

COACHING AND MENTORING: SAME OR DIFFERENT?

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The terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' may appear to have the same or similar meanings when used in different contexts, yet in the context of education and more specifically teaching and teacher practice, the meanings of these terms are not always clearly understood by educators. This, in turn, leads to confusion about the relevance of these practices to teachers and what the fuss is all about.

Instruction and support can be provided through mentoring or coaching practices. Both processes have the aim of improving the knowledge and skills of the mentees or 'coachees', as well as supporting them on their journey of professional development and, ultimately, their professional outcomes and career development.

So what's coaching?

Coaching provides an opportunity to problem-solve, and share and develop skills and knowledge, through the establishment of an equitable and respectful relationship between a coach and coachee. The coach assists in planning the direction of the professional development that the coachee personally identifies for himself or herself. The coach assists in the process of acquisition, the practice of the identified skills and knowledge (Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Coaching Partnership Program 2017) and, thus, the improved performance of the coachee.

Unlike peer mentoring, the coach does not necessarily have more expertise than the coachee, and the coach may actually come from a different background of experience. The coachee takes a self-directed and self-driven approach to his or her own professional development, while the coach takes a backseat in the coachee's acquisition and development of the skills and knowledge acquired. The coach's objectives are to develop the coachee, improve performance or the knowledge and skill base, as identified by the coachee, raise the self-awareness of the coachee as a result of the coaching process, and build trust with the coachee.

While this form of professional development maintains coachee independence throughout the process, it is time-consuming, and relies on each coachee being self-driven and responsible for his or her progress and decisions. (Dent, 2003) The coachee must be motivated to achieve the goal he or she has set, and the coach should provide support, without being directly involved in the process. Within an educational context, this means that a staff member, the coachee, is to discuss ideas and needs, identify a goal, develop an approach, identify steps to follow, and follow those steps. The coach regularly monitors the coachee's progress, listens to feedback about the experience and future direction, and supports the coachee on his or her individual journey.

Coaching involves more stakeholders than just the coach and coachee. Managers, Human Resources, the organisation and an external organisation are usually involved. In the case of ISQ-funded coaching programs, a nominated coach usually works with one or more coachees, and the coaching program also involves the Dean of Teaching, Learning and Innovation, the Principal and ISQ. In other contexts, various coaching models involve combinations of stakeholders, depending on the organisation's goals and structure (Standards Australia, 2011).

There are several different types of coaching, dependent on the nature of the organisation and parties involved (Standards Australia, 2011:40). The desired outcomes can also define the type of coaching; for example: skills coaching (acquisition of skills and knowledge required for the skill); performance coaching (improved performance to meet workplace measures); developmental coaching (intrapersonal development); and remedial coaching (focussing on remediating adverse or undesired attitudes and behaviours that interfere with organisational performance) (Standards Australia, 2011:40-43). Typically, the nature of coaching within an educational context aims to develop a teacher so that he or she may move to a higher level of knowledge or skill.

What about mentoring?

Mentoring is the offering of advice, information or guidance by a person (the mentor) with the expertise, experience, specific knowledge and skills, which are of use to another individual, in order to promote his or her personal and professional development. Mentors share their expert knowledge and skills relevant to the professional development of mentees, and provide emotional and social support (Harvard Business School, 2004; Standards Australia, 2011; Wilson, 2012). The professional development identified may be related to teaching practices being adopted within a department, new approaches and strategies identified, or specific professional development required within the workplace.

Mentoring involves one-on-one informal communication, often involving face-to-face communication that is ongoing over a sustained period of time. Typically, mentoring is defined as a process that involves a mentor, who is perceived as having more knowledge, wisdom and experience, interacting with a mentee, who is perceived to have less (Bozeman and Feeney, 2007). A key element of the mentoring relationship is the expertise contributed by the mentor in terms of domain-specific knowledge and experience, and of networks (Standards Australia, 2011). Unlike coaching, mentoring is a learning experience for both the mentor and mentee, in which both parties learn from each other in a trusting and private relationship (Wilson, 2012).

Mentoring involves supporting novices by actively listening and sharing experiences, problem-solving approaches and strategies, and by openly discussing problems, options and possible outcomes. It is part of the learning journey for both the mentor and mentee, and offers each individual opportunity for both personal and professional growth (Miller, 2002). Mentoring succeeds when a positive nurturing relationship based on shared values is established between the mentor and mentee, providing personal and professional support (Wilson, 2012).

So what's the difference?

Mentoring differs from coaching in the level of autonomy the coachee or mentee has regarding the acquisition of identified knowledge, in the process, and in nature of interaction between the parties involved. While in both processes the coachee or mentee identifies the professional development required, the approach involved in acquiring the knowledge or developing the skills is different, as is the nature of the emotional and social support offered. Coaching aims to find new solutions to a coachee's situation (problem solving) and is not dependent on a coach's specific knowledge base, experience or networks (Wilson, 2012). The focus in coaching is on immediate problems and learning opportunities; whereas, mentoring focusses on long-term career development (Harvard Business School, 2004:79). Transfer of knowledge between both parties often accompanies the process, yet the coach is considered a facilitator, rather than a didactic instructor or teacher. In some contexts, the coach can be seen as the coachee's 'boss'; whereas, the mentor is seldom seen as the mentee's 'boss' (Harvard Business School, 2004:79).

While coaching aims to correct weaknesses or develop skills, mentoring aims to provide opportunity for personal growth. The nature of the relationships established is quite distinct (Harvard Business School, 2004; Wilson, 2012). Mentoring is based on a personal relationship in which personal advice, based on knowledge, experience and self-reflection, is shared, and the mentor supports and guides the personal and professional growth of the mentee (Harvard Business School, 2004; Wilson, 2012). Coaching relationships and conversations focus on roles, responsibilities and expectations. This is in contrast to mentoring conversations that focus on what the mentee has been thinking about (Wilson, 2012). The 'scope of mentoring is vastly greater than coaching,' and coaching is 'a small subset of mentoring' (Harvard Business School, 2004:77).

The two processes can also be differentiated by their time scales, with mentoring often extending over more time than coaching. While some coaching relationships extend over years, they are more typically short-term and extend over weeks or months. In contrast, mentoring relationships are long-term relationships that may extend to several years (Harvard Business School, 2004; Standards Australia, 2011; Wilson, 2012).

Peer mentoring for graduate teachers

Peer mentoring refers to the mentoring of novices or inexperienced individuals by an experienced individual. Mentoring can consist of either of a natural mentoring type (Miller, 2002; Crisp, 2009:528-529) or a planned mentoring style (Miller, 2002:26), the latter being 'typically developed at a time of transition in the mentee's life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time' (Cared, 2002 as cited in Miller 2002).

Fluckiger, McGlamery and Edick (2006) report the importance of quality mentoring during the first year of teaching as the key factor that supports novice teachers staying in the profession. Based on OECD data, up to a third of teachers in developed countries, including Australia, leave the profession within five years. While this trend has been linked to two key factors, workload and the lack of recognition and reward (AITSL, 2016b), there are many other identifiable factors that contribute to this exodus from the profession. While personal factors are a contributing factor, other factors include the following: student behaviour and support for the management thereof; work place demands; school policy and curriculum changes; professional development; and insufficient time to plan, mark and collaborate with peers during working hours. The profession as a whole must acknowledge and respond to these factors if the trend is to change and more teachers are to be retained.

Most educators acknowledge the need for graduate teachers to be mentored in their first year of employment as a practising teacher. Some employment authorities recognise this need and have taken steps to formalise induction and mentoring programs to support graduate teachers. This is in line with the recommendations of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) that defines guidelines for the induction of new teachers into the profession (AITSL, 2016b). The guidelines

outline the critical factors that have been identified for the high quality and effective induction of early career teachers. Practice-focussed mentoring is one of the key elements in the guidelines. AITSL defines practice-focussed mentoring as involving regular access to mentoring that intentionally supports the growth of the early career teacher. In contrast to a significant number of research focusses that have investigated the impact of mentoring during the first year for graduate teachers, AISTL considers the most effective form of teacher induction, involving mentoring, to have been extended beyond the first year, and usually lasting for about two years. Teacher induction is also considered to be most effective 'delivered in settings with a strong learning culture and strong professional relationships' (AITSL, 2016b:4).

Schools can initiate mentoring through an induction program, using guidelines developed to support beginner teachers to move toward proficiency. AITSL has developed guidelines for the induction of graduate teachers, noting that high quality induction programs have an impact on learner outcomes (AISTL, 2016a:3), and that the most effective induction extends to about two years, focussing on maximising teacher impact on learners through practice, skill development, and inquiry into practice. (AISTL, 2016a:4). In programs that take graduate teachers from the 'beginner teacher' to the 'proficient teacher' stage, AITSL notes that programs are successful when the range of supports and strategies provided expands with time, and when practice-focussed mentoring by one or more expert teachers is provided. When referring to teacher quality, there is evidence that better appraisal coaching and feedback can improve teacher performance (AITSL 2016a:2).

Practice-focussed mentoring

Practice-focussed mentoring by one or more expert colleagues is particularly powerful in supporting the transition from the 'graduate' to 'proficient career' stage. It is highly valued by inductees, and is effective in improving their knowledge and skills. It is also a means of delivering or supporting other strategies; for example, feedback and engagement in professional networks.

A key role of the mentor is ensuring that the early career teacher understands that a commitment to improvement should be embedded in daily practice, rather than occurring only in association with formal professional learning opportunities.

Practice-focussed mentoring is defined as follows: a strong professional relationship that attends to the professional development of early career teachers through ongoing observation, conversations, evidence about, and assessment of, practices, goal-setting aligned with standards of quality teaching, and technical and emotional support (based on Achinstein & Villar's definition of mentoring, 2014, AITSL, 2016b:7)

Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring provides gains for both the mentor and mentee. Mentoring provides mentors with an opportunity to develop personally by providing opportunities to practise, improve and demonstrate emotional intelligence skills and capabilities, such as intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, as well as a positive mood and optimism (Miller 2002:38-39). Through role modelling, mentors demonstrate skills and capabilities to their mentees, thereby providing peers with experiences through positive relationships in action.

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