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Creating coaching cultures in schools

Chris Munro, Margaret Barr and Christian van Nieuwerburgh

Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of coaching cultures in schools. In their review of the literature on coaching cultures, Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) concluded that the development of such cultures promises to create more positive and supportive organisational climates for personal and organisational growth.

We place a particular focus on how and why headteachers and other senior leaders might promote this culture in their school and build the capacity of teachers as coaches. This will be illustrated by reflections from practitioners in Australia and the United Kingdom.

We argue that the realisation of a whole-school coaching culture involves procedural and managerial changes in practice and, perhaps more significantly, changes in attitudes and habits across many aspects of school life, in order to enable a new and sustainable organisational "way of being" where students and educators flourish.

We first clarify the difference between coaching and mentoring and outline some of the psychological theories and approaches that underpin coaching in school environments. After defining a whole-school coaching culture for learning, we use the "Global Framework for Coaching and Mentoring in Education" (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight & Campbell, in press) to describe four educational contexts through which coaching can be introduced in order to build a coaching culture.

What is the difference between coaching and mentoring?

Coaching in education is defined by van Nieuwerburgh (2012, p. 17) as:

> …a one-to-one conversation that focuses on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate.

A coach "facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee" in a non-directive way. On the other hand, a mentor tends to share knowledge and expertise with the mentee in a more directive way. While both interventions are helpful when used appropriately, this chapter focuses on coaching. We also refer to a "coaching approach" which Campbell (2016) defines as "intentionally utilising the transferable elements of coaching in other conversations wherever they might be appropriate and helpful". In a coaching approach, coaching skills and principles influence professional conversations that take place outside formal coaching sessions.

What psychological theories and approaches inform coaching?

School leaders need not necessarily have an in-depth understanding of the psychological theories that inform the practice of coaching. Nevertheless, it is helpful to appreciate some of the key theories and frameworks that underpin coaching and to consider the implications for culture change.

Adams (2016, p. 38-54) identifies a range of useful psychological theories, principles and frameworks that inform the application of coaching in schools. These are complementary to some of the psychodynamic and systemic approaches described elsewhere in this book. In brief, some of these are:

- **The person-centred approach**. This approach is based on the theory and philosophy of Rogers (1961). The coach is non-judgemental and holds that the coachee is the best expert of himself or herself. Thus, the coach's "way of being" facilitates the coachee's intrinsic motivation and sense of responsibility. This standpoint can be a challenge for leaders adopting coaching roles and approaches, and will be explored more fully later. However, when a coach respects and values the contextual knowledge and expertise that the coachee brings to any situation, they are more likely to empower the coachee to take sustained action.

- **The solution-focused approach.** De Shazer's (1985) work on solution-focused therapy with families focused on the clients talking about their preferred future, without needing to analyse the problem. A coach using a solution-focused approach helps the coachee gain clarity about possible solutions and how to use their strengths and skills to achieve a solution. Where a school culture embraces a solution-focused approach, the focus is not on the problem, but on supporting one another to find solutions.

- **Self-efficacy theory.** Self-efficacy is our belief in our own abilities. Bandura (1986) theorised that self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of our ability to set and achieve goals and persist when we meet setbacks. A coach can use a range of strategies to support a coachee to build their self-efficacy, for example by using past successes to identify future possibilities. For teachers and leaders external pressures, agendas and responsibilities can erode this sense of self-efficacy. Coaching helps educators to find focus and identify achievable goals that matter to them.

- **Self-determination theory.** This is a theory of motivation. Ryan and Deci's (2000) theory is that in order to function and grow optimally, all of us have an innate psychological need to perceive that we have competence, autonomy, and relatedness with others. Coaching can help us to be more competent, to feel more autonomous, and to sense more relatedness, thus improving motivation and increasing empowerment. Again, this applies equally to school leaders and classroom teachers.

- **Positive psychology.** Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) founded positive psychology: the study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote those factors that allow us to thrive. A coach can support the coachee to identify and use their strengths and positive emotions. This allows the coachee to take action in school that builds the wellbeing of themselves and others, enabling them to flourish. At the heart of the positive psychology based approach is the creation of a school community where the mental health and wellbeing of everyone is a priority. Leach and Green provide an excellent overview of how to

> integrate coaching and positive psychology in education. They cite the growing research base that shows coaching to have benefits such as increased well-being, goal striving, resilience and hope; alongside positive impacts on emotional intelligence, academic achievement, and attitudes to learning (2016, p. 169).

The above short examples are relevant not only to coaching itself, but also to the process of creating a coaching culture.

What is a whole-school coaching culture for learning?

Referring to organisations in general, Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) proposed the following definition:

> A coaching culture exists within an organisation when it has embedded a coaching approach as part of its strategic plans in a transparent way. Coaching cultures should motivate individuals and facilitate cooperation, collaboration and connection within the organisation and with its external stakeholders.

When we apply Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh's definition to a school, the individuals and stakeholders are the leaders, teachers, students and all those involved within the school community. Building on the definitions above, we propose the following definition of a "whole-school coaching culture for learning":

> A whole-school coaching culture for learning exists when education leaders, teachers, support staff, students, parents and other partners, intentionally use coaching and coaching approaches in a range of conversational contexts. For this to happen, coaching approaches should be widely understood and skilfully utilised across the school community. In such a culture, a coaching approach to conversations about learning will need to become part of an organisation's "way of being" with appropriate resourcing and explicit integration into the school's strategic plans.

We now expand on this definition, and shall return to it later.

The "Global Framework for Coaching and Mentoring in Education" (van Nieuwerburgh, Knight & Campbell, in press) sets out a helpful model of four contexts in which coaching and coaching approaches can be used in schools to build a coaching culture. Figure 11.1 presents each of these contexts within the landscape of the educational environment.

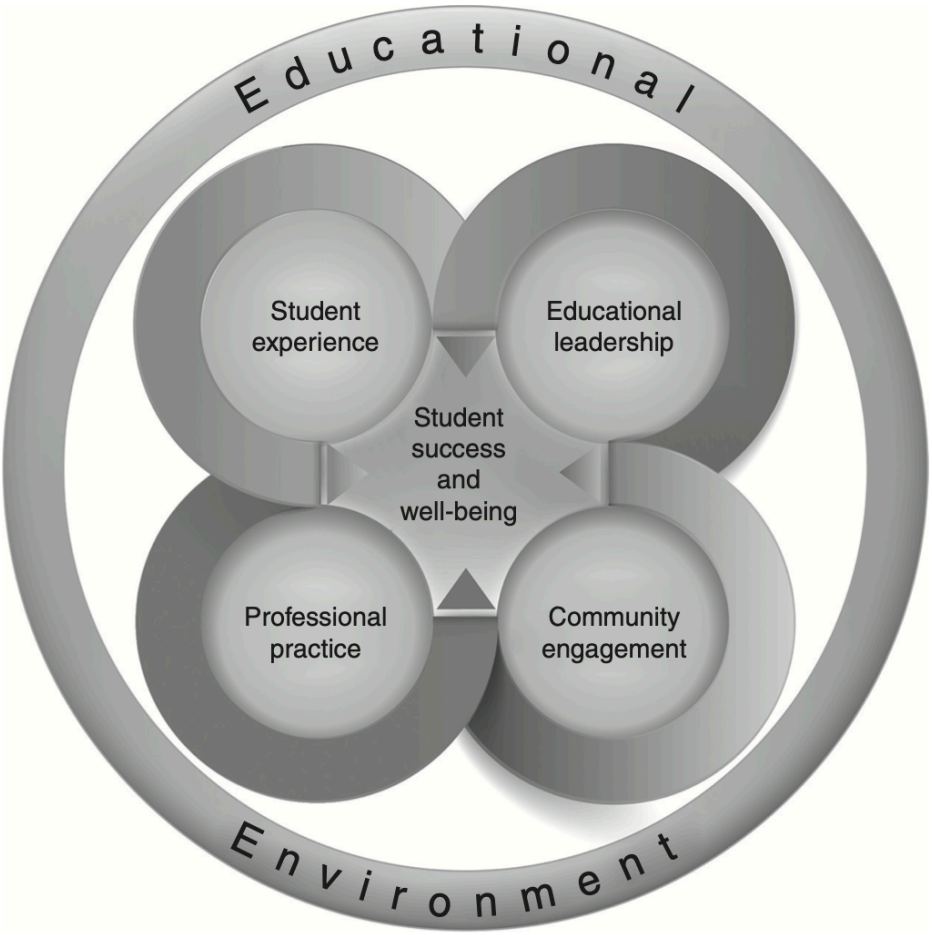

Figure 11.1.
The Global Framework for Coaching and Mentoring in Education
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(van Nieuwerburgh, Knight & Campbell, 2019)

Educational leadership

One-to-one coaching can support aspiring, newly-appointed, and experienced educational leaders with their leadership development (Forde, McMahon, Gronn, & Martin, 2013; Goff, Goldring, Guthrie, & Bickman, 2014; James-Ward, 2013; Robertson, 2016). After learning how to coach, educational leaders can use a coaching approach to leadership interactions with colleagues (Adams, 2012; Barr & van Nieuwerburgh, 2015; Cantore & Hick, 2013). When such a coaching approach to leadership becomes the norm for leaders, they convey a coaching "way of being" (van Nieuwerburgh, 2014, p. 12). It might be said that coaching is not only the things that leaders do; it has evolved into the way that leaders are.

Professional practice

In its simplest form, coaching in the context of professional practice aims to improve teaching and learning, through coaching by external experts, senior leaders or peers. Teachers see that coaching

to develop their professional practice is a catalyst for their learning. Teachers may peer-coach one another (Hooker, 2014; Wong & Nicotera, 2003) with a focus on classroom practice, pastoral responsibilities, or other aspects of their work. In addition to, or instead of a peer coach, they may have a designated coach, for example an instructional coach (Knight, 2007), who has been internally or externally appointed. Using a dialogic approach (Knight, 2018) instructional coaches use their own knowledge and expertise about instruction (or teaching practice as it is also known) to support the teacher as they seek to implement new practices.

Community engagement

Teachers can use coaching approaches when interacting with parents. Parents can be supported to develop their parenting skills through coaching from educational professionals or psychologists (Golawski, Bamford, & Gersch, 2013) or can be trained in coaching skills so that they can coach their own children (Graham, 2013).

Student experience

The interventions already mentioned are intended to lead to improved student success and wellbeing. Therefore 'Student success and wellbeing' is at the heart of the Global Framework. However, students can experience coaching with and by one another. Trained external coaches can work with students to improve academic performance and wellbeing (Passmore & Brown, 2009). Trained school staff can coach students in the same way and trained students can coach each other. In the latter scenario, there are benefits for the student coach as well as the coachee, for example with student coaches reporting improved attitudes to learning (van Nieuwerburgh & Tong, 2013, p. 20).

The Global Framework shows that the interventions take place within a broader educational environment. The environment will influence the implementation of the interventions, and in turn will be affected by them.

Working towards a whole-school coaching culture for learning

It's a journey

Others have written about the steps, stages or pathways towards establishing a coaching culture in organisations (13 & Megginson, 2005, p. 1-13; Creasy & Paterson, 2005; Hawkins, 2012; Passmore & Jastrzebska, 2011). Whilst these are helpful, they inevitably run the risk of making the process appear somewhat linear. This viewpoint would miss the evolutionary, iterative or cyclic nature of what happens within and between each stage.

While we acknowledge the attraction of such delineated steps to success for school leaders, we also know that organisational change is rarely straightforward, and success at each stage of development depends on context. The following observations and recommendations are based on our own experiences and those of a range of schools at different stages of the journey towards establishing a coaching culture for learning.

Who and what initiates the journey?

It is likely that whoever initiates the journey will have identified with a compelling coaching experience themselves, or will have read or heard about successful coaching interventions. Robertson (2016, p. 17) draws on her work with school principals in Australia and New Zealand in describing how leaders who experience coaching "are generally no longer satisfied with less in-depth relationships with other colleagues and so are more likely to try to establish professional coaching relationships with them".

Campbell (2016, p. 131) suggests that the "essential role of conversation" in educational settings is a fundamental reason why coaching resonates so strongly with educators:

> Not only are the leadership and organisation of a school progressed through various conversations…but conversations are also *central* to the work of that school. Learning and teaching occur through various forms of conversation (real and virtual) taking place in classrooms and playgrounds across the globe every day. Consequently, coaching resonates strongly with many educators. At its essence coaching is a conversation, and conversations are at the heart of learning, school life and work.

Quality coaching conversations go beyond routine procedural talk to get to the heart of matter. They result in deep learning and sustained change fuelled by authentic connection and trusting relationships.

Schools provide a range of conversational contexts (Campbell, 2016, p. 133) where coaching approaches can make a positive difference. Those with leadership influence in a school often identify problematic conversational contexts as the starting point for the introduction of coaching. They may start with something like "We want to change the nature of conversations around 'x' so that 'y' will improve, and we think that a coaching approach could help." As school leaders, it is not difficult to identify a wide range of scenarios like this that sit within each of the contexts mentioned earlier.

> "[We realised] that while we had established a culture of learning and teachers had many opportunities for professional learning, the missing piece was growth conversations for individual teachers."
>
> Edna Sackson, Mount Scopus Memorial College, Melbourne, Australia

> "We opted for coaching as we wanted to commit to staff a more sustained working relationship focused on developing classroom practice, growing their capacity to work with new ideas and receive ongoing feedback. Also, it was to help align individual efforts with school priorities."
>
> Jon Andrews, St Paul's School, Brisbane, Australia

> "The school had run a compulsory "learning trios" programme for teachers. This involved peer observation and peer discussions. The feedback from teachers was that they enjoyed observing each other but were unclear about how to structure the subsequent discussions, which often became unfocused chats. It was clear to me that a coaching model would provide exactly the structure and solution-focus that seemed to be missing. So I sought volunteers to integrate peer coaching into the programme of peer observation and collaborative professional enquiry."
>
> Robert Jones, North Berwick High School, North Berwick, Scotland

In another scenario, the initiator may be driven by a more general philosophical view of teaching and of teacher learning. For example, they may be driven by the "moral imperative" argued by Wiliam (2014, p. 6):

> We need to create environments in which teachers embrace the idea of continuous improvement…an acceptance that the impact of education on the lives of young people creates a moral imperative for even the best teachers to continue to improve.

> "…the ultimate goal… was improved teaching practice and therefore improved student learning. Other long term goals of coaching teachers on their practice were: a vibrant culture of professional learning, de-privatised classrooms, a shared language of practice and teachers with increased reflective practice, and self-efficacy."
>
> Deborah Netolicky, Wesley College, Perth, Australia

Although those proposing the introduction of coaching may not yet have a clear vision of what it will look like in practice across their school, they *will* know what is driving them to pursue it. This rationale for the introduction of coaching in a school context is key to the success of the initiative and an important area for leaders to examine. So, if coaching is seen to be the answer, what is the question?

> "The wider culture shift in education has also sharpened my commitment to a whole school coaching culture. The expectation that all teachers can be good or better has necessitated different types of conversations about teaching and learning – whether between the classroom teacher and student; the classroom teacher and their line manager; or between the Head and Chair of Governors."
>
> Michelle McLeod, Preston Manor School, London, England

Robertson (2016) explains how coaching can help school leaders to uncover their "educational platform" which is based on the values and beliefs that underpin the decisions they make in their schools. Being coached, and the process of learning how to coach, can be a powerful form of leadership development that stimulates critical reflection on the learning relationships that they have across their educational community (Robertson, 2016, p. 45).

The implications of teachers' increased sense of self-efficacy, as a result of being coached by senior leaders, are very positive. By empowering teachers to take responsibility for their own learning and development, and trusting them as their own contextual experts, school leaders flatten hierarchies and professionalise their staff by enabling them to exercise agency (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015).

However, the notion of teachers identifying their own development priorities can be very challenging for some educational leaders. It may seem intuitive and appropriate to give strong direction on individual teacher goals. This is perfectly sensible at a whole school level since teachers do not operate as 'freelancers' within the building and it is fair to expect that their goals should align with whole school priorities. However, when teachers are allowed authentic freedom within this 'form' and are encouraged to determine their own goals and development needs, teacher development becomes more about mindful engagement and less about mindless compliance. As Wiliam asserts, "what we have learned is that when we start out by assuming the best of people, rather than the worst, then, in general, good things happen" (2016, p. 168).

Table 11.1 shows a range of common conversational contexts for coaching approaches and typical desired outcomes. School leaders can use it to reflect on which conversational context provides the starting point, and what will be different by employing coaching and/or coaching approaches in school.

Table 11.1: Coaching approaches - common conversational contexts and desired outcomes

	Conversational Contexts	Desired Outcomes
Professional Practice	• Teacher professional learning • Professional reflection • Teacher goal setting and development planning • Teacher collaboration • Professional learning teams • Curriculum/faculty/year-level teams • Classroom observation and feedback • Use of data • Supporting beginning teachers	• More discerning choices of professional learning • More personalised professional learning • Implementation of alternative teaching strategies • More focused use of evidence • Recognition of strengths in practice • Identification of strengths and capacity building • Creating a safe space to talk about and develop practice, and thus de-privatising classroom practice • Increased awareness of classroom reality and increased self-efficacy and agency • Observation and feedback is non-judgemental and serves the development goals of the teacher • More action-oriented team dialogue • Differentiated support for beginning teachers
Educational Leadership	• Performance review and development processes • Leadership skills • Leadership functions • Team operation • Strategic planning • Difficult/hard conversations • Feedback conversations • Managing mandated processes from governing authorities	• More positive and productive performance conversations • Establishment of a culture of continuous improvement or enhancement • Flattened hierarchies • Leadership conversations are more developmental/growth orientated • More efficient and effective meetings • Increased emotional intelligence • Constructive feedback is sought, given and received more positively • Increased collegiality and collaboration • Externally imposed processes are implemented more sensitively and meaningfully
Student Experience	• Academic progress • Pastoral support and wellbeing • Student goal setting and action planning • Restorative practices • Behaviour management • Student leadership development • Student voice • Peer support and feedback • Positive Education programmes	• Increased academic attainment • Wider range of achievement • Increased student uptake of voluntary activities • Reduction in instances of challenging behaviour • Enhanced student wellbeing • Building student capacity for peer leadership • Students better able to articulate their learning • Improved attendance • Reduction in exclusions from school • More agency-enabling conversations with students • Conscious application of positive education strategies by students • Students feel heard and supported as individuals
Community Engagement	• Parents/carer communication • Parent-teacher interviews • Parents-student communication • Community leaders and groups • School governors/boards • Liaison with external agencies	• Parents report feeling better listened to, and more involved in their children's learning • Parents are more intentional in conversations with their children • Increased sense of partnership between parents and school • Parent-teacher communication is more dialogic • Community leaders and groups engage more with school • Improved relationships and better engagement with school governors and boards • More inclusive decision-making • Schools and external agencies see one another as partners

The critical importance of authenticity

Coaching is about unlocking potential (Whitmore, 2009, p. 10). We believe that coaching in schools should be strengths-based and solution-focused. It should be a discourse of what is wanted and what is possible rather than what is wrong and what has not worked; it should be a treasure hunt rather than a witch-hunt. At its best, coaching is an empowering and respectful conversational process designed to build individual and collective capacity and efficacy.

When educators consider their rationale for initiating coaching, it is worth reflecting on the above description. For example, what scenarios are envisaged when viewing coaching as a possible intervention? How does the rationale for coaching sit with the philosophy of a coaching approach?

A school leader who is under pressure to improve student results may be tempted to view coaching as a response to teacher underperformance, or as a means of ensuring compliance. They may believe that coaching can be *administered* to teachers. While we recognise that the issues underlying these drivers may be very real, this deficit-based position is contrary to the philosophy of coaching.

To avoid doing more harm than good, we must ensure that coaching is not viewed as a manipulative strategy. Covert performance management thinly disguised as coaching risks undermining trust in the leadership of the school and in the true intent of coaching, the capacity for professional growth. Hargreaves and Skelton (2012) explore the issues of politics and school culture in relation to coaching and mentoring. They caution against the positives of coaching being diminished through "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1994) where a true teacher-driven collaborative learning opportunity has been hijacked by school administrators seeking to control and manage performance.

A related challenge for school leaders is the power imbalance inherent when formally coaching a direct report ("manager as coach"), as opposed to using a coaching approach in everyday work-related conversations. When leaders attempt to coach teachers who are accountable to them, they do so against a backdrop of perceptions based on previous relationships that could be described as the "corporate memory" of the school. These past experiences and impressions may be positive or negative and will determine the level of scepticism toward this new approach. Further, the coachee's perception of their relationship with the leader will influence how candid they feel they can be. Even if the coaching conversation is explicitly positioned outside of any appraisal or performance review framework, positional seniority can stifle candour for fear of being judged or of some repercussion. Where this issue is not acknowledged, the teacher is much more likely to go through the motions and may expend considerable energy on "impression management" – telling the leader what they think they want to hear. While the leader cannot relinquish overall responsibility for the performance of their staff, they can set down a clear statement of intent about their role in the coaching conversation.

Leaders need to be sensitive to these issues when adopting coaching as a leadership strategy and allocating or matching coaches. In a study in Denmark, Spaten and Flensborg (2013), found that in order to succeed, the manager as coach should: be aware of power relations; be sensitive and empathic in building the coaching relationship; and draw clear boundaries between their roles as leader and coach. In reality, this may be easier said than done.

> "Leaders are aware of the tension that exists when they take a coaching stance with someone who they line manage or are in a position of professional power over. We try to alleviate this by being clear and intentional about the role a leader is taking at any one time. Partly this is about prior explanation of the role and expectations of any process or conversation.
> If a leader needs to shift stance during a conversation, such as from coaching to consulting or evaluating, they will deliberately break rapport with the person to show that they are shifting stance, as well as being verbally explicit about this."
>
> Deborah Netolicky, Wesley College, Perth, Australia

The second issue is the leader's responsibility for inviting trust and building an authentic coaching relationship with their coachee. Coaching relationships are commonly described as "learning partnerships" or "helping relationships". Knight (2011) proposes seven "partnership principles" that should underpin teacher professional learning. Of these, the principles of choice – teachers should have a choice regarding what and how they learn – and reciprocity – we should expect to get as much as we give (p. 46) – are perhaps the most challenging for leaders as coaches. Leaders need to genuinely adopt a learner's mindset and an attitude of curiosity in order to enact these principles.

> "In the current educational culture of increased accountability and performativity, teachers are constantly the subject of critique and evaluation, establishing that coaching is not part of this evaluative aspect and impressing the development aspect of coaching is vital."
>
> Alex Guedes, Thomas Carr College, Melbourne, Australia

The rhetoric of coaching may sound authentic but this must match the lived experience of the participants, if the potential benefits are to be fully realised. Leaders need to engage with the learning around coaching so that they can model practice authentically. Further, leaders need to go beyond simply endorsing or advocating coaching for others (by implication, lower down the organisational hierarchy) if they are seeking to move towards coaching as a way of being at an individual and organisational level.

> "Advice for anyone looking to develop coaching within a school. Be honest with yourself as a leader. If what you really want is for teachers to start doing some specific task, or to adopt some specific strategy, then coaching is not the right tool. Coaching always gives the coachee control. Avoid compulsion. Forcing teachers to coach and be coached is a monstrous waste of time and energy."
>
> Robert Jones, North Berwick High School, North Berwick, Scotland

Netolicky (2016) sums up the issues for us here:

> A belief in the capacity of teachers for reflection and growth implies that everyone is coachable, yet issues about the effects of hierarchical relationships on an individual's authenticity, openness, and vulnerability remain. When deciding who will coach teachers, schools should consider the ways in which trust, rapport, and emotion influence learning.

The influence of existing school culture

When we speak to schools about the initiators and drivers of coaching and how it has been introduced, they invariably refer to the conditions that existed in their school before coaching was introduced. These antecedent conditions are the norms, practices and prevalent discourse that may enable or inhibit the rate of development and adoption of coaching.

The antecedent conditions for coaching will be different in every school and even in different contexts within a school. If educators are in tune with these conditions, they can be taken into account when considering the pace of change. Trust is a critical factor here. Just as individual coaching relationships depend on trust to be productive, so a coaching culture will thrive or wither on the levels of trust within the school's conversational contexts. As Covey puts it: "Nothing is as fast as the speed of trust." (2006, p. 3).

> "I see exceptional coaches as well as some who have recently joined the challenge and there is a ramp up in learning before they become as effective as they need to be to build relationships and trust."
>
> Alex Guedes, Thomas Carr College, Melbourne, Australia

When thinking about the prevalent discourse in their school, leaders may reflect on the following questions:

- Do people use the language of trust, growth, ownership, empowerment and learning? Or is their language about performativity, judgement, deficit, suspicion and compliance?
- What norms or protocols are in place for different kinds of conversations or collaboration?
- How are stakeholders involved in decision-making processes?
- What other forms of collaborative learning, goal setting and development planning are in place?
- What processes are in place for gathering data, giving feedback and discussing practice?
- What is the *lived experience* of these practices?

> "We intended to develop a non-threatening but cerebral culture of professional inquiry, conversation and reflection, in order to develop professional culture, professional practice, and therefore student learning."
>
> Deborah Netolicky, Wesley College, Perth, Australia

> "Our coaches were all experienced teachers who had the respect and trust of wider staff so this made it easier to get people to come on-board and model being coached for other staff."
>
> Fiona Gontier, Haileybury College, Melbourne, Australia

Advocacy and leadership

Earlier, we discussed the role of the initiator in proposing the introduction of coaching in a school. In our experience, the subsequent development of coaching practice across the school may not be led by the initiator and is often led by others. A common approach seems to be one of coaching initiated from the top but championed from the middle. This championing role tends to fall to an individual or small group of staff that act as advocates, as the practicalities of implementation are worked out and evolve. The role of advocate, or coaching leader, often falls to middle leaders who have professional learning or staff development roles, or to someone in a newly created role. There are several advantages to this approach. The coaching leaders are in a better position than a senior leader to give the project more of their attention and can maintain momentum. Further, those who already have a mandate to support teacher growth and learning are ideally placed to act as advocates for teacher development initiatives such as coaching and can be a conduit to the senior leadership of the school.

> "The Vice-Principal, an accredited coach, was very excited about introducing coaching at our school. His presentation to staff really focussed on the skills of the type of person that might be interested in being one of our coaches."
>
> Fiona Gontier, Haileybury College, Melbourne, Australia

> "This change was initiated and supported by Leadership but it was guided by the staff. They were and are integral to this "journey". They are the "keys"."
>
> Sophie Hunter, St Kevin's College, Melbourne, Australia

Coaching skill development

At this point a school is beginning to build its coaching capacity through the training and immersion of these people who, ultimately, become the in-house experts in coaching. Timperley and Parr (2008) note that coaches are more effective when they have been trained, and Campbell (2016, p. 140) reminds us of the importance of training in specific coaching skills:

> In defining coaching as a form of "conversation" it can be easy to trivialise and underplay the critical importance of effective coaching skill development training. Coaching *is* a specific kind of conversation, full of intention; subtle and not so subtle shifts in perspective; carefully nuanced language; and acutely refined listening among other things.

This training element is a common feature in all of the stories that practitioners shared with us. Since this can be a significant resource investment, leaders need to carefully consider the range of training options available and how this will be utilised. The importance of high quality training for coaches is identified as a key factor across a number of professional contexts (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016).

Evolution and Growth

When coaching in school begins, a conscious decision should be taken to allow it to evolve through a principle of "democratic voluntary involvement", as proposed by van Nieuwerburgh (2016a, p.233). A common message from our conversations with schools is that teachers and leaders buy-in more readily when they can see and feel the beneficial outcomes of effective coaching conversations.

As more participants engage in coaching conversations and as coaching approaches begin to be utilised in interactions across the school community, so the benefits are felt by an ever-increasing number of people. By gathering and reviewing feedback data from those involved, schools can bolster the sense of democratic involvement in the evolution of these new ways of working and begin to build a common language, understanding and value of coaching. This is vitally important. To prevent the perception of coaching as yet another top-down initiative, time must be taken to establish shared understandings of coaching approaches and to promote the benefits of the approach.

School leaders have an opportunity to model the commitment to their own professional growth that they expect of their staff. In doing so they demonstrate that they have the courage to create opportunities for critical conversations (Robertson & Allan, 1999) for the benefit of themselves and their school community.

As those with most decision-making power in the school, leaders must be proactive not only in nurturing the continued growth of a coaching culture, but also in limiting potential inhibitors. For example they can influence professional learning time, meeting agendas, timetables, and the structure of the school day, so that time is freed up to allow teachers to practise coaching skills and develop new habits. Staff can therefore benefit from the increased levels of awareness, increased clarity and improved self-efficacy that coaching conversations bring.

> "School leaders responsible for teaching and learning and CPD took the decision to move to collaborative professional learning, and this was the area that I led on. Core coaching skills provided the framework for the peer discussions and underpinned the challenge to improve classroom practice in order to enhance outcomes for pupils. Importantly, the sessions were facilitated by staff and designed to enable meaningful collaboration – principles that enhanced the coaching methods built into the whole school CPD programme."
>
> Michelle McLeod, Preston Manor School, London, England

Over time, as senior leaders and coaching champions continue to endorse, support and participate in coaching, and as trust in the process increases, a tipping point is reached where several things begin to happen:

1. More trained coaches are required because of increasing demand for internal coaching.
2. Trained coaches begin to think about the need for reflection to support their work, for example coaching supervision (Clutterbuck, Whitaker & Lucas, 2016), or peer reflective practice.
3. Additional forms of coaching are developed in response to need – peer coaching, technology coaching; career coaching; leadership coaching, etc.
4. Members of the school community (not necessarily the coaching leaders) begin to identify additional contexts where coaching could be of benefit.

The final point is significant because it provides a strong indication that the school is beginning to own and expand the approach. Coaching is no longer simply an initiative.

> "Our coaching journey began with two trained coaches offering 1-1 coaching to teacher volunteers on any aspect of their practice. Now, 3 years on, we can see the embryonic signs of what might be described as a coaching culture: increasing uptake; reciprocal peer-coaching; eLearning coaching rather than tech 'pushing'; leaders trained in coaching approaches; growth-based performance and development processes; and teachers consciously employing coaching skills with their students; in short, more coachable opportunities are being identified."
>
> Chris Munro, St Kevin's College, Melbourne, Australia

> "Having used coaching with teachers as part of their professional review and development, I was impressed at the level of ideas and actions generated from even one discussion. It occurred to me that if we want to meet our educational aspirations, then we must listen to the perspective of our learners and believe that they have answers. I plan to use a coaching model with our Pupil Council to help meet our school improvement plan targets. By allowing the pupils to set goals related to the targets, and go through the coaching process to decide who, how and when the actions will be taken, I hope that the learning experience for all will be improved and sustained."
>
> Susan Bell, Bridge of Weir Primary School, Bridge of Weir, Scotland

> "It seems to me that the more one is coached, the more of one's professional life one is willing to open up to examination through coaching."
>
> Robert Jones, North Berwick High School, North Berwick, Scotland

Embedding ways of working and moving towards an organisational way of being

Earlier in this chapter we proposed a definition of a "whole-school coaching culture for learning" which included coaching approaches to conversations about learning becoming embedded as a fundamental aspect of the organisational way of being. We have attempted to illustrate what we see as the key factors influencing the emergence of such a culture.

The precise timescale for the evolutionary period between initiation and the emergence of a coaching culture is practically impossible to define. As we have argued, this is due to the highly contextual nature of the journey. While formal coaching arrangements may be one part of a coaching culture for learning, the effects should be felt across the organisation. The "way of being" can be experienced *within* one-to-one coaching conversations, but also between educators, by students, in leadership team meetings, and within the broader educational community.

So let us now consider what it might look like when a coaching culture starts to become our school culture. What are the indicators of *organisational alignment* and *normalisation* of coaching interventions (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016b, p. 232)? The list below provides some suggestions:

- Coaching is no longer viewed as an initiative – it's just how we do things now.
- Common coaching language and principles are apparent in a wide range of conversational contexts.
- The intent of different forms of coaching, from formal coaching through to coaching infused leadership approaches, is understood and there is procedural clarity around these.
- Policies, strategic plans and role descriptions reflect a common language and understanding of coaching approaches.
- Sustainable resourcing is in place to support internal coaching.
- Coaching and coaching approaches are apparent across all four contexts.

> "One thing I am looking more for now is the change in language. More solution focused. Where staff would once want problems solved, the culture has shifted to doing, learning and reflecting."
>
> Sophie Hunter, St Kevin's College, Melbourne, Australia

> "Don't dismiss the time issue. It is all too easy as a leader to become frustrated when teachers tell you they don't have time to engage in coaching, but if you want teachers to coach each other, you have to make time for it to happen in your plans."
>
> Robert Jones, North Berwick High School, North Berwick, Scotland

Conclusion

The desire of school leaders to establish coaching cultures in schools is indicative of the compelling argument that coaching and coaching infused approaches to conversations can have a positive

impact on all members of the school community. Coaching develops a school leader's capacity to become a true "leader of learning", focusing on the quality of education in their school and their own leadership development with greater agency and political empowerment (Robertson, 2016, p. 60).

In some ways, the evolution of a coaching culture can be seen to be a natural development over time, based on the experiences of those who have benefited from coaching interactions and training, and then become advocates for these approaches. Further, as reflective educators, teachers and leaders who have experienced the positive effects of coaching on their own practice are more likely to identify opportunities to apply the approaches in other contexts.

We began this chapter with the observation by Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh (2014) that the development of coaching cultures promises to create more positive and supportive organisational climates for personal and organisational flourishing. By consciously changing the nature of the interaction in the myriad conversational contexts across a school community we can create an environment that is more conducive to personal growth and development and where students and educators can flourish. The lived experience of a coaching culture is fundamentally one of better quality conversations that lead to an improved learning environment for everyone in the school community.

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