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# **Sabbatical Report**

## **Investigating Coaching in Schools**

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The late Ross Lamb who was my coach and mentor for several years.  
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their information regarding coaching systems within their school. Enthusiasm  
is a contagious thing!  
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**Purpose:** To investigate and research the use of teacher coaching and mentoring, within a New Zealand context, to evaluate the impact on student achievement.

**Rationale and background:** School achievement and improvement is constantly under scrutiny. Countless research espouses teacher capability as one of the most significant factors influencing student outcomes and success. Indeed teacher capability is often noted as the most influential determinant of successful student learning.

" Successful schools are committed to sharing best practice. The process of networking and sharing knowledge is at the heart of teacher professionalism as it involves both learning from what works and contributing to the pot of professional knowledge."  
The Green paper, Schools Building On Success ( 2001)

A growing body of research suggests that a substantial contributor to student outcomes and achievement is teacher effectiveness.

John Hattie, University of Auckland, Australian Council for Educational Research, Oct 2003 suggests that excluding student internal influences, teachers have the greatest influence on the achievement variance of students. He notes that teachers account for 30% of student achievement, while home, the school at large and peer effects are generally between 5 - 10%.

He further suggests that schools need to ensure that this greatest influence is optimized. If the focus of a school is to have a powerful effect on student achievement, and excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence over student achievement, we need to focus on ensuring excellence of teaching within our schools.

"Schools need to identify, esteem and grow teachers who have the most powerful influences on student learning"

Having previously established several professional learning groups across the school, trialled an independent mentoring programme for individual staff members, as well as having a robust and sustainable literacy and numeracy mentoring programme in the school, I thought it was timely to look into the

differences of coaching and mentoring programmes within schools so to establish a broader mentoring and coaching programme throughout my school, with the long term goal of sustaining teacher growth and development through self reflection and self sustained action.

**Methodology:** I wanted to read and research mentoring and coaching within an educational context and to look at it's implementation in schools. I wanted to see different models operating in schools so I could develop an effective model for my school.

Interestingly, while researching both coaching and mentoring styles, I noted the fundamental difference between the two and realized that while both may lead to improved teacher performance, coaching embraced the model of teacher inquiry more significantly and was the preferred model for my research. Let me elaborate that point.

Coaching is a form of inquiry -based learning, characterized by collaboration between individual or groups of teachers. It involves professional dialogue that helps the coachee to reflect on their practice. Within the context of coaching the coachee takes responsibility for their performance as they, through robust discussion and reflection have determined their best course of action rather than someone else deciding for them.

" Coaching is about performing at your best through the individual and private assistance of someone who will challenge and stimulate you to keep you growing." (Gerard O Donovan) International Institute of Coaching.

" Coaching in it's truest sense is giving the responsibility to the learner to help come up with the answers." ( Vinci Lombardi) US NFL Coach

"Coaching is a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve. To be a successful coach requires a knowledge and understanding of process and as well as the variety of styles, skills and techniques that are appropriate to the context in which the coaching takes place." (Eric Parsloe)

In contrast, mentoring is often defined as a professional relationship in which an experienced person (the mentor) assists another, (the mentoree) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance their professional growth. In essence mentoring is a sharing of skills from the more experienced to the less.

"Mentoring is the process of the formal transmission of knowledge, social capital and the psychological support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development: mentoring entails informal communication usually face to face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom or experience(the mentor), and a person who is perceived to have less( mentoree)."

Bozeman, B Feeney, M.K. (Oct 2007) "Towards a useful theory of mentoring. A conceptual analysis and critique"  
Administration and Society 39 (6)

Clearly there is a place for both coaching and mentoring in schools. Induction programmes, support for provisionally registered teachers, support and guidance programmes and possibly curriculum specific professional development could all be regarded as a mentoring programme of some sort. However I wonder if schools tend to favour the use of mentoring programmes over coaching? I can certainly say we have at Rosehill Intermediate. At this point I have veered slightly from my original proposal.

Having learnt more about coaching programmes in schools and feeling reasonably confident about mentoring, I have modified my focus to purely researching coaching methods and investigating coaching models in schools with the intention of developing such a programme at Rosehill Intermediate.

**Findings:** The schools I visited use the GROW coaching model. This was originally developed in the 1980s by performance coach John Witmore, although it has had several modifications since.

The GROW model is a framework for structuring coaching sessions. It is a simple set of questions to guide the discussion through 4 stages of a coaching session.

As the coach works through the different stages of questioning, the coachee is required to think through an issue or problem at hand and identify a possible solution or range of solutions.

This model works under the premise that it is far more effective getting someone to think about what they need to do and why, rather than simply telling them what to do. In my opinion this model demonstrates the strength of a coaching over a mentoring model of learning.

This model reinforces the thinking that through reflection we can learn and grow, something that is imperative in any learning environment.

Here is an example of the GROW model as prepared by Frog In the Well Coaching [www.thefrogswell.com](http://www.thefrogswell.com)



<p><b>G= Growth <i>What do you want?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you want to achieve?</li> <li>• What does success look like?</li> <li>• How will you know when you've reached your goal?</li> <li>• What would a milestone be on the way?</li> <li>• How much of this is in your control?</li> <li>• Is the goal positive, challenging, achievable for you?</li> <li>• How will you measure it?</li> </ul>	<p><b>R= Reality <i>What is happening now?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happening now (what, when, how much, how often)?</li> <li>• What actions have you already taken to reach your goal?</li> <li>• What have you learnt from that?</li> <li>• What is holding you back from finding a way forward?</li> <li>• What is really going on (intuition)?</li> </ul>
<p><b>W=Will <i>What will you do?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which option or options so you choose?</li> <li>• To what extent does this meet all your objectives?</li> <li>• What are your success criteria and measurements for success?</li> <li>• When are you going to start and finish each action?</li> <li>• What could arise to hinder you in taking these steps?</li> <li>• What support do you need and</li> </ul>	<p><b>O=Options <i>What could you do?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What could you do as the next step to meeting this goal?</li> <li>• What else could you do?</li> <li>• ..... and what else?</li> <li>• What are the benefits and costs of each?</li> <li>• What if you had more....time, money, power etc?</li> <li>• What if there was no "history", "politics" – what could you do?</li> <li>• Would you like another suggestion?</li> </ul>

<p>from whom?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will you do to obtain that support and when?</li> <li>• What could I do to support you? What commitment on a scale of 1- 10 so you have to taking these actions?</li> <li>• What prevents this from being 10?</li> <li>• What could you do later to raise your commitment closer to 10?</li> </ul>	
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The schools I visited have a systematic, planned and sustainable coaching programme based on the GROW coaching model. How did they achieve this? The following is a highly simplistic overview of what was an extremely well executed planned approach.

1. The leader/ s in the school researched coaching, believing it would be beneficial to their school. This belief was shared and discussed with the staff.
2. Several staff members received formal coaching training.
3. Coaching was trialled with a small group of staff over a reasonable time frame, ( up to a year in some instances). This enabled other staff to become aware of the coaching model and see it in action if they were interested to.
4. Staff professional development was put in place to enable all staff to understand the thinking behind and the philosophy for coaching in school e.g. Staff meeting, Teachers Only Day, with the view of more staff picking up the training.
5. Several more staff attended coaching training and consequently more staff became coaches and coachees.
6. Some schools trained in partnership with other schools and established a clusters of schools that could share their journey and learn together. In one instance one school leader did additional training that resulted in him training and supporting other coaches and principals in the cluster.
7. Steps 3 and 4 were repeated until there were enough coaches in the school to accommodate all the teaching staff.
8. The process was discussed, evaluated and refined at several stages of development.

Other factors integral to the plan that were considered and provision made for .....

- \* Budgeting for teacher training and release to do coaching
- \* Time allocation to enable coaching
- \* Paper trail for coaching sessions, what was recorded and who had access to it

- \* Accountability for decisions made in coaching sessions
- \* Was coaching suitable for provisionally registered teachers?
- \* Did coaching replace or support appraisal?
- \* How many goals were staff expected to set?
- \* Was there a time frame to achieve goals?
- \* Were all goals purely personal or was there a place to expect whole school focus areas to be integrated into staff goals?
- \* Was all the staff coached or just the teaching staff?
- \* Who coached the principal?
- \* Could you choose your coach or were they allocated?
- \* What systems were in place to deal with issues between coach and coachee?
- \* What systems were in place to review coaching across the school?
- \* How did the school know coaching was making a difference to teacher performance?
- \* How did the school know coaching was making a difference to student achievement?

And last but by no means least.....did the culture of the school support coaching?

By definition coaching requires a high trust model. The integrity of the programme relies on the participants supporting and trusting each other. Confidentiality is critical as more often than not, decisions made between the coach and coachee will stay just there- between them. Therefore for real growth to occur all participants must be committed to the programme and see the value of the process. It is essential, for the spirit of the programme to work, that a culture of fostering self improvement, collegial support, respect and cognisance of the need for self reflection to hasten self improvement is apparent within a school. It may be the case that in some environments a lot of work needs to be put in place before coaching can be implemented!

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Following extensive research and observations I believe that a coaching programme would be very beneficial to the school. I would like to employ the principles of the GROW model of coaching and follow an action plan similar to the one outlined above in my report.

Initially members of the senior management team will receive the coaching training and put it into practice. This opportunity will be gradually and systematically integrated into the school over the next three years, resulting in all staff members trained and operating as coaches.

Long term I would like to think that the rigorous coaching culture operating in the school could replace all existing appraisal systems as skilled and practiced self reflection and consequent action takes the place of redirection and evaluation.

By three methods we may learn wisdom; first by reflection, which is the noblest; second by imitation, which is the easiest; third by experience, which is the bitterest.

Socrates.

**Key Readings:**

Parsloe, E, *The Manager as Coach and Mentor*, CIPD Publishing 1999

Rock, David, *Quiet Leadership*, Harper 2006

Robertson, Jan, *Coaching Leadership, Building Educational Leadership Capacity through Coaching Partnerships*, NZCER Press

Whitmore, John, *Coaching for Performance*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009