

COACHING AND MENTORING OF TEACHERS

PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT 2014

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Introduction

We both want to acknowledge the Ministry of Education for providing such a wonderful professional development opportunity, and enabling us to undertake a joint study. The time away from our busy school lives was both invigorating and enlightening. The Principal's sabbatical programme is a fantastic opportunity for our schools and us as we returned to our positions.

Background to the Sabbatical Study:

This report is a result of a dual application for sabbatical leave by Julia Johnson, Principal of Reignier Catholic School and Mark Johnson, Principal of Greenmeadows School. Both schools are in the Taradale area of Napier. Being in close proximity to each other, the schools share a number of initiatives, resources and facilities. This occurs whilst sustaining distinct communities and character that defines two separate schools.

We were on sabbatical leave for the second term of 2014. The theme of coaching and mentoring of staff was selected as a focus for research due to a number of reasons.

Mark:

During a previous performance appraisal it had been suggested that I could consider spending more purposeful time in classrooms supporting teachers and giving effective feedback. This resonated with me and I intended to read and observe proven practices in this area. I envisaged uncovering research about the most effective methods of observing individual staff members and giving them various forms of feedback with previously identified criteria that had been discussed. 'Active listening' and other techniques linked to my background knowledge would make this a useful exercise for the recipient and at the same time I would get a clear understanding of teacher practices.

I saw the time away as an opportunity to allow me to develop the best practice in following this model – the school's educational leader as a 'coach and mentor' of the staff. However the end result after a term away was markedly different to this original thought process.

Julia:

Over the last five years at our school we have built and developed a new senior management team and appraisal practices that were focused on:

- supporting teachers to set goals;
- review their own practice;
- and gather evidence to show they were making a difference in student learning and achievement.

Teachers were having robust discussion around good practice and working through inquiries to inform their teaching. I felt that although this was all happening throughout the school, it was driven from the senior management and that if we were removed from the picture, then teachers could potentially revert back to what they had always done. In reality it felt like the senior management team were driving the appraisal process – observing in classrooms, supporting the development of goals, giving the feedback, and helping teachers to construct next steps for future development. My question was – how do we get teachers leading their own learning, and how do we best get them to ‘want to change’?

I saw the sabbatical as an opportunity to investigate other schools’ systems of appraisal, to look at ways in which successful school leaders developed that growth mindset in teachers and to explore what might work with our staff in our school.

Case Studies Of Coaching and Mentoring:

Our sabbatical focus of study evolved to become a close examination of a number of case studies – four successful schools all with distinct and different approaches to coaching and mentoring of staff. They had set up systems that allow the staff ‘to be the best that they can be’.

This report will describe each of the various approaches we observed in four different schools. Each had their own merits and would be very effective in the particular situation they had been established.

We will also include a brief description of the potential way forward for both of our schools.

Case Study 1 School A

In Queensland we visited a full primary school in a small rural town approximately an hour's train ride or drive from Brisbane.

We selected this school as we had become aware of the role of a New Zealand trained teacher on the staff who was a 'lead teacher' - whose primary function was as a 'coach' for other members of staff. She was effectively fully released to support the development of literacy and numeracy practice within the school. This position was provided by the school's involvement with a state government initiative. As a result it received significant financial support to enable this involvement.

The key characteristics of this approach involved a clear directive 'lead teacher' intervention with work in classrooms alongside teachers. The use of a lot of demonstration lessons was a key element in this model. The lead teacher providing examples of best practice techniques and approaches, then transferring responsibility to the classroom teacher with support and constant feedback.

This lead teacher approach involved a significant amount of modelling and demonstrating, accompanied by a deliberate philosophical base – their catch phrase is:

'I do, we do, you do'.

The same ethos was also promoted as being part of the school's engagement with the student learners, and was openly communicated to the students.

This model involved significant use of video and analysis of lessons. To avoid too much anxiety and pressure, the film records of lessons were 'owned' by the teacher and shared with the coach, only if the teacher was willing and prepared to do so.

To ensure that there was consistency of message and delivery, the lead teacher was involved in a significant number of professional development sessions that were provided by the state government's 'Education Queensland'. This professional development involved teachers holding similar roles within others schools in the surrounding district.

The school's leadership also had clearly aligned the philosophy of Robert Marzano, particularly outlined in 'The Art and Science of Teaching'.

We found this approach quite a prescriptive one that would not really suit either of our school's situations. It was easy to appreciate the decision for the

school leadership to adapt this approach. Staff appointments were out of the school's control, with a new staff being selected by local education authority. Aiming to develop consistency in approach whilst up skilling staff in programmes of professional development means that this rather explicit method of coaching was easily and understandably justified.

The efforts put in by the senior management and staff involved in the programmes were significant and they were also developing very valuable skill and depth of understanding of the learning and teaching cycle. The extent of the support provided by the state educational body was intensive and deliberately designed to raise the effectiveness of the school leaders as well as providing ongoing support for all staff.

It was a very valuable experience to spend time in a school system with many clear similarities to that we were familiar with, yet with some readily apparent distinctions in approach.

Case Study 2 School B

We selected a school in Auckland to visit where the Principal had played a leading role in the First Time Principals programme as a highly respected mentor over a number of years. The school was in south western Auckland and was larger than both the schools we worked in.

We interviewed the Principal at length about the methods, techniques and values that she held and drew on working with staff, as well as with other Principals in her mentoring role. As a leader, her approach was to be a very effective communicator – whether with staff, senior management or community. Deliberate attempts were made to ensure that communication was clear, explicit and that wherever possible there were 'no surprises'. This allowed mutual trust to be built within the staff.

Aligned to this was the ongoing use of 'open to learning' conversations of which the Principal was a committed and skilful participant. This approach was effective in 'coaching' of staff with the various discussions she would hold with them over the course of the school year. Teachers were paired to set goals together and then met regularly throughout the year to discuss progress. The Principal was kept informed of ongoing progress linked to these goals and other elements of appraisal and attestation, which were focussed on personal development.

During the course of our interview she stressed that 'asking questions' was a key element of her approach to her leadership. Using the 'open to learning'

approach she would attempt to use techniques that would allow staff to make their own conclusions about personal development. One strategy aligned with this was the use of the metaphorical 'challenge card' – when she would prompt a teacher to verbalize their thinking or justification for an action. By openly talking about the 'challenge card' and how this was used to explicitly draw out the individual's thinking rather than a potentially personal 'attack', much of the emotion could be removed from this dialogue. Finally to end these interviews, the Principal would habitually ask ways in which they as school leader can help and what the staff member would want from them to achieve their goals.

These same techniques were used when holding the quality dialogue with Principal mentees. The Principal was skilled in these discussions, and her ability to communicate was readily apparent throughout our time with her. She made the commitment to find time to ensure that trust was established and that communication was effective. However, the staff were encouraged to talk and reflect with their peers and were included in a lot of the goal setting and evaluative discussions about many aspects of school development.

Case Study 3 School C

We met and interviewed the Principal of the third school who had written a paper on school leadership and creating an effective environment where staff provide meaningful and deliberate components of the professional development of their peers.

This school in Wellington was selected as it had been involved in an ongoing programme involving Quality Learning Circles as a method of building teacher capability over a number of years. While not referred to as an explicit 'coaching' technique, there were undoubted links to the use of peers and colleagues to help staff approach self-improvement and professional development. Staff members are trained in the skills required to enable the opportunities to be most effective for all concerned.

High trust and collaboration are key components in this approach. As our research was broadening, these factors were a similar constant, vital throughout. Also important was the need to have school staff all trained in the skills required to be full participants in this coaching and support approach. Being aware of the techniques in listening, discussing any problem identified in a clear manner and following up these discussions enabled the

positive impact. The whole staff (at least within their 'circles') were being used in a coaching and mentoring role to support their colleagues.

The Quality Learning Circles were established to provide a platform for teachers to develop their practice and improve professionally. As it was working very effectively within the school, the approach was serving the purpose of being a major element of the school's appraisal.

Case Study 4 School D

The final school we visited in an official capacity had deliberately focussed on a programme of developing staff members as coaches for their peers. It was a large school on the north shore of Auckland.

The Deputy Principal was the key leader in establishing the programme within the staff and reviewing and refining the programme over a period of years. Critical to this, as we had been hearing in all instances, was the building of the high trust between staff to optimise the opportunities to benefit from the peer coaching structure.

Initially the focus for the school leader was to establish ways in which to enhance effective practices for teachers across the school. The coaching and mentoring of a number of staff members was identified as the selected approach. Early into the initiative, the decision was made to use external facilitation to establish the approach within the school. A number of staff were trained in a specific coaching model, and interestingly enough it was kept outside of the existing senior management team. Staff were asked to volunteer for involvement in the instructive workshops, and undertook a comprehensive training programme to develop the key skills involved in being a coach.

Once training was completed then staff members were invited to have the opportunity to select who of the coaches they worked with. Staff were exposed to the skills of a mentoring and coaching programme where teachers worked in pairs, one as the mentor and one as the coach. Linked to this was explicit goal setting, in class tasks, questioning, probing, and getting teachers solving their own problems. Critical to this whole approach were the skills of effective communication.

Hearing about this school's experiences really pulled together so many of the elements we had already seen.

So Where to From Here? Top Ten Report Summary Bullets

The following summarise the overriding conclusions we shared as a result of our sabbatical leave:

1. 'To affect change, use the group to change the group'
2. As leaders we need to move our mindsets from 'fixing' individual teachers
3. Lead change by ensuring these elements are present:
 - a. Establishing goals and expectations
 - b. Resourcing strategically
 - c. Ensuring quality teaching
 - d. Lead teacher learning and development
 - e. Ensure an orderly and safe environment
4. Provide more opportunities for teachers working collaboratively both in and out of class and emphasise 'teamwork'
5. The Principal is a key player but not necessarily the dominant player
6. Build skill and expertise across the school
7. A 'high trust' model can weaken when it is the senior management or leadership team exclusively mentoring or coaching – teachers can potentially revert to feeling 'judged rather than supported' to learn
8. Ensure there is collaboration across schools at leadership and teacher level, within clusters, teachers talking with other teachers
9. Develop leadership across the staff so teachers become experts at coaching and mentoring each other
10. Develop key skills in teachers as coaches – such as questioning effectively and giving quality feedback which can create self-directed learning

References for the above (i.e. Not entirely our own brilliant thinking ...)

Michael Fullan – 'The Principal: Three Keys to Maximising Impact

Carol Dweck – 'Mindset: The New Psychology of Success'

Viviane Robinson – 'Student Centred Leadership'

David Rock – 'Quiet Leadership'

Jo Hewitt – 'Building Teacher Effectiveness – Sabbatical Report 2013'

The following quote which was published at the time of Richie McCaw's century of tests as captain seemed particularly relevant as this report was being finalised, as he reflected on his growth as a leader within the All Blacks:

"I had no idea what I was doing back then. When I started, I felt like I needed to have all the answers, to know it all myself, always be the guy talking. But as time goes on you become more comfortable if someone else has the answer and you go with that. You get satisfaction seeing other guys make the right calls."

Richie McCaw – Source: 'NZ Herald' Friday Nov 21, 2014

What now for us as Principals?

1. Build the capacity of the 'leadership' within the school

- identify goals for the school leadership team that are realistic and show impact
- provide exposure to professional readings on effective leadership. Work through these collectively
- identify our strengths as a team. What do we need to work on? What are our needs?
- source effective PD to develop good leadership questioning so teachers are reflecting and problem solving for themselves

2. Build the capability of 'team' within the school

- develop confidence and independence in our teachers to have self-belief and promote risk taking
- expose staff members to different organisational structures and strengthening of professional relationships across traditional groups
- promote the concept 'strengthening the capacity of the team is much more effective than building the capacity of the individual'
- provide opportunities for staff to plan, teach and reflect collaboratively to achieve shared outcomes

3. Build relationships with other schools (getting coaching and mentoring for leadership)

- continue involvement in a PLG as a Principal
- ensure senior management remain connected with other schools – e.g. Maths PLGs, leadership PLGs, AP/DP groups
- find ways of getting teachers out into other schools for observations, buddy classes, shared professional learning

4. Develop a coaching model

- provide professional development for staff in coaching and mentoring
- expand the traditional team (or syndicate) model into opportunities for QLC discussion
- provide alternatives to 'top down' appraisal and promote teachers appraising and supporting each other

Acknowledgements:

We both want to thank the following individuals and groups for their support, industry and contribution during our periods of leave:

The Boards of Trustees of Greenmeadows and Reignier Catholic Schools who supported our applications for sabbatical leave, especially the Board Chairpersons Patrick Jones and Boyd Gross.

Staff members within the schools who took on additional responsibilities in the absence of the respective Principals. In particular we thank the:

- acting Principals Allyson Ross and Sheryl Riceman who both performed exceptionally in their roles
- other members of teaching staff who took on extra duties in our absence supporting Allyson and Sheryl including Ali de Lange, Marty Gibbs (both Greenmeadows) and Blair Jenyns (Reignier Catholic)
- the entire staff who ensured our two wonderful schools continued to operate fantastically for the periods of our absence

The schools, and in particular the key leadership staff, that so openly and readily welcomed us and shared all aspects of their school practices with us. To spend the time experiencing the school climate and tone, as well as having the opportunity to talk in depth to the leadership was so valuable to us. It also gave us so many opportunities to reflect on what we do and the focus our sabbatical had. The quality of the discussions we had in each school further enhanced this, and we are very grateful to the openness and willingness shown by those hosting us.