FIVE WAYS TO MANAGE CHANGE

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In Quebec's colleges, the individuals at the centre of teaching, curricular, or administrative transformations are forced to question their practices in the face of any new contextual reality. These changes obviously entail, not only innovation and new ways of thinking, but also resistance and compromise on the part of the professionals in charge of their implementation. The college community represents a work-organization context in which educators enjoy conisderable professional autonomy; the process involved in the adoption of new practices obviously depends on which aspects of change they employ. According to Dahan (2011), two main conditions are necessary for change: teachers will embrace new practices if (i) they are able to maintain autonomy of judgment and (ii) feel there is a certain congruency between their professional identity and the practices in question. Given the current momentum to promote change, how can this fact be taken into account?

This article discusses action research conducted in a rural-college setting, involving a group of teachers who were grappling with a new reality: distance education.[1] To help these individuals master new instructional strategies more suited to this situation and student needs, the researchers had them participate in a professional-cooperation group that provided individualized support. The goal of this study was, in addition to promoting the adoption of new teaching practices by participants, to describe the change-management process implemented and to determine which methods were most effective (LaBillois and St-Germain 2014).

First, we summarize the research context, then explore in greater detail our findings (in the shape of five recommendations) on how to ensure the success of change management. Although this particular project was aimed at teachers, many components of the process could be apply to any change-management situation, whether it affects students, colleagues, professionals, the administration, or other parties. Study outcomes make it possible to make any process involving change management and the mastery of innovative practices more efficient, and should help stakeholders in higher education to enhance the quality of their instructional techniques.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

For the past ten-odd years, the CÉGEP de la Gaspésie et des Îles has been grappling with major challenges that have compromised its ability to carry out its mission. Against a backdrop of alaming demographic declines and a huge geographic area to cover, continuing to offer some of its technical programs has become difficult. In order to manage this situation, the CÉGEP has implemented innovative solutions, in particular distance education. The preferred formula is that of the telecourse, in which instructors at the Gaspé campus teach students on site as well as at a different location (one of the CÉGEP's other campuses).[2] This means teachers have to adjust their strategies in order to actively involve their distance students. While telecourses have proven extremely promising as concerns the suvival of certain programs, they also have their own challenges. Although the educators we coached adjusted easily to the technology, a number of issues rapidly made their appearance, resulting in a pressing need for professional guidance. How can teachers best be assisted? What form should such coaching take?

COACHING IN SUPPORT OF CHANGE

Instituting changes in postsecondary education is never an easy task, as it involves challenging our knowledge, beliefs, and theories (Bédard and Béchard 2009). Effective deliberations are therefore a must, and, as related to our research, the coaching process would benefit from their inclusion in the process.

"Professional development" often leaves educators alone with proposed solutions that are not always clearly transasferable to their current circumstances and do not always provide all the strategic tools they need. To help them reflect on and master effective distance-education practices, we felt that establishing a group of teachers and giving them personalized coaching was the best way to go. A number of studies conducted in high schools (Lafortune 2008) and a CÉGEP on coaching in a paradigm-shift context (St-Germain 2008) show

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[1] The study, which was funded by PAREA, was carried out between 2012 and 2014. The complete report is available at [cdc.qc.ca/parea/788732-labillois-st-germain-accompagnement-enseignants-collegial-innovation-pedagogique-gaspesie-outaouais-PAREA-2014.pdf]. [TR: In French only.]

[2] The Chandler or Maria hospital as well as the Carleton-sur-Mer or Îles-de-la-Madeleine campus.
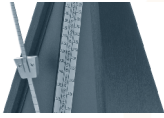
that such coaching activities foster productive discussions in which doubts are aired and knowledge is built. Coaching allows us to guide, accompany, develop support measures, and help educators find their way (Boutinet 2007). The creation of a working group can provide an opportunity to eliminate the resistance created by change.

St-Arnaud (1999) stipulates that the goal of coaching is to provide participants with a chance to develop new, useful resources that will help them establish and reach an objective of change, and subsequently use what they have learned to make other modifications. Accordingly, any coaching process is based on resource development by coachees, and aimed at making them independent. However, while the literature discusses certain coaching fundamentals and strategies (Arpin and Capra 2007; L'Hostie and Boucher 2004; Lafortune and Deaudelin 2001; Lafortune 2008; Pratte 2003; St-Germain 2008), little information is available on how these can be adapted to the context of postsecondary education and made more efficient and flexible.

The working group was composed of the two researchers (educational advisors) and eight teachers of curriculum-specific Nursing courses (care, biology, chemistry). The coaching strategies used took into account participants' professional autonomy throughout the two-year project.

QUALITATIVE-DATA COLLECTION

Our study used a number of different methods to collect data, making it possible to triangulate results. Those methods included, in particular:

- a logbook for teachers;
- a logbook for researchers;
- audio recordings of the individual feedback provided by researchers after a classroom observation of each teacher;
- audio recordings of group meetings, meetings between the two researchers, and semi-structured interviews, in order to anonymously collate data on the following aspects:
  - teachers' perceptions of their mastery and maintenance of new distance-education practices; and
  - teachers' opinions on the coaching received (strengths and weaknesses).

Group meetings, whether online or on site, were held every three weeks after two intensive six-hour meetings at the beginning of the session to launch the action research. Meetings in the form of individual semi-structured interviews with all teachers took place at the end of the coaching period. A

content analysis of the qualitative data was conducted during the study in order to allow for self-regulation during the action portion of the research and to enable us to properly adjust to coachees' actual needs.

◗ FIVE WAYS TO OPTIMIZE THE COACHING PROCESS

Upon completion of the study, the spinoffs of coaching on the practices and professional lives of the teaching team were undeniable. Participants enhanced their practices by using instructional strategies centred on distance education, and were able to overcome the problems they experienced. Our research also helped us identify aspects that promote change and make observations consistent with the establishment of an effective, flexible coaching process. The following aspects were implemented during the study and produced several positive effects.


POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE COACHING PROCESS

1. Establishes a "side-by-side" relationship.
2. Focuses on teachers' views via three critical moments of the collaborative process (where teachers stood, agreement on the goal to be reached, and understanding of how to proceed).
3. Targets teachers' *sweet spot*.
4. Recognizes teacher's professional skills.
5. Creates and maintains a professional-development zone.

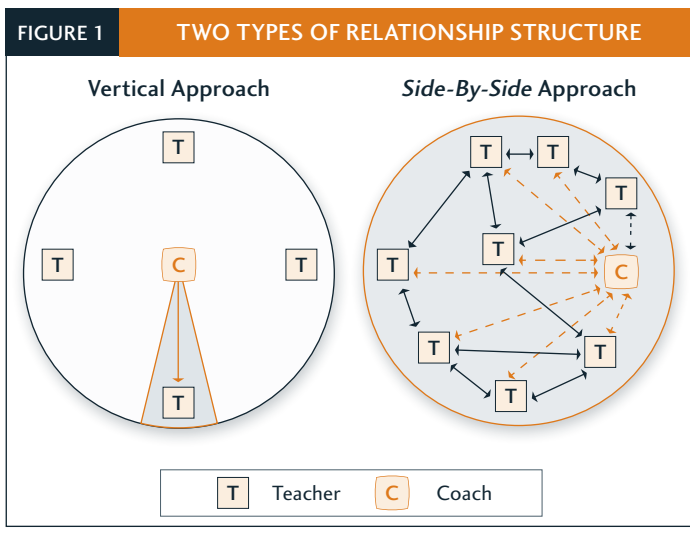
| 1 | ESTABLISHES A *SIDE-BY-SIDE* RELATIONSHIP. |

We had two options for structuring the coaching relationship: directive authority in a vertical, hierarchical arrangement, or shared authority in a horizontal, collaborative arrangement. We decided to adopt the latter, as it seemed best suited to the professional milieu involved.

With a descending vertical arrangement, coaches may feel secure and valued, as they provide direction and often already know the goals and have some idea of the outcome. This type of relationship frequently represents one with which coaches are already familiar, and they naturally seek to reproduce it; in some cases, this also allows them to bring their knowledge to the fore. With such a structure, however, coachees are unsure of their place in the arrangement, as the coaching relationship is not always based on their needs. As a result, they do not perceive any immediate benefits. The ineffectiveness of coaching for change based on a vertical arrangement in which
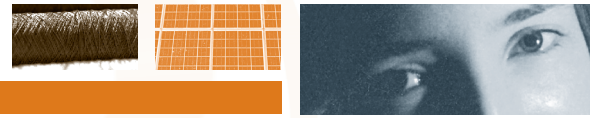
authority is in charge has also been clearly mentioned by a number of authors (e.g., Dahan 2011).)

As concerns our study, we were looking to build a coaching relationship that reflected participants' needs. Accordingly, we had to use a horizontal arrangement in which authority was shared. The first thing we did, therefore, was to adopt a *side-by-side* relationship with teachers throughout the study (as illustrated in Figure 1).

FIGURE 1	TWO TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP STRUCTURE

Vertical Approach   *Side-By-Side* **Approach**

T	Teacher	C	Coach

Our choice of coaching-relationship structure represented a major dimension of the project, not only because it gave participants a clear indication of group dynamics and the type of relationship expected, but also because, for us, it was demanding and somewhat unsettling. As we were not familiar with teachers' needs beforehand, this structure represented an unknown path and goals. Accordingly, considerable preparation was required on our part before meetings. Guertin (2013) recommends that coaches at the very least know the individuals they will be coaching, and have a basic mastery of their field.
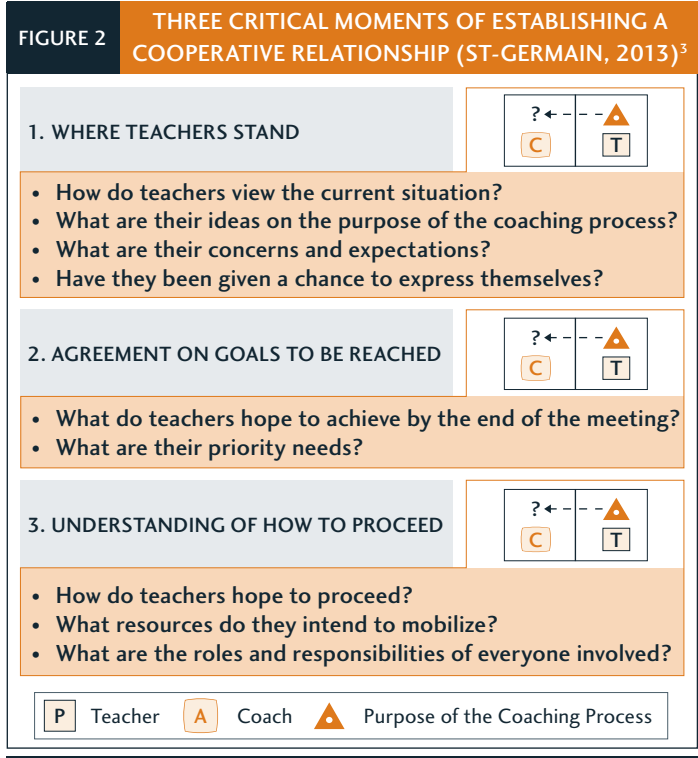
ASPECTS TO BE CLARIFIED BY COACH

- Properly define the coaching situation; explore the context, stakeholders, identified irritants, challenges, issues, history, and participants' strengths.
- Determine the goal of the coaching process, as well as participants' needs.
- Identify participants' expectations and the indications of change to be observed, so as to be able to make any necessary course corrections.

At the beginning of the coaching relationship, participants were likely sceptical, as they were not at all convinced that we did not have a hidden agenda. Some, uncertain about getting involved in the project, came to "take a look" and were attempting, consciously or not, to determine if the coaching process would meet their needs. At the end of the first "meet-and-greet", however, they all indicated an interest in participating. An anlaysis of the content of logbooks and interviews showed that the choice of a side-by-side relationship played a large role, from the outset, in creating a foundation of trust between coaches and teachers.

2	FOCUS ON TEACHERS' VIEWS VIA THREE CRITICAL MOMENTS OF THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS.

The success of our coaching process was also based on the three critical moments by which we structured the process and ensured that no steps were missed in establishing a relationship of trust (St-Germain 2013). Figure 2 illustrates these moments, which were used to build a relational structure, and presents examples of questions used to facilitate the meeting.

FIGURE 2	THREE CRITICAL MOMENTS OF ESTABLISHING A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP (ST-GERMAIN, 2013)[3]

1. WHERE TEACHERS STAND

- How do teachers view the current situation?
- What are their ideas on the purpose of the coaching process?
- What are their concerns and expectations?
- Have they been given a chance to express themselves?

2. AGREEMENT ON GOALS TO BE REACHED

- What do teachers hope to achieve by the end of the meeting?
- What are their priority needs?

3. UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO PROCEED

- How do teachers hope to proceed?
- What resources do they intend to mobilize?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved?

P	Teacher	A	Coach	▲	Purpose of the Coaching Process

[3] The position of the triangle and question mark is the same for all three critical moments. We found it was important emphasize that it is vital to continually review teachers' perceptions so coaches did not automatically assume that their own interpretations of the question were shared by everyone.

1– Where Teachers Stand

The first critical moment was constituted by the group's initial meeting, and consisted of a discussion on distance education. Our intention was to take stock of the situation, giving all participants a chance to express themselves and share their views on virtual distance education (expectations, reservations, understanding). Coachees all had a chance to speak, as well as to hear their colleagues' views on the purpose of the coaching process. While this step definitely required an investment in time, we believe it was essential, as it helped build trust; we felt it would be useless to go any further if the vital step of creating an effective work space, in which everyone could be frank, had not been properly established.

This approach was based on the principle that coaches are unfamiliar with teachers' circumstances and that they enter the relationship with a blank slate in theory, and as a result, coaches had to stay "in the moment". As for the teachers, they were expected to contribute to the discussion and fill in that blanks. Coachees' perceptions, however, can change; accordingly, at this stage, coaches must avoid being influenced by generalities, by what they think the group knows about the subject, and by what they think they themselves know about the situation or the participants before having met with them individually.

2– Agreement on Goals to Be Reached

During the second critical moment, after the classroom observations and one-on-one feedback, participants were all asked to decide on a project they would like to conduct; most opted to work individually. Given that classroom management in a distance-education context represented a collective concern, the teachers also decided to work as a group to establish standards of behaviour aimed at maintaining a virtual instructional climate conducive to learning.
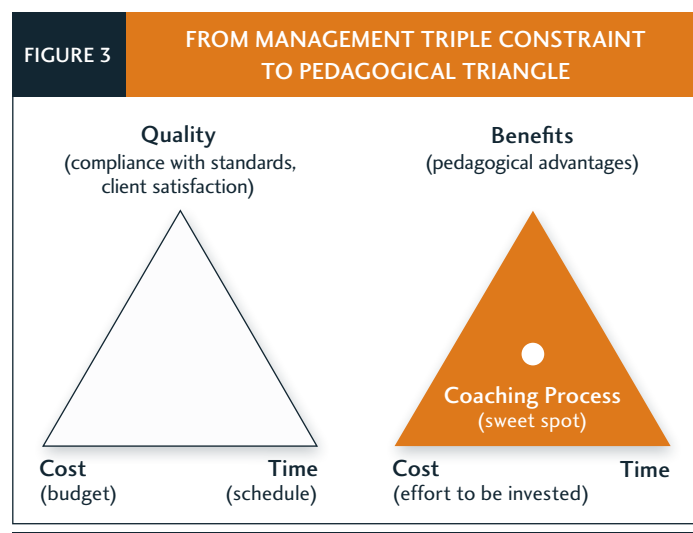
3– Understanding of How to Proceed

The third critical moment, which occurred once everyone had chosen an individual project, consisted in having the teachers try out a new instructional practice during the term. Each teacher experimented at his or her own pace, and follow-up with the researchers was personalized. Next, there were group meetings in which participants could discuss their experiment and concerns with their colleagues. The entire process was extremely transparent throughout, and allowed for all sorts of adjustments, where necessary.

An analysis of the qualitative content of our data leads us to believe that respect for these critical moments enabled the coachees to play their part and express themselves freely without fear of being judged by their peers. To ensure that everyone was able to participate with ease in the discussions, attentive listening and a non-judgmental attitude were the watchwords. At any time during the meetings, if cooperation threatened to turn into confrontation, we could go back and re-examine the critical moments to prevent an impass. By way of illustration, if participants seemed resistant or passive, it was likely because they had unspoken concerns (Bareil 2004); accordingly, we had to allow them to express those concerns, to go back to the first critical moment and restate their position, so that, together, the group could better understand everyone's experiences and take it into account during discussions.

3   TARGETS TEACHERS' *SWEET SPOT*.

In the area of project management, the literature uses the concept of the "magic triangle" (Kinareva-Dumont 2011) or the triple constraint, to illustrate achievement. As shown by this triangle, the success of a project is contingent upon a balance among cost (budget), quality (compliance with standards, client satisfaction) and time (schedule). If any of these aspects is compromised, the triangle loses its shape, and the project, its balance. To depict teachers' areas of interest, we took the project-management triple constraint and turned it into a pedagogical triangle. In their day-to-day professional lives, teachers focus their interest and efforts on very specific aspects of their work, which change over time in accordance with the situation and circumstances. By analyzing and triangulating the data collected, we identified those aspects as being the teachers' *sweet spot* (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 — FROM MANAGEMENT TRIPLE CONSTRAINT TO PEDAGOGICAL TRIANGLE

Quality (compliance with standards, client satisfaction)

Benefits (pedagogical advantages)

Coaching Process (sweet spot)

Cost (budget)   Time (schedule)

Cost (effort to be invested)   Time

This sweet spot is in equilibrium with the three prerequisites necessary for teachers to adopt a given solution.

TEACHERS' REQUIREMENTS

- The solution has educational benefits that immediately meet teachers' needs.
- The solution does not demand too great an investment in terms of time.
- The solution does not require too much effort.

Since teachers will adopt a solution or agree to be coached only if these three conditions are met, as coaches, we had to target their sweet spot to obtain a positive outcome and further the process of change.

The identification of each teacher's sweet spot represents a major prerequisite before the coaching relationship can be continued; the three critical moments help coaches in this regard. Indications that the process is "stalling" could mean that adjustments must be made. Below are examples of questions that could be used to determine whether the points of the triangle are no longer balanced:

- Do teachers find that the benefits of the solution in question are not sufficiently apparent?
- Do they mention not really having enough time to implement the solution?
- Do teachers have the impression that the effort required is too great?

With everyone's focus varying rapidly, we had to listen carefully and act as quickly as possible, if need be repeating the critical-moment questions, in order to ensure we were still targeting the current *sweet spot*.

4   RECOGNIZES TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL SKILLS.

Our data analysis provided a description of college teachers that involved three types of identity:

- **Disciplinary Identity**
  Associated with a university education, this type of identity is always demonstrated by a degree, and therefore officially sanctioned by an academic institution. This firmly anchored identity is respected by peers and rarely contested or called into doubt in the workplace.

- **Relational Identity**
  This type of identity is composed of (i) the competence related to a mastery of disciplinary knowledge and expertise and (ii) the interpersonal skills related to the use of that knowledge and expertise.

- **Professional Identity**
  The concept of professional identity, which involves the recognition of specific pedagogical abilities, remains tenuous, as it is not necessarily confirmed by a university degree or officially established as a condition for employment. The confirmation of teachers' professional identity represents an important step that must be taken before suggesting any kind of instructional changes.

In confirming the professional identity of the teachers in our group, the classroom observation of their practices represented a major phase of our research. Beginning with the first work session, at the very outset of the study, we asked all participants if we could attend their distance-education classes. The reply was unanimous: everyone gave us permission, and a schedule of related appointments was quickly set up.

After the very first meeting to help teachers understand the changes in question and select a project to carry out, we conducted the classroom observations and provided individual feedback, which helped us validate several current instructional practices. The distance-education classroom observations provided a wealth of information to the coaches, who must be properly equipped in order to collect the maximum amount of relevant information.

...coaching activities foster productive discussions in which doubts are aired and knowledge is built.

Accordingly, we used a rubric as a guide when conducting the observation sessions. After each session, we met with teachers individually with a view to confirming and validating proper practices, as well as to suggesting instructional tools and strategies (in the shape of questions, where the situation was appropriate or participants so requested). Many were nervous at the beginning of the meeting. We gave them our constructive comments only orally, realizing that most of their strengths had never been confirmed or validated by external observors or the administration, and that, for each teacher, the number of sound practices largely exceeded the number of deficits. On several occasions thereafter, in their logbooks, during interviews, and even during the post-mortem, participants were very positive about this phase of the study.
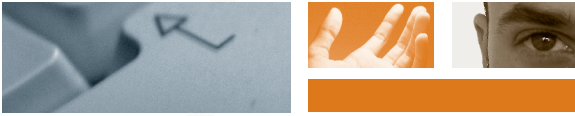
Subsequently, we observed a change in teachers' behaviour and attitude: they were more open to improving aspects of their practices and experimenting with new methods. Their discussions became more animated, and, by and large, everyone participated more in the exchanges, shedding their reticence and discomfort. Observation constituted a significant step of the coaching process, as it helped teachers consolidate their professional identity. Once that identity had been confirmed, they felt a positive, calming sense of professional consistency and coherence. As evidence of this fact, they did not want to leave the action-research group once the study was over. They even wrote letters to their respective administrations to request that it be continued! The coaching process truly filled a latent need for all participants, regardless of the number of years each had spent in the profession.

5	CREATES AND MAINTAINS A PROFESSIONAL-DEVELOPMENT ZONE.

Throughout the study, we maintained our *side-by-side* position with teachers, and ensured that the coaching relationship was always geared to responding quickly and effectively to their professional needs (their sweet spot). We observed that a relationship of trust still prevailed and a *professional-development zone* had been created, in which all participants were able to confidently make changes to their practices.

In accordance with the perceptions noted, we can now depict this zone as an imaginary space in which teachers find themselves at ease with experimenting, feel protected, and are confident others will support and encourage them rather than confronting or judging them. When educators enter this zone, the better and more confident they feel, the better they perform, and the more they want to discuss and share with their colleagues. This process involves three phases:

- A relationship of trust must be firmly established between coach and coachees. There is absolutely no use pursuing the coaching relationship if teachers don't trust the arrangement.
- Teachers who feel sufficiently confident then begin exploring, experimenting with new instructional practices (which may be validated by an external observer).
- Teachers gain assurance and demonstrate a desire to talk openly about their practices, thereby entering the phase of liberation and professional autonomy.

The *professional-development zone* concept occurred to us at the end of the study, when we were able to take a step back and explore the above distinct phases in the coaching process we had just undertaken with the teachers.

The results of our research enabled us to develop a procedural guide that can be used by anyone wishing to implement a coaching relationship featuring a *side-by-side* relational structure in a context of pedagogical change or innovation. The guide makes use of the three phases of the *professional-development zone* and, for each, the role of the coachees and coach (as well as suggested tools) are indicated.

> *With everyone's sweet spot varying rapidly, we had to listen carefully and act as quickly as possible, if need be repeating the critical-moment questions, in order to ensure we were still targeting the current sweet spot.*

Figure 4, shown on the next page, summarizes the roles of all parties involved and describes the tools needed in the three phases constituting the professional-development zone. Throughout these steps, it is vital that coaches maintain a dialogue with their coachees. To complete the process shown in Figure 4, here are a few questions that could be used to promote this dialogue:

- What exactly does the coachee mean? As coach, how much of that message do I understand?
- What is the coachee communicating non-verbally? As coach, how much of that message do I understand?
- What does the coachee need right now? What is of concern to him/her?
- What are the issues involved? What are the coachee's thoughts in this regard?
- How important does he/she feel these issues and thoughts are? Priority 1, 2 or 3?
- What questions could I ask to clarify the situation?
- What is the coachee's sweet spot?
- How can I deal with the fact that everyone's sweet spot is so individual and different?

◗ CONCLUSION

Our coaching project in a context of change involved the partial redefinition of the usual roles and responsibilities of coaches and coaches. Rejecting a top-down approach, we

adopted a *side-by-side* position based on teachers' concerns, needs, and challenges. Coachees, on the other hand, took on greater responsibility in a process centred on their situation and concerns. This new stance met their need for professional autonomy, enabling them to be part of the solution.

This process helped consolidate the professional identity of the teachers concerned. As coaches, we were no longer the only suppliers of knowledge: that responsibility was now shared. Solutions were jointly established over the course of discussions held. The relationship was not one of power, but rather of genuine collaboration to establish solutions based on each party's knowledge and experience. Accordingly, coaches did not bear sole responsibility for the success of the coaching relationship; they shared it with participants. Both parties became interdependent in this bilateral relationship. ◑

FIGURE 4	THREE PHASES OF THE PROFESSIONAL-DEVELOPMENT ZONE: SUMMARY OF ROLES		
Phase of Zone	**T TEACHER'S ROLE**	**C COACH'S ROLE**	**TOOLS**
Confidence Zone	Express needs.	Establish a *side-by-side* relationship.	- Relationship (Figure 1)
	Share views with peers.	Ask questions to help coachees clarify their situation.	- Sweet spot (Figure 3)
	Discuss.	Listen: be truly interested in coachees, their experiences, and their concerns.	- Indicators for achievement of confidence phase - Teacher's profile
	Participate and demonstrate confidence in agreeing to be observed in the classroom.	Recognize coachees' accomplishments.	- Classroom-observation rubric - Professional identity
Exploration Zone	Choose an individual or group project.	Confirm that project meets a need (sweet spot).	- Sweet spot (Figure 3)
	Conduct the project.	Provide instructional resources.	- Educational, resource, and network knowledge
	Observe and begin to see results.	Continue to take an interest in coachees, to "be there" for them.	- Monitoring tools (meetings, e-mails, recordings, etc.) - Professional identity - Indicators for achievement of exploration phase
Emancipation Zone	Become aware of professional identity, consistency, and cocherence.	Confirm coachees' professional identity, consistency, and cocherence.	- Professional consistency and coherence - Professional strengths
	Discuss experiments with colleagues without fear.	Provide forums for expression and communication.	- Available means of communication (workshops, videos, social media, etc.)
	Take own turn at coaching.	Offer support; help coachees adopt their new role and stance.	- Indicators for achievement of emancipation phase - Coaching process

HAVING THE POWER TO CHOOSE   LETTING SOMEONE ELSE CHOOSE

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C   T

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