



A GUIDE TO SUPPORT
**COACHING
& MENTORING**
FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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- Ms Pam Erfurt President of the Northern Territory Principals' Association (2015-2016); and
- Ms Donna Feltus (NTPA Executive Officer) (2013 to 2016).

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FORWARD

This *Guide to support coaching and mentoring for school improvement* has emerged from policies and professional learning practices implemented in the Northern Territory. The production of this *Guide* has been an outcome from a project jointly undertaken by the Northern Territory Principals' Association and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Between 2014 and 2016 six experienced school principals located in remote urban and remote regional schools met twice a year to share plans, experiences and reflections about how they were using coaching and mentoring conversations to support the teachers in their schools, to improve their classroom practices. This project built on a similar initiative funded in 2013 by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). In 2015, the six experienced principals 'buddied up' with a new school principal to support these less experienced principals to also use coaching and mentoring conversations to support their school improvement strategies. As such, the coaching and mentoring occurred at the school level between the principals and teachers in their schools; and across schools, between principal colleagues.

The purpose of this program was to support a small number of Northern Territory school principals to establish a 'community of practice' that supported them to develop and document the strategies that enabled purposeful coaching and mentoring programs within their schools, that were directed towards deliberate school improvement. These principals participated in semi-structured conversations conducted twice yearly to reflect on

- in what ways their approaches were or were not working;
- the reasons why these approaches did or did not work; and
- the questions arising and the lessons learnt from their experiences, they would like to share with their colleagues.

To participate in the 'community of practice', the principals had to meet one of the following criteria. They were a graduate from one or more of the following:

- *Growth Coaching International* program; and/or
- *Cognitive CoachingSM* program; and/or
- the *Principals Professional Development Program 2013*, conducted by the Centre for School Leadership at Charles Darwin University.

The principals were also required to be implementing a planned approach to whole school improvement using coaching and/or mentoring processes.

This program was based on the view that developing a community of practice among experienced and new principals would be mutually supportive for each person, as they implemented their planned school improvements. In this way too, the community of practice became a systemic approach to improving the outcomes students were achieving.

It is intended that this *Guide* will support other principals in the Northern Territory to use coaching and mentoring for school improvement as part of their school improvement strategies.

We commend this *Guide* to you.

Kathryn Moyle

Research Director, Education Policy and Practice
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This *Guide* grew out of work undertaken in 2012 and 2013 by Maree Bredhauer (then President of the Association of Northern Territory School Leaders (ANTSEL) and I, when we were both working at the Centre for School Leadership, Northern Territory. The *Guide* is intended to support graduates from the three coaching and mentoring programs offered to school principals in the Northern Territory:

- *Growth Coaching International* program;
- *Cognitive CoachingSM* program; and
- the *Principals Professional Development Program 2013*, conducted by the Centre for School Leadership at Charles Darwin University.

This publication has been jointly prepared by the Northern Territory Principals' Association and the Australian Council *for* Educational Research (ACER), to support the use of coaching and mentoring approaches for deliberate school improvement, and to support coaching and mentoring between colleagues in leadership positions in schools.

Through the development of this community of practice, experienced school principals have been involved in coaching and mentoring conversations with both teachers and new principals. As such, this publication focuses on two broad ways in which coaching and mentoring conversations have been used in the Northern Territory:

- by principals with teachers in their schools, to support improvements in classroom practices; and
- by experienced principals with new principals, to support the new principals to undertake the various roles and responsibilities expected of school principals in the Northern Territory.

Without the participation and contributions from the Northern Territory Principals' Association and the individual school principals involved, the preparation of this publication would not have been possible.

A big thank you to all those, whose work has contributed to the development of this publication.

Kathryn Moyle

Research Director

Australian Council *for* Educational Research

March 2016

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
School improvement	9
Characteristics of effective school leaders	10
Using data for school improvement	11
Coaching and mentoring	12
Role of coaches and mentors	13
Conversations and observations	14
Principals Coaching Principals	15
Educational leaders coaching teachers	16
Educational leaders mentoring teachers	16
Strategies	17
Coaching and mentoring skills	18
My coaching learnings in two very different schools	19
Glossary	20
Endnotes	21

INTRODUCTION

International studies and research literature about the use of coaching and mentoring approaches to support the development of leaders and teachers, is extensive. Research by Olivero, Bane, and Kopelman in 1997 examined the impact on executive managers' performance of conventional training compared with coaching that focused on goal setting, collaborative problem solving, practice, feedback, supervisory involvement, evaluation of results, and public presentations. This study showed that 'one-off' types of professional development resulted in just over 22% gain in productivity and effectiveness, while coaching increased productivity and effectiveness by 88%ⁱ.

Subsequent studies such as those by Joyce and Showers (2002) also indicate that when teachers apply their learning from traditional forms of professional development to classroom practice there is minimal transference of learning. But when coaching is added, then the level of application increases substantiallyⁱⁱ. Joyce and Showers (2002) also showed that professional learning programs that led to higher achievements by students, shared common characteristics, which included:

- Teachers and school leaders focused on curriculum and pedagogies
- Goals were set for improvements in student learning
- School-based research was used to evaluate the implementation of the learning
- Both formative and summative measures of progress toward the identified goals were usedⁱⁱⁱ.

More recently in Australia, school leadership development centres in the respective states and territories have all included professional learning

about coaching and mentoring approaches, in their suite of professional learning options.

The use of coaching and mentoring strategies for deliberate school improvement involves several intersecting education theories and practices to bring about school change. These include school improvement approaches used by effective school leaders that are aimed at improving students' learning outcomes; approaches to teachers' inservice professional learning; and the use of conversations and observations in coaching and mentoring approaches.

In the Northern Territory, each school principal is responsible for the development of a *Strategic Improvement Plan* which identifies the key priorities and targets identified by the school community for development. The *Strategic Improvement Plan* is submitted to the Northern Territory Department of Education for approval every three years. Each school principal that took part in this community of practice program linked their coaching and mentoring conversations to achieving the priorities identified in their respective *Strategic Improvement Plans*.

The Department of Education has taken a system-wide approach to the improvement of student learning outcomes. Across the Northern Territory, several concurrent policies and practices have been introduced. These have included professional learning programs with a focus on supporting the development of coaching and mentoring skills of educational leaders, in order to create the conditions to systematically support, develop, and retain highly effective school leaders.

The coaching programs in which the principals in this project had participated were either GROWTH Coaching, by *Growth Coaching International*^{iv};

Principals need to spend the time on developing a school culture that can foster mentoring and coaching for school improvement. We are all familiar with strategic plans, programs and reports but we can't assume that everyone has the mindset to be open to mentoring or coaching. Nobody really teaches us that.

Developing the right school culture requires a planned approach and an

investment in time to develop trust amongst staff, open communication, putting issues 'on the table', team building, understanding perceptual positions, sharing ideas, giving and accepting feedback, discussing data, working collaboratively and supporting each other.

From experience, without these practices in place, mentoring and coaching is just given lip service. Going

'below the green line' and developing relationships is so important. This provides the structures for a school culture so that mentoring and coaching is focussed on school improvement.

Fathma Mauger, 2016
Principal, Larrakeyah Primary School



Campbell, 2016, reproduced with permission of *growth coaching international*^v.

*Cognitive Coaching*SM and/or the *Principals Professional Development Program*, offered by the Centre for School Leadership, at Charles Darwin University. Since 2011, these specific professional learning programs had been offered annually in the Northern Territory.

Alongside of the coaching and mentoring professional learning programs, the Department of Education has introduced 'Visible Learning' approaches developed by Professor John Hattie^{vi}. In the Northern Territory, the implementation of

At Rosebery Primary we have been working with a Coaching consultant to develop a sustainable coaching model across the school. This year the leadership team reflected on our coaching model from past years. This year, each leadership team member plus our two Highly Accomplished Lead Teachers (HALT) and our two Visible Learning Coaches will have a teacher approach them who wishes to be coached. Planning a coaching conversation will take place where a mind map is developed. We use a coaching plan to work through the steps and develop a bit of a timeline as to when the coaching will begin and what is expected of both the coach and coachee. This has proven to be a very workable model with most teaching staff understanding clearly that the purpose of coaching is to improve practice and is a very supportive process. With proper coach training, staff are confident with this model and we will continue with this whilst it is working for us.

Gail Smith, 2016
Principal, Rosebery Primary School

'Visible Learning' aims to improve the literacy and numeracy of students by building the capacity of leaders and teachers to use effective practices that result in measurable gains in students' achievements^{vii}. The approaches to leadership promoted through 'Visible Learning' include an emphasis on classroom 'walk throughs' to promote conversations about students' achievements.

The logic model for improvement through 'Visible Learning' is:

- Build knowledge
- Challenge beliefs
- Strengthen classroom practice
- Enhance student learning
- Improve student achievement^{viii}

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Improving student achievement through school and system reform is a priority for governments around the world. Over the past decade however, there have been some differences in the focus of countries' respective approaches to school improvement^{ix}.

Reform efforts in some countries have focused on building the capacity of school leaders and teachers to enable them to provide high quality teaching and learning that leads to improved student learning outcomes; and to ensure that excellent teaching and leadership practices are distributed across the school system^x.

In other countries, the focus has been on using systems of accountability and incentives to drive school improvement^{xi}. While these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, studies of what school leaders do to achieve whole-school improvement show a high degree of consistency in the priorities they set^{xii}.

These priorities include:

- developing an explicit school improvement plan to address students' learning requirements;
- systematically monitoring progress towards achieving the plan;
- establishing and sustaining a culture of high expectations with support;
- matching the use of school resources to meet the priorities outlined in the school improvement plan;
- supporting teachers to work as a team to improve pedagogies;
- establishing a coherent, sequenced, whole-school curriculum;
- implementing effective pedagogical practices;
- sustaining a focus on addressing individual learning requirements; and
- using local community resources^{xiii}.

A coherent, sequenced, whole school curriculum means that there are connections between what is taught at each year level and in each discipline across all year levels. It can include that the whole school teaches from the same programs, or a curriculum 'map' which indicates at what level certain topics are taught.

Implementing whole school reform requires the school principal provides leadership to the school community, to ensure shared understandings, involvement and commitment to the directions being undertaken at the school.

The next section briefly discusses the characteristics common in effective school principals.

Whole school reform must first and foremost be built on collaborative trust. The development of that trust can be nourished through professional learning communities, alongside, or from there on, coaching is an ideal tool for implementing and maintaining whole school reform. Our 3 year Strategic Improvement Plan provides the perfect opportunity to use coaching for change.

Shona Henderson, 2016
Principal, Bees Creek
Primary School

Our School Improvement Plan identifies targets for improvements in students' literacy. We have used coaching conversations to support teachers to identify incremental steps to explicit teaching strategies.

Sue Beynon, 2016
Nhulunbuy Primary School

To bring about whole school reform requires involving all stakeholders in the school vision, and providing specific tools to implement and maintain it.

Shona Henderson, 2016
Principal, Bees Creek
Primary School

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS

Principal effectiveness is fundamental to achieving high-performing schools^{xiv}. Principals are more than simply supervisors. They are required to build relationships so that they can:

- lead the redesign of their schools;
- be instructional leaders;
- provide effective in-school professional development;
- rethink goals, priorities, finances, curriculum and pedagogies; and
- engage in regular evaluation and school improvement processes^{xv}.

These relationships have to be built on trust.

In the Northern Territory, school principals work within a system, where effective school principals also contribute to whole system improvement. International studies highlight characteristics and conditions that foster highly effective school principals. These characteristics include that they establish the conditions to support personal, systemic and organisational development^{xvi}.

Research also suggests that effective school principals are visionary and can communicate their vision of a high performing school to their communities and external policy-makers. They

- build relationships built upon trust and respect for every individual within the community;
- provide educational leadership and adapt their style of leadership according to the circumstances at hand, and the school context;
- create a strong culture for learning and achievement;
- support teachers to perform well;
- focus their professional learning approaches toward school improvement;
- ensure that data management systems are in place and are used to inform school improvement;
- create the conditions for the conduct of school-based research that is then used to inform practice;

I work to build trust, so that as a school community, we can co-construct an improvement plan that focuses on the following areas: curriculum and pedagogical leadership; student achievement; professional learning; shared leadership; the quality of the teaching and learning; and community and family engagement.

Liz Veel, 2016
Sanderson Middle School

Establishing and maintaining a high trust culture in extraordinarily complex environments means navigating within highly politicised spaces. It involves giving a voice to the marginalised.

Sabina Smith, 2016
Principal, Nhulunbuy High School

At Ross Park Primary, we have created a 'data wall' in the staff room so our data can be updated and shared easily among our staff.

Karen Blanchfield, 2016
Principal, Ross Park Primary School

In some schools in the Northern Territory coaching and mentoring are used to build shared leadership within the school. Not in the 'distributed leadership' sense, but to support formal co-principal models.

Sabina Smith, 2016
Principal, Nhulunbuy High School

- analyse student performance data; and
- take actions based upon their findings^{xvii}.

Together these strategies are seen to make a difference to the quality of students' experiences at school^{xviii}.

Effective school leaders who use coaching and mentoring strategies to develop their teachers, do so through the creation, monitoring, and maintenance of stimulating, reflective and cooperative school environments that are deliberately designed to enhance ongoing intellectual growth^{xix}. Effective school leaders use coaching and mentoring strategies to engage their teachers' curiosity and intellect by employing tools and strategies which enhance teachers' perceptions of pedagogies, and expand their frames of reference.

USING DATA FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

To determine whether students learning outcomes are improving, requires the collection and analysis of student assessments at the beginning of the school improvement cycle, in order to establish an agreed base from which to measure future outcomes. School principals can work with their teachers and other principals to interpret whole school, student assessment data. Based on this analysis, subsequent targets can be identified.

Approaches to the use of data

At Nhulunbuy Primary School, the school leaders and coaches work one-on-one with teachers to triangulate the student data to inform the next steps in teaching.

At Gray Primary School, an Oracle Xpert is being used for handling the student data. SAMS is used to store and analyse student attendance data. These data are used as the basis for conversations about initiatives to increase student attendance and participation.

Larrakeyah Primary has a clear assessment plan so that teachers are aware of what assessment/ testing is required and when. Data is entered into the Grade Expert program and this data forms the basis of data coaching conversations with the Assistant Principal and Principal. Data from classroom walk throughs and lesson observations is also kept and discussed in terms of teacher feedback.

BRINGING OUR DATA TO LIFE: ROSS PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

After all members of the leadership team attended a workshop with Lyn Sharrett (Putting Faces on Data), we decided to bring our school's collected data to life by setting up a display board in a semi public space, the staffroom, and placing every child's photo on the board according to their reading level. This was met with a level of resistance, with some staff querying whether the photos were necessary or desirable. We even had a parent comment that they could see the photos when they walked past the staffroom and maybe this wasn't appropriate. We reversed the display board so that it faced into the room and delineated the corner of the room so that it was more obviously a place that only staff should access (we share our staffroom with a weekly community group).

During the second year of the data wall, we agreed on a coaching model whereby each teacher was allocated a time to meet with the senior teacher during the second half of

the year and to physically move the photo of each child in their class, according to their progress. Where there was no movement required, a tag was added to the photo with an explanation of the issue and the intervention in place.

This coaching model brought about a significant change in attitude. Talking about the child's progress, their teaching practice and plans for where to next, handed the ownership of the data wall over to each teacher. The photos took on new meaning and this became more evident when in the new school year, teachers from the previous year were curious to see the progress of former students. The photos made the data real and much more accessible.

The role of the coach can't be overlooked in bringing our data to life.

Karen Blanchfield, 2016
Principal, Ross Park Primary School

COACHING AND MENTORING

Coaches and mentors believe that people have the inner resources to achieve improvements in their practices through coaching and/or mentoring processes. Coaching and mentoring approaches in education aim to build the knowledge and skills of teachers and educational leaders.

These approaches share the following common processes:

1. Establishment of the role for the coach or mentor and of the coachee and mentee;
2. Preparation of plans that include:
 - i. Identification of the instructional issue(s) to be addressed;
 - ii. Selection of the instructional strategies to address the issues identified;
 - iii. Implementation of the chosen instructional plans;
 - iv. Assessment of students' learning;
3. Reflection on whether the plans generated improvements in students' outcomes^{xx}.

Coaching

'Coaching' refers to the nature of the processes and the type of communication used to help another person realise his or her personal or professional goals.

The person being coached develops his or her own solutions through the processes used.

A coach fosters increased self-awareness through conversations aimed at self-directed learning.

Mentoring

'Mentoring' refers to relationships where more experienced individuals (eg school principals), share their skills and knowledge with other, less experienced practitioners^{xxi}. There are formal and informal structures that support mentoring.

Formal structures include performance observations and feedback, policies concerning teachers' probation and teachers' registration. Informal approaches include the development of learning communities, professional learning and informal peer observations and appraisals.

A mentor provides direction, guidance, education, influence and support to others who are less experienced, with the aim of supporting the mentee's development.

In Shanghai and Singapore as teachers progress through their careers, they must take increasing responsibility to serve as mentors and trainers of other teachers. Some mentors provide subject-specific guidance, while others provide support about more general pedagogical development.

Mentors observe the classroom teaching of their mentees on a regular basis, and vice versa: the mentees observe their mentors' classes, so they can learn and work on identified aspects of their teaching^{xxii}. This approach is also used as a way of distributing excellent teaching and learning across the system.

ROLE OF COACHES AND MENTORS

The role of both coaches and mentors is to ask the right questions, to promote greater self-awareness and foster more informed decision making, so that the participants can each learn something. It is not the role of mentors and coaches to try to solve problems for the coachee or mentee, but rather it is to ask probing questions, so that together the best solutions can be found. The processes of mentoring and coaching tend to evolve over time, as the relationships develop strength. Coaching for school improvement can involve coaching between peers such as principal-to-principal coaching; and coaching and mentoring of teachers by school principals and other educational leaders.

Principal to Principal Coaching

Like in any new job, it takes time and experience for new school principals to feel comfortable in their role. It is easy for a new principal to focus on the immediate demands of the role, without asking what differences these demands will make to students' learning. By working with a coach, a new principal can gain insights into what works and what does not, while modeling the ongoing learning principles they expect from their teachers and students.

Coaching and mentoring teachers

At the outset of the coaching or mentoring relationship, the educational leader has to

establish a shared understanding with the teacher or colleague about their respective roles, which may include the following:

- To facilitate an understanding of the purposes of the relationship;
- To explore the motivations, skills, thought processes to be used;
- To discuss the processes of observation, listening, and asking questions;
- To support goal setting and assessment;
- To support solutions-oriented approaches to teaching, learning and leadership;
- To support the development of a commitment to action;
- To ensure a planned approach to the improvement of personal skills and abilities; and
- To contribute to a whole school approach to improvement.

This method of coaching of teachers takes a differentiated approach, as those involved are making choices based on their own readiness, interest, or learning styles; coupled with the readiness, interest and learning styles of their students. The teachers and the students both move at their own pace toward self-sufficiency with their new learning^{xxiii}.

As a beginning Principal, having the opportunity to be mentored by an experienced Principal has provided me with the provision of ongoing feedback and support. This has enabled sustained practice, reflection and dialogue, that in turn has assisted me to foster acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

Individuals need feedback and comparative information to help them assess and enhance their effectiveness.

My coach provided support and guidance to implement and drive my

explicit improvement agenda within my own school setting.

Aspects that are vital to the process:

- *Building rapport and trust*
- *Networking with a Principal outside my region*
- *The purpose of collaboration is explicit*
- *Structures are in place to facilitate the collaboration*

Rebekah Sadowski, 2016
Principal, Gray Primary School

By principals and teachers working collaboratively, across schools, it is possible to build the professional, social and cultural capital required to bring about system reform.

Robyn Thorpe, 2016
Principal, Batchelor Area School

CONVERSATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The use of coaching and mentoring approaches for deliberate school improvement involve both conversations and classroom observations. These approaches provide opportunities for in-school professional learning and support classroom walk throughs, by focusing on a specific theme or topic.

Conversations for school improvement comprise three basic parts:

1. a meeting to discuss the planned improvements being sought in the classroom;
2. a classroom observation that is aimed at addressing the nominated improvement; and
3. a post-observation meeting to discuss the reactions to the classroom observation, and whether the teaching achieved the planned, nominated improvement.

This process is then repeated regularly, to support the achievement of nominated improvements.

1. Pre-observation meeting

The purpose of the pre-observation meeting is to jointly identify what specific focus for improvements should be evident in the classroom, in order to achieve the improvements being sought. The conversation would typically focus upon the type of specific lesson being planned and the aspects the teacher would like the observer to focus upon. The types of topics and questions that are discussed in the pre-observation meeting could include the following.

Topics:

Nature of observation.
Visible learning.

Questions:

What in particular would you like me to observe?
What 'strand' would you like the observation focused on?
Eg the types of questioning you are using?

Classroom walk throughs can provide a powerful source of observational and conversational data to inform a range of coaching and mentoring conversations that improve learning for students. The coaching and mentoring conversations that occur as data is discussed in conversation after walk throughs can be developed powerfully as trust and rapport grow between the coach and the coaches and the mentor and mentee.

Post walk through conversations are a collaborative and reflective space where professional growth and learning are encouraged. Non judgemental clarifying and confirming coaching questions encourage deeper thinking about lessons, curriculum and teaching strategies.

A clear picture of the processes involved in the walk through is required. Professional learning for all teachers and school leaders, prior to beginning an observational cycle has to be undertaken.

The walk throughs are successful when they are planned between coach and coaches and are iterative.

Over time, classroom walk throughs can provide a strong platform for developing a shared language in a school, and by focusing conversations on what is working, can easily build a teacher's confidence and capacity.

Liz Veel, 2016

Principal, Sanderson Middle School

2. Classroom observation

Classroom observations are intended to provide direct feedback on the specific pedagogies used by teachers in situ. The types of topics and indicators an observer might use are outlined below.

Topics:

Visible learning, explicit teaching.

Questions:

Can students answer the three Visible Learning questions: ie What are you learning?
How do you know if you have been successful?
What are your next steps?

3. Post-observation meeting

The purpose of the post-observation meeting is to debrief with the teacher about the strengths and points for growth required to achieve the improvements being sought. The assumption sitting behind this approach is that by connecting the feedback arising from the planned classroom observations with a post-observation conversation, will achieve changes in pedagogies, linked to school improvement plans. The types of topics and questions that are discussed in the pre-observation meeting could include the following.

Questions:

How do you think the lesson went?
What were you happy with?
What do you think has to be worked on?
Is there anything you would like to do differently, next time?
How was your engagement with the students?
What actions are you going to take now?
When would you like me to observe your teaching, again?



PRINCIPALS COACHING PRINCIPALS

One of the valuable outcomes from new principals being coached by experienced principals is that both people learn from the relationship and discussions. Since coaching requires a high degree of trust to exist between the coach and the coachee, it is important in an education system, that the allocation of new principals with experienced principals, occurs voluntarily. To foster this approach, the new principal could be provided with several names, from which he or she could choose to approach.

Being part of coaching conversations with an experienced principal has allowed me to clarify my thoughts and implement deliberate school improvement practices. When thinking reflectively, I find that I regurgitate ideas and thoughts. However, when voicing issues and ideas through coaching conversations, I find that I am much clearer in what strategic approaches I am taking, and what steps I plan to take.

Robyn Thorpe, 2016
Principal, Batchelor Area School

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS COACHING TEACHERS

Coaching involves the educational leader and the teacher working together to collaboratively look at classroom approaches, inter-personal relationships, or organisational and administrative issues: all of which contribute to the achievement of the whole school improvement plan, and improvements in students' learning.

Coaching is not based on evaluating and judging teaching performance. Systems for accountability should be handled separately to coaching approaches for improvements in classroom practices.

These processes should have a positive impact on any teacher, irrespective of how long they have been a teacher.

For many schools in the Northern Territory, using Russell Bishop's Relationship-based learning framework is helpful. Professor Bishop has undertaken research in New Zealand, in which he identifies how important it is for Maori children to build strong relationships with their teachers. His research is aligned with the directions being taken with 'Visible Learning' and is helpful for addressing cultural issues.

Sabina Smith, 2016
Principal, Nhulunbuy High School

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS MENTORING TEACHERS

Mentoring by an educational leader is intended to support the development of all teachers. The educational leader acts as a support, and guides the teacher through negotiated or identified issues. Both the educational leader and the teacher work together to achieve improvements in classroom practices, through conversations and observations.

Asking good questions underpins good coaching and mentoring conversations. Good questions are open-ended, and allow for discursive responses rather than 'yes' or 'no'. Good questions use the words: 'how', 'why', 'what', 'in what ways'.

STRATEGIES

Strategies that support the implementation of coaching and mentoring conversations coupled with classroom observations have the following characteristics.

The conversations and observations are

- specific about the nature of the improvements to be sought in classroom practices (checklists may assist);
- documented to ensure shared understandings;
- planned as a whole process, which means putting in the dates for all three events into diaries;
- arranged so that the post-observation conversation is held very soon after the observation, and no more than 36 hours after the observation;
- regularly repeated throughout the year; and
- valued so that the schedule is honoured.

The Visible Learning approaches debunk the use of observing teachers, but rather asks that teachers and principals focus on the students, which is quite a change but is really effective. The use of walk throughs helps to drive coaching conversations within schools.

Karen Blanchfield, 2016
Principal, Ross Park Primary School

The Visible Learning coalition team, and the use of impact coaches has driven improvements within the school. Walk throughs, observations and mentoring conversations have meant increased accountability, with all staff on board.

Rebekah Sadowski, 2016
Principal, Gray Primary School

Larrakeyah Primary is continuing to develop a whole school approach to improving teaching practices. The following principles inform the practices:

- Create an inclusive work environment;
- Foster high levels of communication;
- Actively use coaching and mentoring conversations for school improvement.

Practices

At Larrakeyah Primary we have now

- Developed a culture where teachers are open to feedback

- Established internal monitoring practices
- Established lesson observations by the Principal and Assistant Principal each term.

Feedback is provided to teachers in regards to

- Using explicit teaching
- Having high expectations
- Being engaged in the students' learning and
- Using visible learning techniques.

Verbal and written feedback to teachers is used as a basis for mentoring conversations.

Senior staff use 'walk throughs' to monitor behaviour management and student engagement strategies with Visible Learning.

To support school improvement

- Visible Learning Impact Coaches mentor and coach a small team of teachers
- Teachers have data coaching conversations with the Principal and Assistant Principal in Terms 1-3, to drill down into the data about students' performance and progress.
- The Assessment Capable Writers Project supports mentoring and coaching for targeted individual teachers.

Fathma Mauger, 2016
Principal, Larrakeyah Primary School

COACHING AND MENTORING

Once a coaching or mentoring relationship has been agreed, then both parties in the relationship will have to hone their

1. conversation skills
2. active listening skills
3. nonverbal language recognition skills
4. constructive feedback skills
5. relationship skills.

1. Conversation skills

Conversations in coaching and mentoring relationships are linked to the ability to ask questions; particularly open ended questions, that avoid simple 'yes' or 'no' responses. The language is supportive rather than judgemental.

In mentoring relationships, the teacher may seek advice and reassurance. While coaching conversations require the listener to withhold descriptions of their own experiences, these may be appropriate in mentoring conversations.

2. Listening skills

Listening is fundamental to coaching and mentoring conversations. Active listening means hearing and understanding what is being conveyed so that the teacher is guided into reflective thought about his or her own classroom practices.

3. Nonverbal language recognition skills

Attention to non-verbal language assists coaches and mentors to understand what it is, about which teachers are seeking support. Coaches and mentors should consider things like the seating arrangements made for the conversations, and observe and monitor the teacher's degree of comfort or discomfort in the discussion.

4. Constructive feedback skills

Coaching and mentoring conversations are premised on the provision of constructive feedback following observations of classroom practices.

Approaches to the provision of constructive feedback include:

- the use of descriptive, specific information that is focused on the agreed purposes of the observation;
- a focus on observable actions (or lack of actions) that do not include accusations;
- the avoidance of generalisations to other contexts or circumstances;
- the provision of timely feedback that occurs when the person receiving the feedback is open to it being provided; and
- the use of paraphrasing to clarify what the teacher intended to communicate.

5. Relationship skills

Coaching and mentoring relationships have to be built on trust. Educational leaders introducing coaching and mentoring approaches into schools for the first time, will have to build a culture of trust and peer review, before it will be possible to use coaching and mentoring conversations for deliberate school improvement. It takes time to build a culture of trust that enables coaching and mentoring conversations to be meaningful. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to build a culture of trust across a whole system of school communities and education offices.

Maintaining skills

Coaches and mentors have to maintain their skills to be effective. This can involve undertaking targeted professional learning, modelling coaching and mentoring processes, and keeping the conversations going within the school.

MY COACHING LEARNINGS IN TWO VERY DIFFERENT SCHOOLS

In my first school it took our leadership team two years to set up a successful coaching culture across the school. The leadership team were the coaches of the teachers and in turn we were being coached by external coaches. The coaching conversations with teachers were about identifying pedagogical practices that led to improvement in student learning goals.

In my second school, there is an Impact Coach that works with all teachers to improve their teaching in order to improve the student academic results. I have facilitated some coaching with the leadership team around leadership practices.

My learnings in these two very different settings are as follows:

- *My job as a coach is to facilitate self-directed people to find the solutions within themselves in order to achieve high performance both as independent people and as members of a learning community*
- *This facilitation is based on focused conversations around pedagogy, data, student growth, skills and knowledge*
- *Coaching is about finding out what the person wants from the session, and what they might need to walk away with in order that their time was well-used*
- *Coaching is the on-going process of shaping and developing people through training, observation, feedback and follow up – in real time and on the job*
- *Coaching requires trusting relationships and time – “take the staff with you and don’t rush matters”*

- *Build a whole school culture around coaching so that it becomes embedded within the school*
- *Ensure that coaches have training in coaching*
- *The coaches within the school also need to be coached, including the Principal so that the expectation is that everyone is on a coaching journey.*

Sue Beynon, 2016
Principal, Nhulunbuy Primary School

GLOSSARY

Community of Practice	A 'community of practice' refers to a group of people who voluntarily take part in processes of collective learning about a shared issue they wish to discuss or solve.
Organisational development	Organisational development refers to the processes used at the whole of organisation level to make changes and improve systems, people and processes that effects the performance of the organisation.
Strategic Improvement Plan	The Strategic Improvement Plan in the Northern Territory is prepared every three years to identify key result areas and targets for improvement. It is accompanied by an Operational Plan.
Walk through	Classroom walk throughs are brief, focused observations of teachers and students, that provide data which is used in follow up conversations related to teaching and learning, and classroom practices. It is also intended to enable the school principal to be more visible to the school community.
Whole School Improvement	This concept refers to treating the school as the unit of change for improvement. 'Whole school' change as an education reform refers to improvements in leadership and management strategies; professional learning; curriculum and pedagogical development; monitoring and evaluation; target setting in school improvement plans; and teacher appraisal processes. The purpose of whole school improvement is to undertake the development in the culture and organisation of schools as a complete whole, in order to improve performance of students.
Whole school reform	This phrase tends to be used interchangeably with whole school improvement. Whole school reform refers to coordinated improvement strategies that are undertaken across the whole school, with a view to seeing improvements in students' achievements.

ENDNOTES

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