

**Coaching for Teachers and Principals: Influence on Resiliency, Student Learning,
and School Improvement**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how coaching can influence educators' resiliency, student learning, and school improvement. Background on the mounting pressure to improve student performance and the increasing popularity of coaching for teachers and principals is provided followed by a summary of the characteristics of and obstacles to effective coaching programs. Next, three prominent international examples of coaching are described. The first description focuses on how coaching can be used to build and maintain principals' resiliency, which is the ability to bounce back from adversity. The second illustration describes how a secondary school in the United Kingdom is using teacher coaching to provide pastoral care and improve academic learning. The final example explores a state-wide coaching program for experienced Australian principals, in which trained coaches support school leaders as they implement school improvement initiatives. Finally, conclusions are provided about teacher and principal coaching, including how to implement initiatives that utilize the qualities of effective coaching programs

KEYWORDS

Leadership coaching, teacher coaching, resiliency, school improvement, student learning

INTRODUCTION

Many teachers and principals are leaving the ranks as they approach retirement age and fewer qualified people are applying to fill these vacancies (Fenwick, 2000). This growing void underscores the importance of determining what support novice educators need as they transition into their new roles. Furthermore, mounting pressure from vocal policymakers, community members, and parents has thrust teachers and principals in the spotlight to increase student performance (e.g., Adams, 1999; Bloom, Barrett, & Strong, 2003; Crow, 2004; Hall, Berg, & Barnett, 2003; Vandenberghe, 2003; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). Many educators mention the stress created by having to respond to federal, state, and district demands for accountability (Bloom, Barrett, & Strong, 2003; Daresh, 2003).

These demands on teachers and administrators require effective professional development programs that reflect the needs and practices of what actually occurs in schools (e.g., Barth, 2003; Daresh & La Plant, 1985). International trends in leadership development exemplify the growing recognition to provide support for aspiring and practicing school leaders (Hallinger, 2005). In the United Kingdom, programs have been developed to focus on learning-centered leadership and personalised development (Southworth, 2002). Weindling's (2004) investigation of 43 principal induction programs from 14 nations reveals that despite local differences, most programs tend to address issues related to instructional leadership, school improvement, change management and skill development.

Coaching as a Professional Development Strategy

As school systems and professional developers have sought effective means for supporting the development of teachers' and school leaders' skills and cognitive abilities, peer coaching programs have flourished (Crow & Matthews, 1998). There is an abundance of literature heralding the value of coaching in business (Clutterbuck, 1998; Hall, 1976; Kram, 1985; Zeus & Skiffington, 2000), teacher education (Jonson, 2002; Portner, 1998), and graduate education (Brause, 2002; Erkut & Mokros, 1981). Barnett and O'Mahony (2002) acknowledge the growing popularity of coaching in educational organizations, noting it provides a flexible way to reflect on important classroom and school leadership issues, captures the realities of workplace learning, and allows for personalized feedback.

Given the trend to offer coaching opportunities for aspiring, beginning, and experienced teachers and principals, this paper provides an overview of coaching as an effective means of professional development for teachers and school leaders. We begin by providing background on the guiding principles, benefits, and limitations of peer coaching. Next, we examine three international examples of coaching for administrators, teachers, and/or students. We conclude by offering a variety of conclusions and implications for future coaching programs.

BACKGROUND ON COACHING PROGRAMS

Peer coaching has a long history in teacher development (e.g., Garmston, 1987); however, far less emphasis has been placed on the value of coaching for leadership development. deHann (2005) suggests that managers can benefit from coaching by reflecting on their strengths and identifying obstacles to their growth and development. Several recent publications address how coaching can be an effective means for developing school leaders' talents. Robertson (2005), for instance, indicates that coaching involves two people setting and achieving professional goals, being open to new learning, and engaging in dialogue for the purpose of improving leadership practice. Despite a lack of consensus on a clear delineation between coaching and mentoring (Hobson, 2003; Mertz, 2004), we concur with Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, (2005), who provide a clear vision of the successful coach, who "provides continuing support that is safe and confidential and has as its goal the nurturing of significant personal, professional, and institutional growth through a process that unfolds over time" (p. 10).

Guiding Principles of Coaching Programs

The expectation of teacher and leadership coaching is to assist coachees to reflect on their practices without evaluating or judging their performances (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Robertson, 2005). Therefore, Robertson (2005) indicates that effective coaching programs:

1. Are dynamic to meet the changing needs of and each person.

2. Encourage coaches to facilitate the learning process.
3. Allow coachees to take responsibility for their own learning and set the agenda for coaching sessions.
4. Assist partners in understanding one another's roles and the social and political context that shapes their workplace learning.
5. Acknowledge coaching relationship take time to develop and mature.

Hopkins-Thompson (2000) mentions five interrelated structural components of successful coaching programs: (1) organizational support, (2) clearly defined outcomes, (3) screening, selecting, and training coaches, (4) focus on learner needs, and (5) continual monitoring and evaluation. To provide more clarity about coaching programs, Bloom and his colleagues (2005) outline specific guidelines for selecting and preparing coaches as well as assessing the quality of their relationships. They suggest leadership coaches must have at least five years of successful educational leadership experience; have demonstrated the ability to informally coach new principals; must complete a formal application and training program prior to their selection; and participate in ongoing professional development activities, including job shadowing and period meetings with other coaches.

Benefits and Limitations of Coaching

Hobson (2003) notes the lack of empirical studies revealing the effects of coaching; however, deHann (2005) indicates coaches understand and validate another person, provide deeper understanding and objectivity, stimulate new ideas and recommendations, and provide feedback and direction for future actions. Popular literature suggests coaching can reduce isolation, increase leaders' self-awareness, improve their skills, consider the broader school context when making decisions, and become more reflective (Rich & Jackson, 2005). A recent empirical study of a peer coaching program for new principals reveals the effects on new principals' instructional leadership skills, job satisfaction, and retention (Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003).

Similarly, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the problems associated with coaching. Speculation abounds that the quality of a coaching program is compromised due to inadequate time being devoted to the relationship (Bloom, Castagna, & Warren, 2003; Hobson, 2003; Robertson, 2005), flaws in matching coachees and coaches (Hobson, 2003), poor training for coaches (Hobson, 2003), and the difficulty of maintaining reflective questioning strategies (Robertson, 2005).

EXAMPLES OF COACHING FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Coaching for Principal Resiliency

Context. Principals who undergo growth may choose alternative methods of coaching for improving their skills and ultimately their effectiveness. One method that is customized is a holistic approach using resiliency as the lens. Principals have selected this approach when entering into a coaching relationship. Resiliency is the “ability to bounce back from adversity, learn new skills, develop creative ways of coping, and become stronger” (Milstein & Henry, 2008, p. 18). For principals, this means meeting challenges, learning from their experiences, and improving their ability to deal with problems. Without such leaders, schools would have a more difficult time in facing the stresses that are increasingly part of their realities.

Program description. The six resiliency elements set forth by Milstein and Henry (2008) constitute the lens used for coaching principals, which include: (a) positive connections, (b) clear, consistent, and appropriate boundaries, (c) life-guiding skills, (d) nurture and support, (e) purposes and expectations, and (f) meaningful participation. These elements are not independent, but tightly interrelated. Strengthening or depleting any one element will have a significant impact on the others.

There are three pathways principals experience that differentiate principals’ effectiveness. Coaching varies depending on which pathway principals’ display. The three groups of principals are those who: remain resilient throughout their careers; begin their careers resilient, lose it, and then bounce back; and are unable to remain enthusiastic or function at a minimal level.

The first group of principals who maintain their resiliency know their craft and develop their artistry as leaders. They seek ways in which to continually improve their skills and effectiveness. In a coaching relationship they are seeking someone who will help them reflect on their practice and growth. Coaches explore ways to strengthen and integrate the six resiliency elements into principals’ personal and professional lives.

The second group of principals has an intuitive sense of what it takes to be resilient, yet they struggle to maintain this disposition. Most principals are in this group, moving in and out of resiliency. Coaches for these types of principals assist them in remaining committed and involved. These principals not only need to be challenged to remain resilient, but also to see the impact they have on educators, students, and the community. Focused coaching sessions are needed to build a clearer sense of the importance of learning from adversity.

The third group of principals is the least effective as leaders and usually are forced into a coaching situation because of external pressures to change. They tend to be miserable and make everyone else around them feel the same way. Because they are in a rut, lack enthusiasm, and are not motivated, other educators and the students in their schools mirror their disposition. Fortunately, this group is small in number; however, they are extremely detrimental to a healthy school environment. In order for the coaching relationship to make a difference, coaches must uncover the issues causing principals to succumb to this level.

Guiding principles. Robertson’s (2005) principles apply to the resiliency coaching lens. The process is dynamic (principle 1) because the relationship is intended to meet the changing resiliency needs of the principal.

Coaches must be adept facilitators (principle 2), regardless of the group type they are coaching. Without mutual understanding of each other's roles and the context (principle 4), then the coaching relationship will not flourish. Finally, coaching for resiliency reflects Hopkins-Thompson's (2000) focus on the need to address the learner's need and the importance of monitoring and evaluating the process.

Teacher Coaching for Improved Student Learning: Penair School, Cornwall, United Kingdom

Context. Penair School (PS) in Cornwall, United Kingdom is a mixed comprehensive international school of 1218 students aged 11-16, nationally recognized for its work with gifted and talented students. PS uses a system of autonomous teams (e.g., faculties, year teams, support teams) with delegated leadership across the school. Professional dialogue is rife, particularly concerning pedagogy, and the rise of coaching within the school has been a mixture of accident and design. Being an Initial Teacher Training institution, there are many trainee teachers in the school, so coaching skills have been taught to the majority of the teaching staff. The headteacher recently introduced the concept of a Learning Team of talented and highly respected teachers to embed coaching into the everyday work of the school (Vann, 2007).

Program description. There are three principal ways in which coaching is used across the school: (1) academic tutoring for students, (2) pastoral support for students, and (3) learning activities involving students and adults. Academic tutoring for students is undertaken by all staff. During evidenced-based conversations held three times a year, staff members help students reflect upon what is going well and needs improving by discussing their progress on agreed-upon targets. The pastoral system reinforces the co-ownership of learning; opportunities are given to students to understand their own learning style and to develop it. Conversations with students often begin with "What sort of learner are you?" From their answers teachers encourage specific learning strategies and outcomes. Pastoral support also occurs when year 10 students become "friends" for students who are struggling with issues, such as poor relationships. A recent dimension of pastoral support has focused on student leadership. The Learning Team proposed a series of activities across the school to actively engage students in leadership. The outcomes have been remarkable; some of the school's most difficult students became its greatest supporters and intransigent students gained self-belief and confidence.

There are several versions of coaching afforded to teachers. For instance, new staff are assigned a "buddy" to help them settle in and learn about the school's values, ethos, expectations, and processes. In addition, teaching triangles allow three staff member to work collaboratively to improve their teaching practices, beginning with self-reflection and analysis of classroom data. Furthermore, the Learning Team has established Learning Detectives, who are student researchers (aged 12 to 13) to investigate the learning processes in their classes. Their findings have been used by individual teachers and also have been shared with the entire staff, governors, headteachers of other schools, and the local tertiary college.

Guiding principles. Because the Learning Team relies on *specialist coaching* and *co-coaching* (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) strategies to improve teaching and learning, individuals' learning needs are being addressed and there is flexibility in achieving learning outcomes (Robertson, 2005). To keep coaching focused and relevant, teachers create written agreements; however, students typically do not formulate these formal written documents. The creation of a strong coaching culture at PS is a result of the ongoing support of the headteacher and the school organization, establishing clear outcomes for learning, and monitoring the process to make improvements (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

Principal Coaching for School Improvement: Victoria, Australia

Context. In response to an initiative from the Department of Education in Victoria, Australia (Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2005), the Australian Principals Centre (APC) developed the Coaching for Enhancing the Capabilities of Experienced Principals Program (CEP). The program is unique because it is intended to support experienced principals, using an executive coaching model (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000). Four guiding principles shape the program: (1) coaching relationships are based on observation and open discussion (Lapworth, Sills, & Fish, 2001), (2) transformational leaders ensure school improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), (3) reflection stimulates thoughtful action (Lieberman & Miller, 1992), and (4) leadership practice improves when data and feedback are received (Sloboda, 1986).

Program description. CEP is founded on the principle that coaching relationships evolve through four interrelated developmental stages: (1) establishing the relationship, (2) building and understanding direction, (3) progressing and reviewing, and (4) consolidating, closing, and continuing learning. Coaches attend a two-day training program to clarify expectations about their roles in negotiating the four stages of development, learn how to use results from the Educational Leadership Feedback Instrument (ELFI), and explore effective coaching skills needed across the stages of the program (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006; O'Mahony & Barnett, 2006). Coaches and their partners are introduced at sessions sponsored by their regional offices to clarify expectations and ground rules for their coaching relationships. Coaches are expected to spend at least 10 hours with their partners over the year; however, most coaches exceed this minimal expectation. Throughout the year, regional staff and APC staff monitor coaching relationships through telephone calls, email messages, and site visits.

During the first year of the program in 2004-2005, 62 coaches (retired principals, state department, employees, practicing principals, and corporate consultants) and 97 experienced primary and secondary principals participated. Subsequent cohorts have had similar numbers of coaches and principals (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2007). Feedback from CEP participants reveals: (1) implementation of a wide array of transformational leadership projects, (2) principals overwhelmingly rated the experience as successful, (3) principals gained self-confidence and awareness of their preferred leadership styles, delegated responsibilities

more effectively, and were more strategic in implementing school improvement (Barnett & O'Mahony, 2006, 2007; O'Mahony & Barnett, 2006).

Guiding principles. The CEP program illustrates several of the important guiding principles of peer coaching programs identified in the literature. For instance, to help coaches and principals clarify their roles and the social/political context of their relationships (Robertson, 2005), they: (a) prepare a memorandum of understanding that outlines their responsibilities and expectations and (b) use the ELFI results to determine the types of school improvement projects to undertake. Despite the short duration of the program, having participants attend to the four developmental phases allows participants to anticipate what to expect as their relations mature. In addition, the program underscores the importance of providing clear structures, such as garnering the support and involvement of regional offices in coordinating the program; training coaches, especially in how to utilize the ELFI results as a starting point in working with their partners; and having APC staff monitor and make adjustments (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

On one hand, these three examples of coaching demonstrate the power of this process for leaders' development (i.e., resiliency), for others' growth (i.e., teachers and students), and for the school organization (i.e., school improvement). Clearly, when coaches work closely with educators and students, individuals and schools can benefit, as noted by others (e.g., Hobson, 2003; Rich & Jackson, 2005; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003). Principals who engage in coaching relationships can build their personal and professional resiliency, which in turn can positively affect the overall climate and school improvement initiatives. Similarly, as coaching becomes embedded in the daily work of the school, students' can gain insights about their personal learning styles, peer relationships, and leadership capabilities. Teachers also benefit by better understanding the school's norms and values, identifying more effective teaching practices, and learning students' perspectives about classroom processes.

On the other hand, these ways of using coaching in schools clearly exemplify many of the qualities of effective coaching programs. Table 1 summarizes the major qualities of effective coaching programs noted by Robertson (2005) and Hopkins-Thompson (2000) and indicates which of these elements are intentionally addressed within our three examples: Coaching for Resiliency, Penair School, and Coaching for Experienced Principals. Collectively, the 10 guiding elements are purposely built into these programs; however, no one program utilizes all of the qualities. In reviewing these qualities, they fall into four general categories:

1. Goals (7 - outcomes clearly defined, 9 - learners' needs addressed)
2. Coaching roles (1 - meets changing needs of individuals, 2 - facilitates learning process, 3 - learner sets coaching agenda)

3. Coaching relationships (4 - partners understand roles and context, 5 - relationship takes time to develop)
4. Structural support (6 - organizational support exists, 8 - coaches screened and trained, 10 - process monitored and evaluated)

These four categories can serve as benchmarks or standards for individual schools and/or systems that are intending to incorporate coaching programs for students, teachers, or school leaders. For instance, program organizers need to demonstrate how the coaching process is intended to affect those being coached, clarify the roles coaches are expected to perform, describe the expectations for the emerging relationship, and provide support throughout the program. In addition, feedback from coaching program participants can be solicited for each area, allowing formative adjustments to be made to address unexpected problems and concerns. Although no coaching program can expect to work perfectly for everyone involved, paying attention to these elements can reduce potential problems and maximize the benefits for students, teachers, and school administrators.

Table 1. Guiding Principles Utilized in Resiliency Coaching, Penair School, and Coaching for Experienced Principals

Guiding Principles	Coaching for Resiliency	Penair School	Coaching for Experienced Principals
Robertson (2005):			
1. Coach meets changing needs of individuals	X	X	
2. Coach facilitates learning process	X		
3. Learner sets the coaching agenda			X
4. Partners understand roles and context	X		X
5. Relationship takes time to develop			X
Hopkins-Thompson (2000):			
6. Organizational support exist		X	X
7. Outcomes clearly defined		X	
8. Coaches screened and trained			X
9. Learners' needs addressed	X	X	
10. Process monitored and evaluated	X	X	X

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