

TeachNZ – Primary Principals Sabbatical Report

Aaron Richards – St Patrick’s School Bryndwr

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the opportunity TeachNZ has provided with the provision of a sabbatical. This time has been very valuable, as it has provided me an opportunity to step back and reflect on my role as principal.

I would like to thank the St Patrick’s School Board of Trustees for agreeing to provide me with leave to undertake the sabbatical and their support with attending the coaching training in Australia.

A special thanks to my Deputy Principal who took up the challenge of leading the school as Acting Principal while I was on leave. It was reassuring that I was leaving the school in capable hands.

Background and Rational

Teaching is a complex and demanding profession. Teachers require high quality support and training to ensure they have the skills and strategies to meet the changing needs of learners. Teacher development has been an important focus area for research and government reforms over recent years. In 2007, the Ministry of Education published the “Best Evidence Synthesis: Teacher Professional Learning and Development and Research” to support professional development and learning in New Zealand schools.

The education sector is not alone with its focus on professional learning and development as a strategy to improve outcomes. Corporate training has become the need of the hour, with the commercial world identifying employee performance as the driving force of any successful company. The business sector has invested heavily in corporate training as a strategy to improve overall performance and profits (Scott 2013). This has resulted in the rapid grow of the Human Resources industry.

This sabbatical report investigates current best practice used to improve teacher effectiveness and to explore alternative models of human resource management used by the commercial sector to improve employee performance. In particular this report will investigate how coaching as a performance improvement strategy is used to provide support and guidance to employees and achieve overall organizational goals and objectives.

Methodology

A literature review of core documentation from the Ministry of Education, Education Review Office and researcher Jan Robertson was used to develop an understanding of current theory around the subject of Teacher professional learning and development. Please refer to the references for a list of research reviewed for this sabbatical.

I also attended Stage One coaching accreditation training at the Institute of Executive Coaching and Leadership in Sydney. This was a corporate focus training opportunity that was attended by human resource managers, bank executives and insurance managers. The training not only provided research and theory from a corporate perspective, but also enabled me to identify parallels between the experiences of managers from different industries.

Literature Review – Performance Management

The purpose of professional learning and development is to enhance teacher quality and improve student achievement (ERO 2009). “High quality teacher learning and development is more than providing teachers with a range of teacher strategies, it is about transforming who the teacher is” (Robertson 2005).

High Quality professional learning and development is not subject to a single perception (ERO 2009). Schools use a variety of professional learning and development approaches to improve performance. Some types of professional learning and development included, but are not limited to:

- Coaching and mentoring
- Critical friends
- Peer assisted learning
- Professional development and leadership centres
- Problem-based learning
- Action research
- Enquiry projects
- In-house workshops
- Informal conversations and discussion
- Training courses and conferences
- Observing others teach
- Feedback

Timperley (2007) however asserts that the prevailing discourse surrounding professional learning and development opportunities needed to be challenged to ensure that teacher performance is enhanced or transformed. Essentially any professional learning programme should expose individuals to new ideas, challenge their current discourse (values, beliefs), stimulate self-reflection and link theory and thought with action. Whitmore (2002) also affirms that

unlocking the potential of others only occurs when there is a commitment to action and a self-realisation of ability.

A number of contexts for promoting highly effective professional learning opportunities included:

- Maintaining a learning culture where improvement is sought in all aspects of operation.
- Maintaining a collaborative environment where relationships are based on open communication, support and trust.
- Active involvement of all individuals in the professional learning process where individuals have ownership of change.
- Ensure learning is focused on relevant personal professional context
- Adoption of processes that reinforce the reflection and action cycle
- Regular opportunities to develop skills and knowledge over time.
- Use of external expertise or observation of others teach
- Multiple opportunities for the individual to receive feedback
- Processes in place that keep individuals on task
- Experimentation is encouraged through a process of enquiry or action research.

Literature Review – Coaching

Robertson (2005) confirms that coaching can provide all the elements necessary for effective professional development to occur. Whitmore (2002) supports this notion emphasising that coaching unlocks a person's potential to maximise their performance.

The International Coaching Federation affirms that professional coaching provides many benefits: fresh perspectives on personal challenges, enhanced decision-making skills, greater interpersonal effectiveness, and increased confidence. They believe that those who undertake coaching also can expect appreciable improvement in productivity, satisfaction with life and work, and the attainment of relevant goals.

Robertson (2005) believes that coaching has a distinct benefit in that it develops a learning culture where individuals have the ability to contribute collectively to sustained and ongoing improvement. This concept supports the principle of life long learners that drives institutional change.

Another of the major benefits of coaching is that it is based on a social-constructivist theory. Coaching reflects a learning relationship where participants are open to new learning and engage together as professionals. This results in increased professional interactions and collaboration. This assists with breaking down the isolation that many educationalists work in (Sergiovanni 2001). However, for a collaborative learning culture to flourish, time and energy needs to be invested in to developing an open and trusting relationships. If staff have high levels of trust they are more open to sharing and accepting ideas (ERO 2009). Coaching delivers results because it

develops supportive relationships between participants and promotes communication (Whitmore 2002).

A third benefit of coaching is that it focuses on improving practice in context (ERO 2009). Because the context in which teachers operate markedly influences teaching, development and support initiatives need to focus on the immediate context of the classroom and school. Robertson (2005) believes coaching achieves this with its central primus of active reflection where teaching experiences are used to encourage teachers to question, problem solve and develop new ways of thinking. Reflecting on experiences and action related to the classroom helps teachers become more receptive to trying out new strategies and behaviours. Robertson (2005) also points out that reflection must go beyond the evaluation of teacher behaviour and dig down into the values and beliefs of the individuals. Values and beliefs underpin many of the decisions that are made within the classroom. Duignan (1989) extends this concept by asserting that reflective practice should develop an awareness of discontinuity between espoused theories, values and goals and the theories, values and goals that are lived out in the classroom. Reflection at this level not only improves teaching practice but influences the person the teacher is (Robertson 2005).

Reflection time needs to be structured. Structured time enables teachers to become increasingly reflective about what they are thinking and doing or what they are planning to do. Coaches build capable teachers by enabling them to bring critical reflection to their teaching practice.

There is a diverse range of coaching approaches that can be used. These approaches include, critical friends, action research, enquiry teaching, reciprocal coaching and peer assisted coaching, to name a few. However, like concepts relating to performance management, the vast majority of approaches share very common elements that make the approach effective at increasing performance. In contrast to the commercial models, an education model needs to be directly linked to its context by:

- The necessity for participants to receive feedback relating to performance observed by the coach;
- The necessity for participants to be exposed to new ideas that either challenge their current discourse or extend current thinking by observing others or through dialogue with an outside expert; and
- The necessity for the coaching process to link theory with action.

Jan Robertson developed an example of a coaching programme promoted throughout New Zealand. Robertson designed a peer-assisted learning model where leaders work as a reciprocal coaching team to support and guide improvement. Each team receives training and is supervised by an outside moderator. The G.R.O.W model is also utilised by the coaching team to plan and monitor ongoing progress.

The coach is identified as a pivotal role in the coaching process. The success of the coaching process relies heavily on the coaches' skills and ability to satisfy the elements of effective professional learning as well as conduct the

coaching process. However Robertson (2005) identifies that coaches often conducted the coaching process with little if any experience as a coach. The necessity for coaches to develop knowledge relating to effective professional learning and skills as well as implementing specific coaching skills are considered paramount if a coaching approach is used.

Coaching Training

The Institute of Executive Coaching and Leadership (IECL) is an Australian based leadership and coaching organization that not only provides coaching services but also provides accredited coaching and leadership training. IECL assert that coaching is one of the most effective ways to create dynamic, focused organisations and foster executive development. Executive coaching gives people the freedom to use their talents, skills and experience - while at the same time ensuring clear goals are in place and outcomes are achieved. Specifically, executive coaching assists managers in becoming more effective leaders of their team.

In contrast to the education model, IECL clearly defines the role of the coach and draws strict distinction with other leadership roles:

	<p>Leading</p> <p>Inspiring the team, setting the direction and creating fellowship.</p>
	<p>Managing</p> <p>Managing people and resources to achieve outcomes. Keeping things organized and operational.</p>
	<p>Mentoring</p> <p>Providing expert advice</p>
	<p>Training</p> <p>Teaching and new skill or knowledge</p>
	<p>Counselling</p> <p>Providing advice and guidance to a person with a problem</p>
	<p>Consulting</p> <p>Identifying the problem and providing a solution</p>
	<p>Coaching</p> <p>Empowering others to reach their potential</p>

The IECL define coaching as “a structured conversation with a measurable outcome that is collaborative and in the service of the coaching counterpart.... Coaching conversations identify strengths and challenges and guide a coaching counterpart towards reaching their potential at work.” Unlike the education model where expertise is used to either challenge existing discourse or open the coaching counterpart to new ideas, the IECL model proceeds on the principle that the counterpart has untapped potential. Therefore the goal of the coaching session is to remove or reduce internal obstacles to performance and realize the natural ability within (Whitmore 2002). The IECL coaching model maintains that it is essential that the coaching conversation conclude with the coaching counterparts realization that success was dependent on their own ability.

Similarly, the IECL coaching model maintains that coaches need to be trained to effectively lead the coaching process and ensure that the coaching conversation obtains the desired goals. However, unlike the education model, IECL do not believe that coaches need to be experts or understand teaching. Instead the IECL coaching model is based on drawing the potential inherent in the individual through a structured conversation that is based on concepts of adult learning.

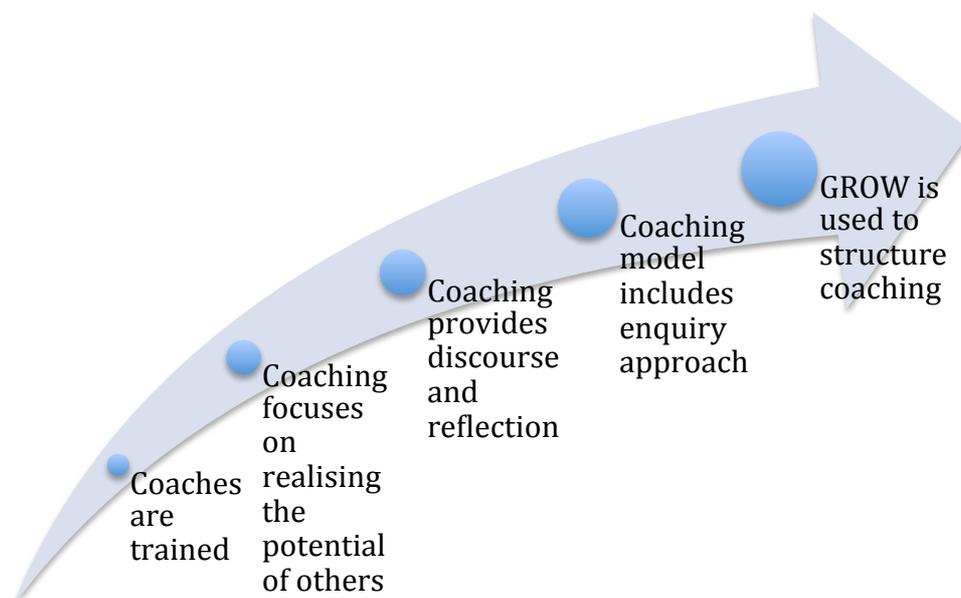
The IECL model uses the G.R.O.W tool to structure the coaching conversation first by confirming the counterparts **goals**, clarifying **reality** of the current situations, identify **options** available to achieve the goal, securing commitment to action by **wrapping-up** the coaching session. Robertson (2005) also identifies the G.R.O.W model as a useful tool for coaching teams to use to document their improvement plan.

Conclusion

1. The single greatest influence on the achievement of students and the success of a school is the quality and performance of teachers.
2. To maintain a high performing school environment that is utilising the potential of teachers who are committed to ongoing improvement the following elements need to be realised:



3. Coaching is an effective type of professional learning and development that should be used to realise the potential of teachers. An effective coaching programme contains the following elements:



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