9/4/17



Ian was Principal at Homebush Boys High School (1999-2010) and since retirement has been a Tertiary Mentor at Sydney University, consultant to several schools on curriculum change and mentor of HSC students. His personal interests include travel, reading, watching sport plus swimming, yoga and jogging at a 'comfortable' pace.

References

- Henning, D. (2012) Mentoring and Coaching, Growing coaching skills: Beyond the basics, The Australian Educational Leader, Vol 34, No 3..
- Heggart, K. (2015) Securing our future: the importance of mentoring, e -Leading, ACEL, Vol 21.

- Van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2014) An introduction to Coaching skills – A practical guide.
- Munro, C. (2016) Coaching in Education: an introduction, e – Leading, ACEL, Vol 27.
- O’Bree, M. (2009) The Leadership Coaching Guide: Growing You and Your Organisation, Sydney: Growth Coaching International. [http:// www.growth coaching.com.au](http://www.growthcoaching.com.au)
- Paterson, I. (2016) Tertiary Mentoring: A mixture of purpose and pleasure. Principal Futures Website.
- Robertson, J. (2005) Coaching Leadership, Building educational capacity through coaching partnerships, NZCER Press, Wellington.
- Robertson, J. (2015) Deep learning conversations and how coaching relationships can enable them, AEL; 37 (3). [www.minnisjournals.com.au/accel/article/Deep learning-conversations-and-how-coaching-relationships-can-enable-them](http://www.minnisjournals.com.au/accel/article/Deep%20learning-conversations-and-how-coaching-relationships-can-enable-them).
- Schwille, S. (2008) The Professional Practice of Mentoring, American Journal of Education, Vol 115, No 1 (Nov 2008). Pp 139-167. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/590678>.