Newcastle University

Research Centre for Learning and Teaching

TEACHER COACHING

A collection of think-pieces about professional development & leadership through teacher coaching

Rachel Lofthouse

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This booklet is made up of a collection of blog posts written between March 2015 and June 2016 and republished under the Creative Commons license. These are presented here as think-pieces, so that following each 'post' there are two or three questions which you may find helpful to ask yourself, your colleagues and the leadership team of the school, college or other organisation in which you work. The core educational stance underpinning this publication is the belief that workplaces can be sites of learning, and that professional learning in the workplace is critical to building a sustainable, resilient, creative, adaptable and motivated workforce. For teachers this is especially critical. Teachers face enormous workload pressures, often feel judged rather than supported and can find their resilience dipping. We are seeing the consequences of this in the worrying teacher retention figures.

These think-pieces offer a way of addressing the need for appropriate Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) which is respectful of the demands of the workplace but nuanced to the interests of individuals. They are not a complete set – more will be written as I undertake research and development in this area, but they are a capsule collection from this moment in time. I hope you find them interesting and useful.

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A note on footnotes and referencing
As most of these think-pieces were originally published as blogs in-text citations are not provided in full academic convention, however footnote references are given. I hope that this helps to ensure their relatively informal style and readability. Open access and weblinks are given in footnotes where possible. Some references are thus repeated to allow readers to dip into chapters one at a time.

Contents & overview

To help you navigate your way through this collection here is an annotated contents:

The publication opens with think-piece first published by BERA. This post started with the concepts of mentoring that most teachers are familiar with. It goes on to suggest how peer coaching by and for teachers contrasts with the typical models of mentoring, and asks how successfully it is being used.

The second think-piece was also first published by BERA. It extends the first one by focusing on the critical element of trust within coaching, but also demonstrates how coaching practices can build up trust in workplace cultures. This post was based the development of coaching in a teaching school and draws on the voices of participating teachers.

The third think-piece was a blog first published by IPDA which focused on the use of video as a tool recording to support CPDL. It comes with a warning – making video powerful takes more than simply having the kit!

Leading on from [3] the fourth think-piece was published as a blog on the website of the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS). It focuses on a specific example of video-based inter-professional coaching to support pedagogic practice in nursery and primary schools.

The fifth think-piece is different from the others in that it was first published in another CFLAT booklet. It is included here because it extends the case study outlined in [4].

This think-piece was again published on the ECLS website and is the first linking coaching and mentoring with educational leadership. This one was triggered by a discussion at the first national WomenEd *un*conference.

This is the second think-piece linking the development of leadership with coaching, and was first published by BERA.

This think-piece was a guest blog post published by SchoolsNE in which I challenged school leaders to question the professional learning in their schools. It extends the remit of this booklet slightly to consider wider aspects of professional learning.

The final think-piece is followed by some concluding thoughts drawing attention back to the scale of coaching, but situating it within these wider questions related to CPDL.

THINK-PIECE 1

Beyond mentoring; peer coaching by and for teachers. Can it live up to its promise?

Creating opportunities for individual teachers to work together for professional development is a common ambition in schools in England. Mentoring forms a critical learning resource for both pre-service teachers and those newly qualified (NQTs), offering instruction, support and critical friendship, and typically engaging the mentor in making judgements about the new teachers' practice. Past the NQT phase mentoring is rarely formalised, and a common concern for early career teachers is that they find themselves exposed to the performance management regime of lesson observation, judgement and target setting with fewer sources of personalised support on offer. For some teachers their next experience of such support comes as they proceed through leadership programmes when they are assigned coaches. In between the NQT and aspiring leader stages a gap can open up, which is typically occupied by membership of school professional learning networks, voluntary attendance at TeachMeets, school-based CPD, subject-based training and engagement in moderation activities. For some teachers there is a growing use of social media for ideas, feedback and a chance to share practice.

Peer coaching takes many forms, but a typical rationale is to fill this gap and to enable teachers to share good practice, work on issues they are interested in and to maintain a focus on improving teaching and learning. Coaching is usually distinguished from mentoring [1] in that it can be accessed in between distinct career transition stages and is less likely to be based on forming judgements and linked to performance management, but instead be orientated towards professional development through learning conversations. Some coaching models deliberately locate teachers in pairs and triads across traditional working boundaries (such as subject departments or key stages) while others use coaching as a mechanism to strengthen working practices within these contexts. Sometimes coaching becomes a whole school endeavour involving all teachers, in other schools a team of coaches is established and either as volunteers or through persuasion they work with a cohort of coachees. Coaching frequently includes lesson observations, sometimes extending to the use of video to stimulate discussion[2] (see pages 8 & 11). Coaching is often designed to be cyclical, sustaining sequences of plan, do and review; may be collaborative in that participants work together to plan for learning, and is sometimes reciprocal. Importantly most teachers report that they enjoy being coached. What could go wrong when this sounds so flexible, potentially productive and inclusive?

Having researched coaching over a decade it is clear that issues which support and disrupt it affect its perceived and actual success, and the cautionary tales are useful in diagnosing the potential pitfalls. The first of these might be

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[1] http://www.curee.co.uk/mentoring-and-coaching

[2] http://ipda.org.uk/thinking-beyond-the-toolkit-using-video-for-professional-learning-and-development/

related to the experience that all teachers have of mentoring. Hobson and Malderez[3], Wilson[4], Lofthouse and Thomas[5] all found that mentoring can be distorted away from the personal learning needs of the new teacher. The outcome can be that mentoring conversations are sometimes didactic or instructional, driven by target setting and checking, and do not always engage the mentee in proactive participation in professional dialogue. Teachers' experiences of performance management observation and feedback can be similar. These experiences can be formative creating conversational and behavioural habits that sustain coaching. Other teachers report that even when coaching starts as a confidential and personalised learning opportunity it gets swept up by the performance management system of the school or is ascribed a role linked to the school's (rather than their own) CPD priorities. Schools are busy places and coaching uses up the most precious resource, that of teachers' time. Managing this and the expectations that are generated is problematic. Associated with this is the degree to which decisions and actions in schools are expected to generate outcomes to which teachers and school leaders can be held to account. The drive for 'improvement' is incessant and as yet there is limited evidence of the direct link between teacher coaching and pupil attainment. We have started to understand these tensions through a CHAT analysis[6] recognising that coaching too

frequently fades in the perfomative culture of schools.

So, where does this leave us? Schools will continue to set up coaching, using its promise as a motive. Research gaps include establishing what can be known about the link between coaching and the desired outcomes for learners. As importantly perhaps, at this time of anxiety about teachers' wellbeing and resilience, there are real reasons to establish whether coaching can address issues beyond teachers' and pupils' performance. Watch this space.

This think piece was first published by BERA

https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

What mentoring habits might you have picked up that are getting in the way of coaching?

How can you ensure that coaching lesson observations are opportunities for discussion that helps to develop teachers' personal learning rather than to simply reinforce school level procedures?

How might coaching help teachers to test out some of the ideas generated by divergent thinking?

[3] Andrew J. Hobson, Angi Malderez, (2013) "Judgementoring and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 2 Iss: 2, pp.89 – 108 http://shura.shu.ac.uk/7224/1/Hobson_and_Malderez_2013_Judgementoring_IJMCE_Post-print_draft.pdf

[4] Wilson, V. (2014) 'Examining teacher education through cultural historical activity theory', *Tean Journal* 6(1), pp. 20-29. http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/TEAN/article/viewFile/180/294

[5] Rachel Lofthouse , Ulrike Thomas , (2014) "Mentoring student teachers; a vulnerable workplace learning practice", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 3 Iss: 3, pp.201 – 218 http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=207274

[6] Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, (2013) "An activity theory perspective on peer coaching", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 2 Iss: 1, pp.8 – 20 http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=190955

THINK-PIECE 2

Teacher peer coaching; a story of trust, agency and enablers

CO-WRITTEN WITH EMMA BULMER
Assistant Vice-Principal at Hermitage Academy with a responsibility for Teaching and Learning.

This blog is a good news story in terms of teacher collaboration from The Hermitage Academy, a North-East Teaching School. The Academy has deliberately and steadily built a culture of teacher collaboration. It is not perfect, but it is tangible. In this blog we focus on the contribution of teacher coaching to the collaborative culture. At Hermitage teacher peer-coaching is in its third year with a coaching development programme running to support each cohort of new coaches and coachees. All participants are volunteers and each coaching partnership involves teachers working across subjects. Our roles (the blog authors, a university-based educational researcher and a senior leader in the school) are to design and facilitate the coaching development programme, to ensure coaching becomes operational in the school and to create meaningful opportunities for formative evaluation and coaching development. Most

recently this has been achieved through an interim review to which all current participants contributed. It is this evidence that we draw upon to suggest some of the reasons for the successes so far.

Coaching at Hermitage seems to be a 'feel good' activity, and this is not to be sniffed at. Coaching has been established in such a way that it builds on and further enhances the trust that exists between colleagues. This was highlighted by the teachers as a note-worthy characteristic. Megan Tschannen-Moran [7] makes a strong case for trust as critical for building healthy relationships and positive school climates, and suggests that between teachers this can evolve from a stance of 'empathy and inquiry'. Coaching conversations at Hermitage have been framed around this stance – participants are asked to engage in non-judgemental professional dialogue and appreciate that this may be different from many other episodes of observation and feedback. In their review the teachers stated that they were "not frightened to make mistakes" are willingly "more experimental" and work in a "problem-solving mode, with a focus on teaching and learning and trying to do what is best for the students".

In busy school environments it is easy to find reasons not to engage in something new or voluntary, so how coaching feels matters as without enjoyment resistance would develop. In their review teachers reported enjoying building relationships through coaching, getting to know people in other departments and knowing more about their work. Coaches stated that they felt good about having learned more about teaching and learning by acting as a coach and were taking this learning into their own practice. The coaching relationships produced a growing collective sense of where expertise and areas of interest

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[7] http://www.schooltransformation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/In-Conversation-11-Tschannen-Moran-ENG-Fall-2013.pdf

resided in the staff. This is reported as having spin-off benefits, with new and productive collaborations in teaching and learning emerging organically.

At even this basic level it could be said that coaching is contributing to teachers' agency. Mark Priestley[8] has written about this in his BERA blog post, reminding us that a focus on the individual capacity of teachers might overlook the significance of the 'social context for teachers' professional work'. The teachers were keen to extend this further, by actively bringing coaching participants together more often as a group to share what was being learned and developed in practice. In 2015 The Sutton Trust produced a report called 'Developing Teachers; Improving professional development for teachers'[9]. One of their conclusions was the significance of collaboration at two levels – between schools in a school-led self-improving system, and also between individual teachers engaging in professional learning activities. Our recent research into teachers' experiences of collaboration[10] reveals why collaboration might be so valuable. Collaboration for the development of their teaching practices allowed teachers and student teachers to engage in informed decision-making and to construct a shared understanding of the nature of desired learning outcomes for students and how these might be achieved in their own contexts.

As evidenced in an earlier BERA blog[11] (p4) coaching does not always live up to its promise, but so far Hermitage seem be to resolving tensions that can exist in managerial systems. In our review we considered the

extent to which the practice was supported by enablers for effective professional conversations as described by Helen Timperley[12]. She described the importance of resources, processes, knowledge, relationships and culture in enabling teachers to 'examine the effectiveness of their practice and be committed to appropriate changes for improvement'. This might best be summed up by a group in our review who stated that the vision for coaching at the school was to create a "collaborative problem-solving culture to enable all teachers and pupils to be successful".

This think piece was first published by BERA

https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/teacher-peer-coaching-a-story-of-trust-agency-and-enablers

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

One way to look at the resources of a school is to consider it's the different forms of 'capital' that it holds. Alongside buildings and finance there is social and intellectual capital, but these can either be high or low. Successful coaching could be considered to create greater social and intellectual capital.

In you school how would you judge this? If you consider these forms of capital to be growing through coaching how are you using and mobilising it to maximise its beneficial impacts? In other words what is the organisational feedforward from individual coaching?

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[8] https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/teacher-agency-what-is-it-and-why-does-it-matter
[9] http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/developing-teachers/
[10] Rachel Lofthouse & Ulrike Thomas (2015): Concerning collaboration: teachers' perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices, Professional Development in

Education,
http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=211126
[11] https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise
[12] http://www.aitsl.edu.au/professional-growth/research/professional-conversations

THINK-PIECE 3

Thinking beyond the toolkit: using video for professional learning and development

Recently I overheard an animated conversation about the functions of a power tool used for a DIY task. Talking about the job or even the tool itself was insufficient; the item was removed from its box, the attachments scrutinised and the prospect of more DIY projects discussed with enthusiasm. A power tool in more than one sense it seems; highly functional, well understood and even motivational – not a bad ambition for a learning tool. There is a popular approach of developing and delivering 'teaching toolkits' to enable teachers to change or tweak their classroom practice. While new ideas and strategies can no doubt be helpful to extending repertoires of practice, there remains an anxiety that the imports are

adopted because they are 'on trend', fail to be fully integrated, and that any impact might have a short half-life. I wonder whether the same could now be said of approaches for CPD and if so how helpful this is? Just think for a minute about the CPD 'brands' and models that are out there, the lexicon of 'train the trainers', the use of Twitter and blogs as a means to disseminate and pick up new ideas and the plethora of new digital platforms and kit that are on offer. We have an extended CPD toolkit to select from. I am a fan of tools, but I think we may need to ask ourselves what we use them for, how we understand them and how we as practitioners contribute to their development and modification. I ask myself "how do we develop a toolkit of power tools?"

Over the last decade I have (at first inadvertently and then more deliberately) built new practices and created new tools to support my own professional learning alongside that of my ITE and Masters students and others in the wider profession. This has been underpinned by processes of practitioner research, and represents an attempt to determine how professional learning with transformative purposes can be supported. One of the outcomes has been that I have refined my understanding of tools within contexts of professional and workplace learning and practices located in that workplace. I accept Dewey's [13] and Vygotsky's[14] concepts of tools forged through social and cultural influences, able to perform epistemic functions [15] and having catalytic qualities[16]. I have considered how tools can function as boundary objects supporting boundary crossing such as that between

[13] Dewey, J. (1938) *Logic, the Theory of Enquiry. The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol.12 edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

[14] Vygotsky, L. (1978) *Mind in Society – the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

[15] Knorr-Cetina, K. (2001) Objectual practice. In: Schatzi, T.R., Knorr-Cetina, K. and von Savigny, E. (Eds.) *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. Abingdon: Routledge.

[16] Baumfield, V., Hall, E., Higgins, S. & Wall K. (2009) Catalytic tools: understanding the interaction of enquiry and feedback in teachers' learning. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 32 (4), pp. 423-435.

schools and university[17], and through which learning can occur as a result of reflection and transformation, which often involves aspects of confrontation [18]. I have also considered Engeström's Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) [19], which proposes contradictions as inherent tensions in the activity system which if addressed can transform the object of the system, its rules or division of labour. I have developed the innovative use of tools as artefacts within an activity system to support this transformation.

To illustrate this I will use an example, one which (as Gok Wan would say) 'is bang on trend'. Video-recording of one's own or colleagues' teaching practice to promote reflection, professional discussion and self-evaluation may still strike fear into some teachers' souls, but with do-it-yourself iPads and Apps and sophisticated hardware and software on the market it has become relatively widespread and technologically straightforward. Gone are my early days of lending student teachers a cumbersome VHS camera and metre-high tripod in which they inserted their VHS cassette to replay at home through their TV. Although the original kit now seems antiquarian it did produce direct evidence of the value of video-recording teaching. As my student teachers analysed their own teaching experiences I started to make sense of the role of video through related artefacts (such as assignments) and primary data collection (from questionnaires and focus groups). For many student teachers

the experience seemed transformative[20]. As a practitioner researcher I was keen to extend the evidence base and interpret new findings. Therefore developing an understanding of the value of video became a mainstay of my work with teachers in develop coaching practice[21]. As the research evidence accumulated I began to more thoughtfully explore the concept of 'tools' with video as my first example.

Video-recording teaching practice for self or shared review has the characteristics of what Baumfield et al. define as a catalytic tool. Such tools have the ability to 'make a particular activity different: faster, slower, richer, more focused, more efficient, more sustained'. Video creates this effect not just conceptually but in reality, supporting a feedback loop in practice development, and the opportunity for teachers to become more metacognitive in practice. So, if video is a useful tool, what could be problematic about having it in our CPD toolkit? The having it may not be the problem, but its simple addition to a toolkit might be. Using video is not a quick fix, it can too easily be adopted, clumsily used or purloined for performance management purposes. Professional development and learning is unlikely to be best supported by browsing and randomly selecting from products, lined up on the CPD shelf (however carefully labelled, technologically glamorous and well-priced they might be).

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[17] Rachel Lofthouse & David Wright, (2012),"Teacher education lesson observation as boundary crossing", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 1 Iss: 2 pp. 89-103
http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=185048
[18] Akkerman, S.F. & Bakker, A. (2011), Boundary crossing and boundary objects, *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 81 (2), pp. 132-69
[19] Engeström, Y. (1987), *Learning by Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach to Developmental Research*, Orienta-Konsultit, Helsinki.

[20] Rachel Lofthouse, & Peter Birmingham, (2010) 'The camera in the classroom: video-recording as a tool for professional development of student teachers' Tean Journal 1 (2)
http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/TEAN/article/viewFile/59/70
[21] Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, & Carl Towler, (2010) *Improving Teacher Coaching in Schools; A Practical Guide,* CfBT Education Trust
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414_CfT_FINALWeb.pdf

Video-recording provides teachers with access to their own practice in a way previously not possible, and this has the power to re-frame a teacher's view of students, of learning and of themselves. If used to its potential it will provide insights, stimulate debate and support reviews of current practice. Video can create mechanisms for informed and collaborative experimentation and thus opportunities for practice development. The use of video can change how a teacher sees themselves, their self-efficacy and their relationships with learners. Tools, like video, have the potential to activate change over which the practitioner has control if their use is underpinned by, and supports, the development of sophisticated professional understanding. They have the potential to become power tools when practitioners don't simply adopt their use, but also understand their range, recognise their leverage and design professional learning opportunities that have the learning goal rather than the tool at the forefront of decisions.

This think-piece was first published by IPDA

http://ipda.org.uk/thinking-beyond-the-toolkit-using-video-for-professional-learning-and-development/

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

Despite the proliferation of commercial companies offering software, hardware and Apps to schools for videoing lessons many teachers remain understandably reluctant to engage with the opportunities this offers.

How might you provide colleagues with experiences of using video to enable it to start to add value to more teachers' personal professional development which is productive but has low stakes?

Video is just one 'tool' which can be used to support the coaching process. Lesson observation sheets (for example) can be viewed as a tool. Think about the difference that contrasting types of lesson observation sheet could make to the nature of the experience. Some people advocate taking no notes – especially if they are using video. Others take in a blank piece of paper – indicating to the teacher that the coach has no pre-set agenda. There may also be a good case for generating questions during the pre-lesson coaching which are then taken forward to the observation and can be responded to by both the coach and coachee during or following the lesson.

What observation practices could you experiment with if you abandoned your current observation sheet? What professional learning principles would you base the design of this on?

THINK-PIECE 4

Three women and a camera: Developing a coaching partnership that crosses professional boundaries

CO-WRITTEN WITH Bibiana Wigley and Jo Flanagan, CLARITY[22]

Picture three women; Jo, Bib and Rachel. If you saw us in a coffee shop or pub you would see us in animated conversation. We might even be old school friends. You might overhear us talking about our children and husbands or our holidays. We would probably look like we had been chatting all day as we popped in and out of shops and impersonated 'ladies who lunch'. But this impression would ignore the real reasons for our conversations, and the shared passions that have brought us together.

We three women shared a conference presentation, the very last paper of the very last session, in the most distant seminar room

of BERA 2015 in Belfast. Our paper was entitled 'Sustaining change through inter-professional coaching; developing communication-rich pedagogies' and through it we explained how and why we had come to work together and what outcomes we are now able to identify.

So – a little background. Jo and Bib are independent Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), working in Derby. Their aim is to develop an evidence based model of support that enables the workforce in nurseries and primary schools to maximise the skills of all children who experience communication difficulties. They have written about this work on the BERA blog[23]. I (Rachel) am a teacher educator and researcher at Newcastle University. My research and teaching expertise is in teacher coaching and mentoring, including the use of video. We have been working together for about two years (in part funded by a Newcastle University business development voucher) to develop a model of video-based specialist coaching for workplace learning. Jo and Bib (as SLTs) have worked with teachers and teaching assistants in a primary school (3-11 yrs) and a pre-school nursery (3-4 yrs) located in multi-cultural and multi-lingual communities in the East Midlands, UK. In these settings 85% of the children are learning English as an additional language to their home language. The coaching is designed to support the teachers' and teaching assistants' professional development to create communication-rich pedagogies, drawing on the research and practice evidence offered to them through the coaching.

The coaching approach was informed by models of teacher coaching [24] and video

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[22] http://www.claritytec.co.uk/
[23] https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-potential-of-inter-professional-learning-in-supporting-children-with-speech-language-and-communication-needs
[24] Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, & Carl Towler, (2010) *Improving Teacher Coaching in Schools; A Practical*

Guide, CfBT Education Trust
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414_CfT_FINALWeb.pdf

interaction guidance [25], and was rooted in learning which made deliberate and explicit work processes, learning activities and learning processes[26]. It made deliberate use of video to allow the speech and language therapists to engage teachers and teaching assistants in conversation about their own classroom practices. Video is proving to be a great tool for professional development[27] (p8). We developed the coaching approach through collaborative action research as our combined motivations and work drove us to improve the practice through adopting an *inquiry stance* with a 'continual process of making current arrangements problematic' and assumed 'that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is to participate in educational and social change'[28].

Co-constructive discussion

At the same time we wanted to make sense of the role of the inter-professional coaching in shaping practices in the school and its impact on professional development. We used a Theory of Change[29] approach as a structure of two interview cycles, enabling multiple voices to inform both the development and

evaluation of the intervention. This 'Mental model' of Theory of Change privileges the knowledge & experience of stakeholders (school leaders and practitioners) who have their own ideas about how things will work. This approach is outlined as a case study in the next think-piece (p14).

So what have we learned? Well at this point I hand over to those we interviewed. Amongst their comments we discovered that the coaching helped to build professional confidence,

> *"The discussion with the SLTs about my video clips was very reassuring. They found things I do well which I see as natural. They asked me questions about my practice, they focused my attention on things I had noticed and gave me advice. This worked because the video coaching came at the end of the audit and training process, so I had got to know them and felt comfortable with them. I trusted them and accepted their feedback. I feel more confident and reflective." Nursery teaching assistant*

We also found that video was significant in enhancing the coaching conversations,

> *"Although video was initially an uncomfortable experience through watching myself I noticed many of my own teaching and learning communication behaviours. I realised I needed to stop answering for children and also to give more thinking time. I questioned the concept of 'pace'. The coaching raised my awareness of the significance of the elements of the SLC training in my classroom." Primary teacher*

[25] http://www.videointeractionguidance.net/aboutvig
[26] Eraut, M. (2007) Learning from other people in the workplace, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 33 (4), pp. 403-422.
[27] http://ipda.org.uk/thinking-beyond-the-toolkit-using-video-for-professional-learning-and-development/
[28] Cochran-Smith, M., and S. Lytle. (2009). *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
[29] http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/publications/documents/theoryofchangeguide.pdf

In terms of the development of the schools as learning organisations engagement of staff in coaching helped to change the culture in the settings,

> "There has been a definite shift from individual specialist coaching to staff coaching culture. The setting is open plan and I now notice teachers and teaching assistants commenting to each other while they are working with the children, referring to commonly understood concepts which support SLC. Because they are more informed their conversations with parents about SLC are more meaningful." Nursery headteacher

It also supported strategic capacity building

> "While some impacts have been diluted by staff maternity and promotions to other schools the teachers who have been coached and remain in post are being given strategic roles in school to support NQTs or lead key stages, with an explicit intention to focus on communication-rich pedagogies with new colleagues. This is being deliberately linked to a renewed whole-school focus on literary." Primary headteacher

So, what can we conclude from this small scale development and research? There is evidence here that specialist coaching can play a significant part in creating bespoke professional training. Coaching can create a neutral, non-judgmental space in which teachers' own interactional practices can be exposed and made open to co-construction based on the relationship between pedagogic and communication knowledge and skills. The coaching approach formed a key component of an ecology for focused professional development, providing participants with common understandings, a shared language, a willingness to share ideas, and to be more

open to self-evaluation and critique. It also provided some of the 'triggers' and 'glue' which supported access to, and learning from, other CPD and the development of new leadership and support roles.

What next? Well, that depends on spreading the good news, and also on developing strategies and structures that can fund the co-operation through coaching between speech and language specialists and the teachers and teaching assistants that can learn so much by working with them. We have also published on our experience of what was in essence collaborative action research[30].

This think-piece was originally published by Newcastle University

https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/education/2015/09/25/three-women-and-a-camera/

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

In this case study video was central to the coaching process, but only very short clips were made and used. The practice was based in part on VIG, which focuses on what can be observed to be 'working' in the classroom interaction.

How often do your coaching and other post-lesson observation debriefs take this appreciative stance? What might be learned by focusing on fine details in the teaching and learning practice? How can coaching support teachers to work on these finer details?

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[30] Rachel Lofthouse, Jo Flanagan & Bibiana Wigley (2015) A new model of collaborative action research; theorising from inter-professional practice

development. *Educational Action Research* http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09650792.2015.1110038

THINK-PIECE 5

Using *theory of change* interviews to support the development and review of inter-professional coaching for communication-rich pedagogies

CO-WRITTEN WITH Bibiana Wigley and Jo Flanagan, CLARITY

Study context

Recent data produced by the Communication Trust demonstrate a 70 per cent increase in the number of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in the six years to 2012.[1] This means that many teachers are finding more children with SLCN in their classrooms at the same time as the speech and language therapy services have been reduced to prioritise children with the most complex needs, and the expected standard of attainment in early years and primary schools has been raised. A concern is that few early years practitioners or teachers receive pre- or post-qualification training about how best to support these children.

This project was developed in response to this situation. We focused on the development and impact of video-based inter-professional specialist coaching between speech and language therapists, and nursery and primary practitioners. The original settings for this work were primary and nursery schools serving multi-cultural and multi-lingual communities in the East Midlands, UK. The development of the coaching model allowed the speech and language therapists to engage teachers and teaching assistants in conversation about their own classroom practices.

Why and how we used *theory of change*

In this project we were interested in how the school leaders and practitioners of two schools conceptualised their *theory of change* in relation to developing communication-rich pedagogies in their nursery and primary settings, and what contribution inter-professional coaching made in enabling and sustaining the change. This was a small-scale research project, undertaken by Rachel Lofthouse of CfLaT, designed to support the development of new video-based coaching practices by Jo Flanagan and Bibiana Wigley, who had recently established an independent speech and language consultancy (CLARITY). The *theory of change* approach was used as the structure for two interview cycles, enabling multiple voices to inform both the development and evaluation of the intervention. Those interviewed in the first round were the head teachers of the two schools, but not the coaching participants (the teachers and the teaching assistants). These initial *theory of change* interviews were based on the questions below:

- In terms of speech and language development what is the situation you face in your setting?

- What do you believe needs to change?

- How will these changes be made? What role is CLARITY playing, and what actions will you take?

- What effect do you anticipate those actions will have?

- How will you know if change is happening?

- What will this be like for different members of your community (children, staff, parents etc)?

These interviews yielded significant evidence of the expectations of the head teachers, and the resulting interview notes were mapped as flowcharts (see below). These were based on three core themes, each considered in relation to the staff and the children in the setting:
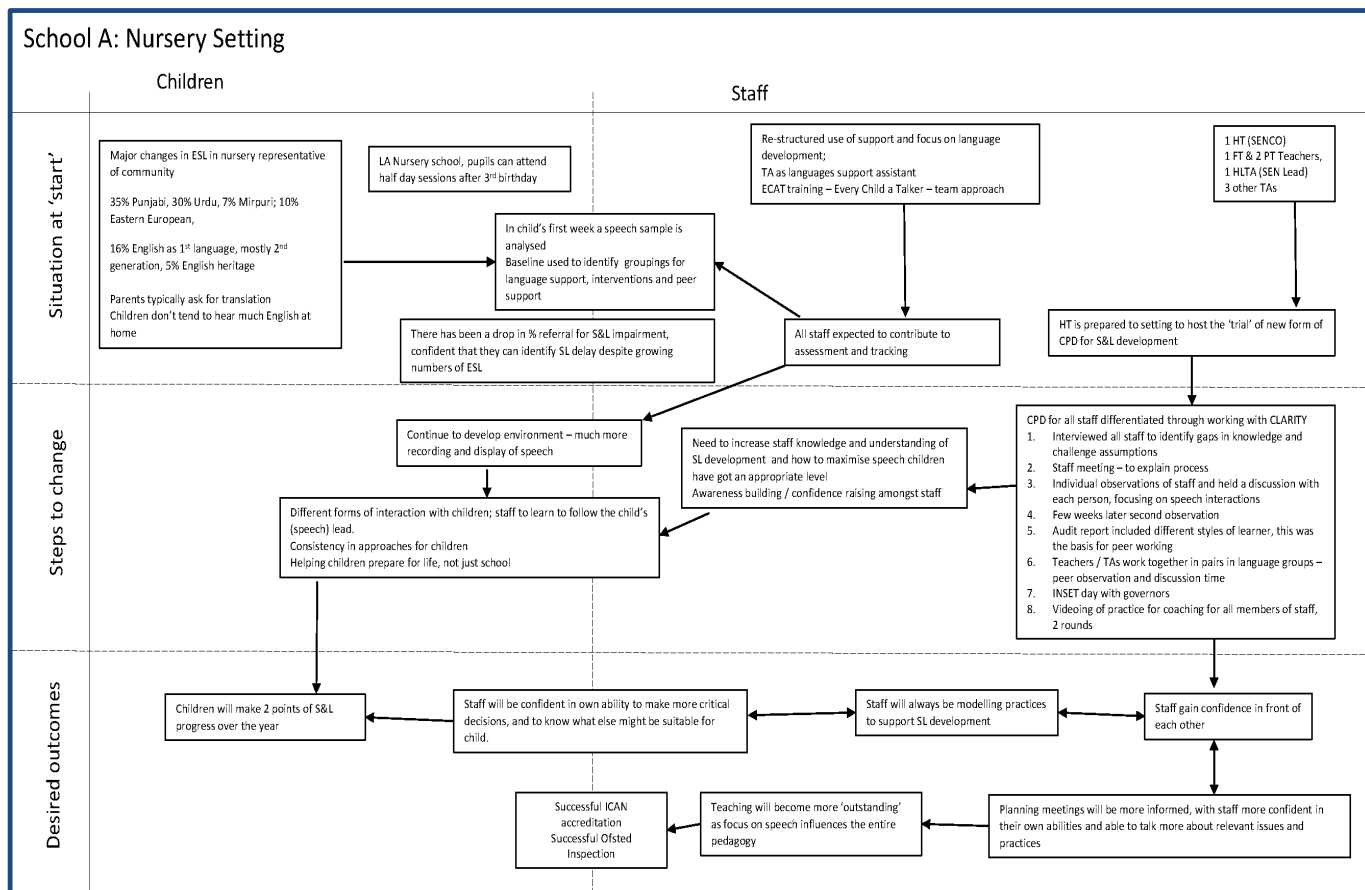
1. The starting situation: what is it like now and why; and what needs to change?

2. The steps to change and strands of action: what we are going to do about it?

3. The desired and intended outcomes.

These flowcharts were used six months later as the basis of individual interviews conducted with the same head teachers who had participated in the specialist coaching and their teachers and teaching assistants. At each interview the flowchart for that setting was shared and the interviewees' opinions gathered as they reflected on the intentions and actions. This was undertaken in relation to both the original 'theorised' leadership perspective and the actual experience of participating in the coaching.

What was the contribution of *theory of change*?

Theory of change was used as a methodological tool to support both the development and review of the inter-professional coaching approach. The coaching approach was in a development phase and all parties were aware of this. We (Jo and Bib

School A: Nursery Setting

Children | **Staff**

Situation at 'start'

Major changes in ESL in nursery representative of community

35% Punjabi, 30% Urdu, 7% Mirpuri; 10% Eastern European,

16% English as 1st language, mostly 2nd generation, 5% English heritage

Parents typically ask for translation Children don't tend to hear much English at home

LA Nursery school, pupils can attend half day sessions after 3rd birthday

In child's first week a speech sample is analysed
Baseline used to identify groupings for language support, interventions and peer support

There has been a drop in % referral for S&L impairment, confident that they can identify SL delay despite growing numbers of ESL

Re-structured use of support and focus on language development;
TA as languages support assistant
ECAT training – Every Child a Talker – team approach

All staff expected to contribute to assessment and tracking

1 HT (SENCO)
1 FT & 2 PT Teachers,
1 HLTA (SEN Lead)
3 other TAs

HT is prepared to setting to host the 'trial' of new form of CPD for S&L development

Steps to change

Continue to develop environment – much more recording and display of speech

Different forms of interaction with children; staff to learn to follow the child's (speech) lead.
Consistency in approaches for children
Helping children prepare for life, not just school

Need to increase staff knowledge and understanding of SL development and how to maximise speech children have got an appropriate level
Awareness building / confidence raising amongst staff

CPD for all staff differentiated through working with CLARITY
1. Interviewed all staff to identify gaps in knowledge and challenge assumptions
2. Staff meeting – to explain process
3. Individual observations of staff and held a discussion with each person, focusing on speech interactions
4. Few weeks later second observation
5. Audit report included different styles of learner, this was the basis for peer working
6. Teachers / TAs work together in pairs in language groups – peer observation and discussion time
7. INSET day with governors
8. Videoing of practice for coaching for all members of staff, 2 rounds

Desired outcomes

Children will make 2 points of S&L progress over the year

Staff will be confident in own ability to make more critical decisions, and to know what else might be suitable for child.

Staff will always be modelling practices to support SL development

Staff gain confidence in front of each other

Successful ICAN accreditation
Successful Ofsted Inspection

Teaching will become more 'outstanding' as focus on speech influences the entire pedagogy

Planning meetings will be more informed, with staff more confident in their own abilities and able to talk more about relevant issues and practices

of CLARITY and Rachel from CfLaT) undertook joint practice development that evolved, over time, to share the characteristics of collaborative action research.

The key role of the initial *theory of change* interviews was to create a space in which the school leaders could articulate their expectations of the coaching and its relationship to other aspects of school improvement designed to enhance children's communication and progress.

Understanding this helped us to design and position the coaching, and to review its practice. The resulting coaching approach was informed by models of teacher coaching[2] and video interaction guidance [3] rooted in professional learning that made deliberate and explicit work processes, learning activities and learning processes. [4] The return interviews allowed us to draw out the multiple voices of school leaders and coaching participants and, as such, informed the evaluation of the coaching intervention.

What was fascinating was the reaction of both the head teachers and the coaching participants at these return interviews. It was the first time that they had seen the flowcharts mapping the initial interviews. For the two head teachers, this provided a moment of consolidation. Their professional lives are crammed with so many roles and responsibilities and the diagrams cut through this to help them refocus specifically on their coaching project. They recognised the degree to which their thinking was relational and chronological, even though they both considered that their original interview responses were somewhat muddled. The *theory of change* structure had provided a visual representation of a complex situation and plan of action. For the teachers and teaching assistants, the flowcharts revealed a grander plan than they had been fully aware of. Staff at both schools had willingly agreed to participate in coaching, but admitted to going along with it as a new CPD approach rather than truly appreciating how it had been conceived as

part of a whole school strategy. The resulting interviews were expansive and informative. The interviewees frequently triggered new conversational threads as they reflected on what they could see represented on the flow diagram. They were able to determine what had come to fruition from the plan and what was more elusive. They added new arrows and notes to explain the experience from their perspective.

Analysis of these interviews indicated that inter-professional coaching can play a significant part in creating the conditions for bespoke workplace learning. Video-based coaching can create a neutral, non-judgmental space in which teachers' own interactional practices with children can be exposed and made open to co-construction, based on the relationship between pedagogic and communication knowledge and skills. Coaching formed a key component of an ecology for focused professional development, providing participants with common understandings, a shared language, and a willingness to share ideas and be more open to self-evaluation and critique. It also provided some of the 'glue' that supported access and learning from other CPD and the development of new leadership and support roles.

Reflecting on the project now, it is interesting to speculate on what difference it would have made to use the *theory of change* flowcharts earlier in the process. If the coaching participants had gained an insight into the school leaders' intentions earlier, might they have engaged any differently? If the head teachers had had the flowcharts to review independently or share with their senior leadership team or governors, might the project as a whole have had a different shape and momentum?

This think-piece was originally published by the CflaT in a publication called Theory-based Methodology: Using theories of change for development, research and evaluation (edited by Karen Laing & Liz Todd)

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/publications/documents/theoryofchangeguide.pdf

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

One of the most significant aspects of this coaching model was the chance to develop learning conversations between practitioners with a common interest but different forms of professional expertise and knowledge.

It would be interesting to take this principle and apply it more widely. Ask yourself – who might be in a position to provide a positive coaching experience to your staff by contributing new knowledge and experience in to the school?

Could you build different working relationships in the new teaching school alliances, with lead practitioners and other educational service providers based on coaching models?

What about those with expertise in supporting learners, such as educational psychologists, SENCOs or behaviour consultants – could they work with teachers in a coaching relationship as well as more directly with students?

How would you make sense of the impact of such practices? Could you develop your own Theory of Change?

THINK-PIECE 6

Opening up a discussion: Do coaches and mentors make successful educational leaders?

In October 2015, I was fortunate to be able to lead a discussion session at the first ever WomenEd *un*conference. WomenEd[31] is a grassroots movement which connects existing and aspiring leaders in education. The group exists to address the fact that even though women dominate the workforce across all sectors of education there still remain gender inequalities, particularly at senior leadership level. My session was entitled 'Do coaches and mentors make successful educational leaders?' The session was a learning conversation. I invited the participants to discuss the fact that many women take roles as mentors or coaches in schools and colleges, playing a key role in facilitating

professional development and building learning cultures, but to consider the degree to which acting as a coach or mentor might prepare us for, or dissuade us from, leadership. While this is an issue of relevance to women in education, it is not exclusively so. As Teaching Schools and School Direct extend the reach and scale of their combined roles in the 'self-improving school-led system' it seems logical that coaching and mentoring activities will expand. When working well both coaching and mentoring draw on, and build up, the cultural competency and linguistic skills of both parties. In terms of impact it is frequently reported that coaches and mentors find the role has a positive impact on their own teaching, but what about its impact on their potential and practice as leaders?

I have a history of research, teaching and school-based CPD in coaching and mentoring, as is evident by other blog posts on this site and elsewhere[32]. While they serve different purposes coaching and mentoring might both provide levers and pathways into good leadership. However, in relation to the links between coaching and mentoring of teachers (for the development of teaching practices) and educational leadership I have the following concerns;

- The objectives and practices of coaching and mentoring often get distorted by the performative culture in schools and can fail to have the positive impact that is their potential. In previous work we have explored this through CHAT (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory)[33]. As we wrote in the abstract of the paper, coaching in

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[31] www.womened.org

[32] https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise

[33] Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, (2013) "An activity theory perspective on peer coaching", International

educational settings is an alluring concept, as it carries associations with life coaching and well-being, sports coaching and achievement and improving educational attainment. Although there are examples of successful deployment in schools, there is also evidence that coaching often struggles to meet expectations. We used socio-cultural theory to explore why coaching does NOT transplant readily to schools, particularly in England, where the object of coaching activity may be in contradiction to the object of dominant activity in schools – meeting examination targets.

- Coaches and mentors have the opportunity to develop great communication skills. However, this opportunity is not always realised. Too often these activities are squeezed into very busy working weeks, given inadequate time, or are hijacked (deliberately or inadvertently) by a narrowly-defined target-based sense of professional development. Developing, practicing and sustaining excellent coaching or mentoring requires a certain language, and a willingness to look beyond the particulars of specific lessons. It requires a more open understanding of a shared process of informed scrutiny than is typically possible in a hurried conversation or one which has overtones of performance management. The communication skills being rehearsed in coaching or mentoring can become rather diminished. If they are not, and coaching or mentoring becomes more

sophisticated then the participants develop a new language for talking about teaching and learning, linking together critical incidents and whole lesson characteristics (for example), and exploring each-others' understanding using a broad interactional repertoire which allows for challenge, exploration of ideas and co-construction. Good coaches and mentors support successful formation of teacher identities that go beyond the requirements to demonstrate a checklist of competencies. Previous research illustrates these levels of development of both coaching[34] and mentoring[35]. But, even when it works at this level there may still be a problem. Educational leadership has become a very managerial process – one through which a priority is holding colleagues to account. The language of exploration and development which might be developed through coaching and mentoring does not always translate easily to accountability regimes.

- While coaches and mentors may gain real insight into the issues affecting colleagues and learners in their school (and sometimes beyond) this 'intelligence' may not then be translated in to leadership. This gap may be caused by the difficulties in resolving activities at different scales. Coaching and mentoring are typically inter-personal activities, focusing on an individual's practices, and only the most sophisticated coaching and mentoring successfully

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[34] Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, & Carl Towler, (2010) *Improving Teacher Coaching in Schools; A Practical Guide,* CfBT Education Trust http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414_CfT_FINALWeb.pdf

[35] Rachel Lofthouse, David Wright, (2012),"Teacher education lesson observation as boundary crossing", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 1 Iss: 2 pp. 89-103 http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=185048

relates this to influences of policy or society (at school level or beyond). Coaching and mentoring can generate the sort of professional knowledge which comes from the ground up or from lateral conversations. School leaders and managers often deal with top down implementation of the latest national agenda. Expertise or dilemmas from the classroom or practitioner conversations can easily be squeezed out in this context. As such, even when coaches or mentors become leaders they may not easily be able to draw on what they learned in that context.

- Good coaches and mentors can get pigeon holed (or even pigeon hole themselves) and their talents may not be developed in relation to educational leadership. This may be exacerbated by the issues raised above. We have evidence that some coaches would rather let coaching dwindle than let it fall in to the hands of senior leadership. We also know that if SLT set up coaching programmes they have to work hard to overcome their own tendencies to over-manage it in the direction of the latest school agenda.

So, my questions at this point are framed by a core concern of how we can use the experience of coaching and mentoring for better educational leadership. I believe that coaching and mentoring can provide genuine opportunities for educational development through a focus on pedagogy, learning and learners, colleagues' professional practices, school and curriculum structures, challenges and opportunities for change and improvement and staff and students' wellbeing. I am, however, concerned that the vital link to educational leadership is not secure.

This think-piece was originally published by Newcastle University

https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/education/2015/10/14/opening-up-a-discussion-do-coaches-and-mentors-make-successful-educational-leaders/

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

This might be read as a fairly negative perspective – but in writing this piece I wanted to provoke critical thinking about the possible gaps between rhetoric and reality. There are several interesting aspects to consider here. One is to do with the level of skill that coaches and mentors are enabled to develop in these roles. My experience is that start-up training accompanied by a handbook is rarely sufficient. There may be a case for setting up coaching development groups (for example) in which some coaching support and supervision, opportunities to plan, reflect and problem solve collaboratively are provided.

Could this be built into your coaching approach in your school? If so, how would you ensure appropriate confidentiality for coaching participants? Would part of the coaching development group's role be extending their thinking about how coaching is supporting the development of knowledge, attributes and skills that would translate into leadership roles?

You might also find it useful to conduct an audit, to explore whether there is a direct relationship between coaching participation and leadership development in your school, and consider how this related to talent-spotting and succession planning. The next think-piece might help.

THINK-PIECE 7

Power to the People; Can Teacher Coaching be viewed as a form of Transformational Leadership?

There is something both alluring and disquieting about theories which can be summed up as a catchy combination of letters and numbers. They create a hook, something which we can engage with, may recall more readily and perhaps therefore start to exploit in our busy professional lives. Teachers may be familiar with the '4 "R"s' of Guy Claxton's Building Learning Power[36]; Resilience, Resourcefulness, Reciprocity, Reflection, or perhaps with the '4 "C"s' underpinning the pedagogic approach of SAPERE's Philosophy for Children[37]; Caring, Collaborative, Critical, Creative. For some these are a powerful shorthand, for others they are overwrought clichés. Recently I was introduced to another one, this time on an academic leadership programme. Wait for it, yes there are four of them, and this time they are the '4 "I"s of Transformational Leadership identified as:

- Individualised consideration
- Intellectual stimulation
- Idealised influence
- Inspirational motivation

We were asked to reflect upon different models of leadership. It was suggested that rather than be 'transactional' leaders we should be 'transformational' leaders. Transactional leadership was summarised in a way that we recognised as managerial; holding people to account against criteria they were unlikely to feel ownership over and holding fast to hierarchical rules of engagement. Transformational leadership was first coined by Bass[38], building on the work of Burns. Both men were researching and reflecting on observable qualities of successful leaders in the US political and business contexts of the 1970's and 1980's. On the leadership programme it was proposed that 'transformational' was something to aspire to, and to nail it as a concept it had the magic formula of the '4 "I"s'. Clearly this was the true path. And yes – my immediate response was of sly cynicism and I wondered whose eye I might catch amongst my fellow academic leaders. Then I realised that the '4 "I"s' were begging for my attention, they were the hook and I was dangling on the line. But wait, I was again distracted, not by the alignment of the transformational leadership model with my own ambitions as a leader, but by their resonance with my work on teacher peer coaching. The '4 "I"s' seemed to offer a frame through which good teacher coaching, and the school culture that supports and is constructed by it, can be viewed. I had recently led a workshop and written a blog

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[36] http://www.buildinglearningpower.com/

[37] http://www.sapere.org.uk/Default.aspx?tabid=76

[38] http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/1048984395900217

post[39] (p17) about the relationships between coaching and leadership, perhaps what I had been missing was the concept of transformational leadership.

My work on coaching in schools (both research and practitioner engagement) always throws a spotlight on its limitations and its potential to clash with performative cultures as I illustrated in an earlier BERA blog post[40] (4). That same work, however, offers an equally powerful narrative of hopeful optimism. We know that where coaching is working well, often between peers, and frequently supported by a sustained coaching development programme it creates a different sort of collaborative professional space[41] than is often experienced by teachers in episodes of training and performance management. Uncannily the '4 I"s' of transformational leadership describe the characteristics of the best of these spaces.

Coaching can create a genuine opportunity for 'individualised consideration'. Teachers are invited to share concerns and areas of interest emerging from their own practice and a good coach will work from that platform rather than from an imposed agenda. This is critical in building and sustaining the buy-in and trust that means that teachers and coaches will work around some of their workload to give time for coaching. Coaching conversations have impact when they offer 'intellectual stimulation'. These are neither cosy chats nor dogmatic instructional transactions. Within a coaching conversation there are opportunities for both participants to experience challenge, to engage constructively with knowledge from multiple

sources and grow their capacity to make decisions appropriate to the complexities of their teaching roles. And then of course there is the crucial question of professional credibility. Few people will accept coaching from someone who they judge unlikely to be able to walk the talk, instead they want a coach who offers 'idealised influence'. Finally hardworking teachers are looking to share a sense of hopeful enthusiasm (not naïve goal sharing). Effective coaches can encourage colleagues to raise their game by building optimism and thus providing 'inspirational motivation'.

So now I am paying more attention to the '4 "I"s' as I think they offer a route to building an experience of professional solidarity, and I think they reinforce how coaching can give 'power to the people'.

This think piece was first published by BERA

https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/power-to-the-people-can-teacher-coaching-be-viewed-as-a-form-of-transactional-leadership

Over to you. Think back – think forward.

This think-piece offers a more positive spin on the link between coaching and leadership. While the 4 I's of transformational leadership may seem clichéd they do offer a mental model – dare I say a theoretical frame. Dewey said that there is nothing as practical as a good theory – why not test this out? How could you deliberately use the 4 I's to both support positive engagement in coaching cultures and to build the bridge to leadership?

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[39] https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/education/2015/10/14/opening-up-a-discussion-do-coaches-and-mentors-make-successful-educational-leaders/
[40] https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise

[41] Rachel Lofthouse & Ulrike Thomas (2015): Concerning collaboration: teachers' perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices, Professional Development in Education, http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=211126

THINK-PIECE 8

Questioning professional learning

This think-piece has reflection questions embedded rather than at the end.

In this blog (written originally for an organisation representing and supporting school leaders in the North-East of England) I chose to write about teachers' professional learning. This theme has a perpetual resonance, and carries the allure of something that school leaders can conceptualise and act upon.

Having left secondary teaching to join the PGCE team at Newcastle University 16 years ago much of the school landscape I now experience feels like unfamiliar territory. My current role as the Head of Education and my family life mean I do not reside in the stereotypical ivory tower and am never more than a few footsteps away from the realities through the school gate. In our brave new educational world there are certainly an ever expanding range of outcome measures and political ideals that are deemed to need the might of school management applied to them, and as a result there is a burgeoning of new leadership titles and roles. Despite these changes there remains a constant, perhaps

increasingly significant, leadership responsibility of supporting and enabling the professional learning of teachers. As a university-based teacher educator it would not be unusual for school-based colleagues to assume that I mean professional learning opportunities offered by university provision and qualifications. I do believe that PGCE, Masters and Doctoral courses offer unique spaces for new and established professional educators to learn about, reflect on and develop their work. Indeed I am humbled by the fact that our programmes continue to attract part-time students many of whom are full-time teachers and school leaders. However as a practitioner and researcher my interests in the last decade have often coalesced around professional learning in and for the workplace. It is that which I want to focus on. This is also timely, because one aspect of the white paper I am trying to believe will make a positive difference is the 'new standard for teachers' professional development.' My hope (perhaps naïve) is that this will offer a genuine chance for the profession to reframe the opportunities for teacher learning. My fear is that this will simply be a vehicle for more off the shelf, commercially-led, training packages.

In my recently completed PhD I developed a 'practice development-led model for individual professional learning and institutional growth'. The model itself represents an ideal, but is also a tool through which those responsible for teachers' learning can reflect on their own workplace practices.   My assertion is that a core role of any Headteacher and senior leadership team is to ensure that their school becomes a productive learning organisation in which their staff have genuine and transformative learning opportunities. I have evidence that many professional learning opportunities can be derived from cycles of practice development, such as offered through structured coaching, lesson study and action

enquiry. The difficulty can be in ensuring that this learning then sustains positive change, that improved practice is embedded (not discarded for the next teaching fad), and that it accumulates into enriched conditions for further professional learning. So in the spirit of the model here are some questions to ask yourself, your leadership teams and your staff.

Firstly think about how well teachers are supported to learn through practice development:

- Are both the vehicle for and objective of professional learning the development of educational practices?
- Does this offer a chance for teachers to deliberately focus on the details, characteristics and outcomes of practice through engagement in cycles of action such as coaching, lesson study or action enquiry?
- Is collaboration with others encouraged and capitalized on such that educational power can be derived from a genuine sense of solidarity?

Now consider whether your teachers are encouraged to develop democratic (rather than managerial) professionalism and whether their learning allows them to offer you a critical perspective (not the same as being a constant critic).

- To what extent is teachers' professional learning through and for practice development based in articulated values and critical enquiry?
- Does it allow teachers to relate their practice to their values, or does it fall into the trap of expecting them to uncritically adopt new workplace procedures?

Finally think about how productively you are helping create opportunities through linking learning which goes on at both individual and organisational levels.

- How does your teachers' learning improve the potential for institutional growth or have you fallen into the trap of assuming that this is automatic?
- How conscious is the integration of the individual's growth with the school's supporting infrastructure?
- Is the flow of professional learning, from foundations to outcomes, reciprocal and cumulative? As professional learning is generated and the conditions supporting it are enhanced more professional learning can be sustained; with the potential for wider and deeper impact on practice. Is this the case?

So my challenge to school leaders is to consider these questions in order to better gauge how successfully you are enabling desirable professional learning that impacts upon the quality of practice and thus has positive repercussions on students' learning outcomes and experiences. Think about the attributes of your school as a workplace and whether they guarantee an environment in which teachers continue to learn. And while you do that please remember that 'training' is only part of learning, and that not everything that has been learned can be 'measured', and sometimes being so busy monitoring our teachers stops us from recognising nuanced and sometimes unpredicted learning and practice development that is so wonderful we should be celebrating it.

This think-piece was originally published by SchoolsNE.

https://schoolsnortheastblog.wordpress.com/2016/05/12/guest-blog-questioning-professional-learning/

Conclusion

As stated at the start these think-pieces are something of a capsule collection. Perhaps like a capsule wardrobe the booklet contains some essential items that are unlikely to go out of fashion and can be used flexibly and in different combinations. I do hope that the think-pieces are used to support discussion, development, practice and policy. While not originally planned as a coherent whole together they do offer a sense of some of the potential of teacher coaching as well as the tensions of making it work to its best effect in the complicated contexts of schools.

I recently read an article with the term 'cruel optimism' in the title as a reference to teachers' attachment to professionalism in managerial cultures. The dissonance implied by the title is in some contrast to my experience and research which indicates that coaching can create a 'narrative of hopeful optimism'. The word 'can' is critical – we are talking here about potential not certainty. All coaching approaches in schools need to be established tentatively, with a commitment to reviewing and revising approaches as participation and engagement develops and allows for informed feedback.

Biographical details

Dr RACHEL LOFTHOUSE is the Head of Education in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University. She is also partnership development director for the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLaT). She has a specific interest in professional learning for teachers and educators, based on innovative pedagogies and curriculum design and practices for coaching and mentoring. These support her learners in building their workplace expertise while developing critical reflection and their ability to contribute to, and draw productively on, the evidence base for teaching and learning. She works with student teachers and their school-based mentors, fulltime teachers as part-time Master's students, international postgraduate students and school leaders.

http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ecls/staff/profile/rachel.lofthouse

@DrRLofthouse   Rachel.Lofthouse@ncl.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

CfLaT

Research Centre for Learning and Teaching
School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Room 2.50
King George VI Building
Queen Victoria Road
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

ENGLAND

www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat