



Coaching and Mentoring: A review of literature as it relates to teacher professional development.

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Abstract

In recent years, mentoring has become a feature of the business world. It is used in the induction of new staff into the culture of the organization, to improve communication between different levels of management, and to encourage access for traditionally excluded groups from senior management positions. The interest in other professions such as Medicine, Nursing, and Education has followed. In this paper we review coaching and mentoring literature to provide an insight into its potential for the professional development of teachers.



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Mentoring has ancient origins, but modern day mentoring has roots in the European apprenticeship system, when the apprentice learned skills from the master craftsman (Clutterbuck, 1985). This legacy leads to many images of 'mentoring' that reflect the difficulty of exact definition (see Carter, 2013; DfES, 2005). While coaching in an organizational sense has traditionally been viewed as a way to correct poor performance and to link individual effectiveness with organizational performance (Ellinger et al., 2003), the distinction between coaching and mentoring has not been clear.

The categorisation difficulty in this field is captured by Hamlin, Ellinger, and Beattie (2008) who conducted a comprehensive literature review and identified 37 coaching definitions. They created four broad variants labelled "coaching," "executive coaching," "business coaching," and "life coaching." The key issue is that the coaching process of providing help to individuals, groups, and organizations through some form of 'facilitation activity or intervention' was found to be common to all four variants (Beattie et al., 2014, 186). Thus:

... the explicit and implicit intention of helping individuals to improve their performance in various domains, and to enhance their personal effectiveness, personal development, and personal growth (Hamlin et al., 2008, 291).

Organizations and the literature use the terms mentoring and coaching interchangeably so that coaching and formal mentoring are similar in nature but different in name (Joo, Sushko and McLean, 2012 p. 30). We follow this advice except where either mentoring or coaching is specifically designated as the core of the discussion.

In addition, the construct teacher 'professional development' (PD) can be rendered as Continuing Professional Development (CPD), teacher learning, school improvement and so on.



In each of them, mentoring and coaching play a key role in their implementation. We refer to both PD and CPD as generic terms in what follows.

At the outset, it is important to note that there are only a few studies on managerial coaching (Gilley et al. 2010; Park 2007) and fewer empirical studies about the outcomes of managerial coaching and mentoring that have definitive results (Beattie et al. 2014, p.188). In particular, there is a dearth of studies about the direct and indirect associations between managerial coaching and mentoring where employee responses have been studied. In addition, Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2013) indicate, “little is known about the factors that may play a role in supervisors’ supportiveness” (p. 290) and the characteristics of highly supportive supervisors. Nevertheless, the literature does corroborate common themes for effective coaching and mentoring behaviours in schools including creating a learning environment, caring and supporting staff, providing feedback, communicating, and providing resources including other people. These are reflected in the DfES (2005) statement that provides the following definitions for an education context.

- Mentoring is a structured, sustained process for supporting professional learners through significant career transitions;
- Specialist Coaching is a structured, sustained process for enabling the development of a specific aspect of a professional learner’s practice
- Collaborative (Co-) Coaching is a structured, sustained process between two or more professional learners to enable them to embed new knowledge and skills from specialist sources in day-to-day practice.

Hamlin et al. (2006, p. 326) conclude that “truly effective managers and managerial leaders are those who embed effective coaching into the heart of their management practice”. Cordingly and Buckler (2012, 221) make the point that for those studies showing a “positive impact on both teacher and learner outcomes” of mentoring and coaching, the most important messages are the processes involved: collaboration, sustained, embedded in real-life learning contexts, and supported by specialists.

Normally, ‘mentoring’ refers to a one-to-one relationship in an organization where a senior experienced person or specialist offers guidance, help, support and advice to facilitate the learning or development of a junior or less experienced other. Curiously, based on management research in nursing, education, and management, Kroth and Keeler (2009) argue that



contemporary managerial strategies and models do not adequately address the importance of 'caring' between managers and employees.

Paquette (2012) identifies three literatures in the mentoring field. In the *sociological literature*, mentoring is an act of social reproduction as a mentor, based on knowledge, experience, or symbolic capital, transmits information, strategies, social capital, and prestige that are necessary for institutional change and career progression. Those mentored in such an arrangement become the legitimate heirs to the mentor, a view that fits an interpretation of mentoring as a conservative practice reminiscent of medieval apprenticeship, reproducing and communicating the 'tricks of the trade'.

There is a 100-year old literature about schooling as the social reproduction of the class structure and the baleful effects of professional cultures that stifle innovation. In Paquette's (2012, 209) view, "most of the literature—even the most supportive of mentoring—conveys the idea that mentoring is equivalent to normalization and social reproduction or learning as an uncritical engagement with a body of professional or organizational knowledge". The mentoring concept must overcome this legacy in practice if it is have any impact on the constraints and restraints that it purports to transform.

The *managerial literature*, emphasizes formal mentoring and the mutual benefits of relationships for both organisations and the mentored. The idea that employees and their manager work for the organisation and therefore coaching and mentoring are tools to assist this process, is hardly questioned. The third approach then is that of an emergent practice in which a new professional seeks or receives "*advice and guidance*" for his or her career from a senior colleague through a 'durable relationship' (Paquette, 2012, 207).

Summarising Paquette's survey, the literature conveys the idea that mentoring is an experience that involves a single mentor, but that this characteristic is an artefact of the kinds of research that have been done rather than a conceptual or theoretical position. The second issue is that the literature emphasizes the processes of normalization. "This characteristic is quite salient in the sociological works; it is the desired outcome of the managerial stream of the literature and is a core component of the vocational one—especially from the psycho-social point of view" (Paquette, 2012, 209). Paquette concludes that the potential of mentoring for creativity and



potential innovation is underestimated so that the idea is rarely associated with organizational and institutional change. This is an important cue for those in education where school reform and more effective teaching to produce improved student academic outcomes are the main game.

The term 'mentor' usually invokes the idea of a formal relationship between an experienced worker and a less experienced one, but the literature shows that in today's work climate involving the need for changed work patterns and cohorts of people, traditional hierarchical mentoring relationships are ineffective. Different forms of mentoring have evolved to fit the circumstances. These include peer mentoring, co-mentoring and developmental alliances, situational or spot mentoring that is short-term and goal specific. 'Mentoring up' in which senior employees are mentored by junior employees, team, group and e-mentoring fill out the list (Mavrincac, 2005).

However well intentioned, attempts to restrict the scope and range of mentoring and coaching are, it seems, doomed. Kram (1985) and Ely et al (2010) describe both informal and formal modes of mentoring. Caruso's (1992) study in a business setting showed that professional and emotional support came from a number of sources rather than one formal mentor. In this way, mentoring can be a relationship between colleagues, where their respective status is equal and communication is two-way. Reflecting this reality, Kram and Isabella (1985) identify a continuum of peer relationships: Information Peer, Collegial Peer, and Special Peer. Kram (1985) identifies two main areas of support provided by the mentoring relationship. Career development includes sponsorship, visibility, exposure, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments while the psychosocial includes role-modelling, friendship, counselling, acceptance and confirmation. While categories such as 'coaching' are identified as discrete entities, the term 'mentoring' fuses them into a single superordinate concept.

These areas of support, mentoring and coaching are fundamental in school settings where professional development is inextricably linked with the personal history of the individual teachers involved. Each teacher has a personal angle on 'teaching' and teaching style, determined by accumulated knowledge and ideas, perceptions of the profession, and era in which they undertook teacher education. Bringing this enormous array of differences and similarities to the table for disciplined dialogue is a priority for school leaders where the psychosocial functions present special challenges. As an illustration, St-Jean and Audet (2013) report that an



intervention style that combines a *maieutic approach* [aspect of the Socratic method that induces a respondent to formulate latent concepts through a dialectic or logical sequence of questions] with mentor involvement enabled the mentor to play a more decisive role with the mentee, indicating that mentors need to be able to vary their approach. Mentoring and coaching are a very diverse church indeed.

Nevertheless, the mentoring role is fraught not just for school leaders. Spaten and Flensburg's (2013) study of 15 middle managers trained to coach 75 employees found that the manager as coach has to be sensitive and empathetic in building the coaching relationship and should draw clear boundaries between their role as leader with a power relationship and supportive coach. Seibert (2013) in a study of 11 companies and 5,000 employees reports that where employees believed that their managers provided ongoing coaching and feedback to help them succeed, 93% reported a willingness to put in additional effort when needed, compared to only 33% of those who reported poor coaching and feedback. If this study is representative, it suggests that mentoring and coaching skills are a core capability for leaders and that even then, the processes can go wrong.

There is a clear trend in the literature away from 'management' emphases towards what might be called a 'Human Relations' approach. It has emerged as an important area for leadership where immediate managers or coaches are in a pivotal position to optimize people 'investments' (Schiemann, 2011). In this approach, human capital is central to achieving the mission and goals of the organization, another way of saying that employees matter and that the organisation and management have a responsibility to optimise both training and work conditions. In turn, dealing with 'alignment', 'capabilities', and 'engagement' of people, are central to the optimization of human capital investments and maximising overall organisational performance (Schiemann, 2011). While education staff may balk at the lexicon of such work, there are many instructive concepts in this literature for both the application of mentoring and coaching processes and for asking pertinent research questions about PD.

Pausing for a moment, nowhere does the gravity of PD weigh more heavily on leadership, management and staff than in education institutions. As the pressures to improve teaching and student outcomes increase, school heads are daily faced with issues such as how teachers and middle managers can be most effective at work, how their commitment to common goals



determined both beyond the school and within can be encouraged and sustained. To participate in disciplined dialogue (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009), mentoring becomes an essential technique as it offers an approach to both the work place individual and the personal side of human development in so far as individuals can be helped to explore their potential. Hence, mentoring is about the whole of an individual's relationship to work and the ability to thrive within it rather than the transmission of a limited set of skills, important as these may be in some circumstances. The Human Relations approach, perhaps stripped of some its imposing terminology that may well threaten the sensibilities of educators, offers a resource to perceptive education leaders. Indeed, theoretical work in mentoring should continue to draw from diverse fields according to Crisp and Cruz (2009, p. 540) who argue that 'alternative, theoretical frameworks will advance the literature in the coming years'.

To illustrate the point, here are some examples. In a business environment, coaching recipients report satisfaction with the experience for developing intrapersonal and interpersonal areas, especially self-efficacy (Theeboom, Beersma, Bianca, van Vianen, and Annelies (2014). Susing and Cavanagh (2013) point out that career developmental stages as well as personality traits have clear but distinct empirical links to work-based performance. What is more, the mentoring concept and process appears to be transferable to other contexts.

In their study of workplace stress, Yang, Liu-Qin, Xu, Xian, Allen, Tammy, Shi, Kan, Zhang, Xichao and Lou, Zhongyan (2011) found that Chinese business employees understood mentoring relationships in a way similar to Western employees, indicating that the concept is valid in a Confucian culture. Similarly, in his review of eight Education studies from 1997 to 2007 selected from the ERIC and Education Complete databases, Hsiu-Lien Lu (2010) found that peer coaching appears to possess unique advantages and have much value for preservice teacher education, while Smith & Ingersoll, (2004), Portner (2008), Stanulis & Floden, (2009) conclude that mentoring constitutes a vital tool in providing support for new teachers during induction to the profession.

On their part, Cordingly and Buckler (2012, p. 221) state that CPD is most effective when it is "collaborative, sustained, embedded in real-life learning contexts, and supported by specialists" and that mentoring and coaching provide "tailor-made in-school strategies". The mentoring concept appears robust and, for all intents and purposes, is universal in PD settings.



Rather than further dwelling on the minutiae of the host of articles and books about ‘mentoring’ and ‘coaching’ in Education and most other industries, we now extract what appear to us to be the dominant ideas of the field, against the projects and activities ongoing in Australian education systems where the focus is squarely on improving the performance of classroom teachers. These ideas include the major critiques of existing work and proposals for the future and create sign-posts for innovation in teacher professional learning models.

First, ‘mentoring’ and ‘coaching’ are core elements of PD or ‘teacher learning’. There is work to be done to clarify and make explicit the meaning of ‘teacher learning’ and its content.

Second, more focused research is needed into what is happening in school PD and the views of teachers and school leaders about those activities. As an illustration of the complexity involved, Hutchinson and Purcell (2007, 298) identified some supportive conditions that promote involvement in and commitment to learning and development in an organisation. Building a ‘language of learning and development’, to provide a common language for sharing understanding about developmental activities is essential. So too is ‘creating a supportive organizational culture’ (299) and ‘an effective and widely used performance management system’ (300). How these tasks are accomplished and what staff think of them are major research areas.

Third, PD processes need to be theorised more so that a body of principles can be developed that have validity beyond the locale where research evidence is gathered. For Education PD, it is time to distinguish the ‘creating’ of practices from the ‘sharing’ of them so that the intricacies can be revealed. Also in Education, it is probably time to transcend the ‘community’ view of ‘teacher networks’ unless these troublesome concepts are refined and made more productive. Promising theoretical approaches include ‘learning’ and there is a range of theories that can be drawn from other disciplines.

Fourth, the role of an outside ‘expert’ is established in teacher PD, notwithstanding some difficulties with differences of opinion about what expertness means when teachers are learning about pedagogy and curriculum. This point also encompasses the role of published research material that can be accessed and synthesized.

Fifth, teacher PD for whole of school change is a long-term process (e.g. 5 years) involving all



school staff and other stakeholders. A planning framework (e.g. alignment, capabilities, engagement) and an expert leadership capacity are mandatory.

Sixth, in all of the teacher learning proposals, there is emphasis on teachers adopting a more 'research-based' approach to their work. This is both a mindset/belief attitude involving investigative skills and a capacity to generate, analyse, interpret data and apply research-based findings. It also includes the capability to engage with and synthesize an international research literature about 'learning' and 'instruction' that in 2014 includes web-based resources (see Hirt & Willmott, 2014). How this can happen with the present framing of the 'schoolteacher' role and the nature of the teacher education programs in place and advocated by the accreditation agencies is a vexed question to say the least. On that issue, one might also reference the AITSL (2014) document on professional learning and performance and development that proposes integration, immersion, design-led approaches, market led approaches and open as innovative practices in professional learning and performance and development planning.

So what can be taken from this modest review of literature? From our own disruptive work in teacher education, where we have explored new models for the education of teachers (see, for example, Smith and Lynch, 2010), we contend that there is much more work to be done in the understanding the mechanics and logistics of coaching and mentoring in schools for teaching effect. Putting aside the well documented challenges that school leaders face in changing the teaching practices of teachers (see for example Hattie, 2012, 2011, 2009; Fullan and Hargreaves, 2012), the six points above reflect some of the territory that needs to be further explored if coaching and mentoring are to be successful as a medium for changing the teaching practices of teachers.

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