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Using coaching for new teachers

In this chapter we will look at:

- how co-coaching can be used to develop newly qualified teachers
- how coaching can be used to develop teachers in their second year of teaching.



Working with trainee and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) can be a highly rewarding part of the job. It is also often a privilege. Their energy and enthusiasm for teaching often translates into excellent classroom practice, even very early in their careers. They are usually highly reflective about what they do and eager to learn how to improve. They will question why things are done in 'that particular way' and not just accept the status quo. These attributes make for good coachees, but also good coaches.

Co-coaching has been described by CUREE (Centre for Use of Research and Evidence in Education) as 'a structured, sustained process between two or more professional learners to enable them to embed new knowledge and skills from specialist sources in day-to-day practice'. (Source: The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching: CUREE)

With this in mind, it makes perfect sense to use co-coaching to support and develop the work of trainee and newly qualified teachers. Teachers early on in their careers have many questions as to how they might improve their practice and they also have many of the solutions. Mentors can answer many of these questions, and do a brilliant job. However, if we want to move away from dependency to independence, we need to encourage these young teachers to engage in coaching.

Question for reflection and discussion

Are NQTs given the opportunity to work collaboratively within your school?

The Career Entry Development Profile (CEDP), developed by the TDA (Training and Development Agency for schools, UK), is an online resource that encourages trainees and NQTs to focus on achievements and goals early on in their careers, and also to discuss their professional development needs. It does this by providing a series of

questions for NQTs to reflect on at various stages in their training and induction periods. For example:

- What do you consider to be the most important professional development priorities for your induction period?
- Why are these issues the most important for you now?
- How have your priorities changed since the end of your training?
- How would you prioritise your needs across the induction period?
- What preparation, support or development opportunities do you feel would help you move forward with these priorities?

(Source: Career entry and development profile (CEDP) 2008/9: TDA)

This provides a perfect (and ready-made) framework to use when setting up co-coaching with NQTs. As well as discussing these questions with their mentor, they could also pair up and use them as prompts during the early stages of a co-coaching session.

Facilitating this process of NQTs working alongside their peers in co-coaching relationships is a very useful strategy which we decided to adopt at Littlehampton. The process was launched at an NQT meeting. Co-coaching was to be used for four main reasons:

- to encourage NQTs to discuss teaching and learning outside of their own subject
- to share best practice
- to raise self-esteem
- to encourage a 'can-do' approach.

The session started with a general discussion of what co-coaching was and why it could be useful. The NQTs were then asked to find partners (from a different subject to their own) and to ask each other the following questions:

- What is going well?
- What do I want to develop further?

They were told that they could not make any judgements and were to avoid giving ideas. They just had to focus on listening and asking open questions. There was a lot of very intense discussion going on. We then stopped to consider the rest of the process, which is outlined below.

NQT co-coaching: the process

1 Identification of issue

NQTs identify issues that they wish to address.

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NQTs select co-coachees to work with.

Pairs meet to discuss issues.

3 Observation

NQTs observe each other.

Focus is kept on the issue that has been identified. Elements of best practice are also noted.

4 Feedback meeting

Pairs meet to discuss the lesson observations, return to the original issues and share best practice.

5 Follow-up

Pairs may decide to do follow-up developmental activities related to their focus, for example visit another school that shows best practice in this area or observe other teachers.

Stages one and two had already been addressed during this initial meeting. For those pairs who found it difficult to find a focus for their discussion, prompt cards were provided. These simple cards have various teaching and learning themes noted on them and they were used by the pairs to prompt discussion on areas of strength and areas for development. Sample cards are provided in Figure 5.1. For many, these cards acted as a very useful prompt. In fact, they are now used widely throughout the school in a number of different contexts, for example NQT/mentoring meetings, performance management meetings and department meetings.

After the initial meeting, the pairs then had to arrange a time to observe each other. They were all very keen to do this. A simple lesson observation review sheet was used to focus the observation. This was completed by the teachers being observed beforehand, to highlight the areas that they wanted the observers to look for. During the observation, the observer then commented on these points. This kept the ownership of the issue with the teacher being observed, but also served to keep the observation focused. A template is provided in Figure 5.2 on page 40. This completed review sheet should not be copied and remains the property of the coachee.

Once they had observed each other, they met up again to have a mutual feedback session. It had been agreed that the feedback would focus on the issue that the NQT had identified as an area for development – the review sheet helped to focus the conversation on this. It was, however, fine to focus also on other aspects of good practice that were observed.

Most interesting was the follow-up that resulted from this process. One pair, that was focusing on assessment for learning strategies, arranged to observe another

Use of voice	Monitoring pupil progress
Inclusion – meeting all pupils’ learning needs	Coping with workload
Engaging and maintaining pupils’ interest	Clearly focused learning objectives
Questioning skills	Use of ICT
Managing activity transition	Knowledge of the National Curriculum
Differentiation	Subject knowledge
Working with learning support assistants	Managing class discussions
Effective body language	Record keeping
The three part lesson	Managing pupil behaviour
Effective lesson planning	Assessment for learning
Starters and plenaries	Using assessment data
Pace	Learning styles

Figure 5.1 Coaching prompt cards



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Lesson observation review sheet

Name _____ Co-coach _____ Date _____

Key questions for the lesson – agreed by coach and coachee	Comments/Observations/Questions – from the coach and coachee

Figure 5.2 NQT co-coaching



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teacher, who was known to be very good at using learning objectives to drive the learning in his lesson. Another pair, interested in transition, went on a visit to one of the feeder primary schools.

The NQTs were asked to evaluate the experience by answering a short questionnaire. The questions used and some of their responses follow.

Has the process been useful? Why?

'It has been a very useful process because I was able to observe some of the same students as I had taught in my co-coaching class. This gave me the opportunity to observe those pupils in a different environment and to observe different techniques and strategies that I could incorporate into my lessons.'

'The process has been useful because observing another teacher and discussing it with them has given me ideas for my own teaching.'

'Really useful to watch a class I teach in another subject – and then to discuss strategies that work with them, with another NQT.'

What did you learn from the process?

'I have learnt that we are constantly developing and that we can all benefit from this experience. I have picked up new ideas and ways of both helping my teaching and also my behaviour management.'

'That other NQTs have similar issues to me, and that they can be resolved.'

'That I had a lot of the solutions to my issues already – I just had to think it through. Talking it through with someone else really helped.'

What good practice did you observe?

'I observed a colleague, teaching a year 8 class, with some of the pupils that I teach in there. He had a starter activity set up for them to complete straight away which really helped settle them down. He also kept them on task all lesson and had extension tasks for those who had finished the previous task.'

'The use of a seating plan. Students working independently, whilst the teacher facilitated the process.'

How will this impact on your own teaching?

'Using a starter activity as soon as they enter the room is something that I will use with my year 8 class; it helps settle them immediately and helps with the lesson. I will also make sure that all pupils are on task all of the time and that there is extra work for those pupils who finish their task.'

'I will give my students more time to work independently.'

'More student-focused teaching and less teacher-focused.'

Next steps: Will you develop this work further? If so, how?

'I could develop this work further by building up a range of starter and plenary activities that will engage the pupils straight away. I will also try to break my lessons up into micro-chunks so that pupils can focus on key areas at a time.'

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‘Work with my co-coach on implementing the use of the interactive white board into my own teaching.’

This whole process proved to be successful – it certainly managed to achieve all of the objectives that were set out at the start of the programme. The NQTs were all very positive about the experience. They learned a great deal from each other, and from themselves through self-reflection. While using coaching in this way for NQTs and trainee teachers is not a substitute for mentoring, it certainly adds another important element to the support and professional development that they are offered. From a school’s point of view, it goes a long way towards building capacity for growth by developing staff who are better equipped to finding the solutions to their own issues.

Coaching for recently qualified teachers

In order not to lose the momentum with coaching amongst our NQTs, it has also become an integral part of our Early Professional Development (EPD) programme for Recently Qualified Teachers (RQTs), that is, teachers in their second year of teaching. It has always seemed bizarre, that in the UK at least, a large amount of time and energy is rightly invested in supporting teachers in their first year of teaching. However, for some reason, usually financial, much of this support is taken away during the second year, and these new teachers are then left to sink or swim. This is wrong. It is so important that we continue to support and develop these teachers, so that they can become as good as possible. The support offered needs to be personalised and different from the mentoring they received during their first year – but it still needs to be there. Coaching is the key to this.

At the end of their induction year, NQTs are asked to identify two or three areas of teaching and learning that they would like to develop. When they then begin their second year of teaching they are allocated a coach, who will support them in devising an action plan to address these issues. The coaches are allocated in consultation with each of the RQTs and may be somebody from the leadership group, their NQT mentor or a peer. They then meet up regularly, at least once every half-term, for a coaching conversation on how the work is going. The coaches are there purely to support the RQTs through this important developmental stage of their careers.

The issues that have been selected are many and varied. However, the most important aspect of the process is that they are chosen by the RQT themselves – so that they are real and in context. Some examples are:

- ‘What effective strategies are there to support the learning of EAL (English as an Additional Language) students in my lessons?’
- ‘Developing kinaesthetic maths activities to engage and motivate low-ability students.’

- 'How the Levels Mountains approach can be used in ICT to raise student awareness of assessment criteria.'
- 'Developing an effective bridging programme in science.'



Question for reflection and discussion

Following their NQT year, is there a structured programme of support and guidance available to second-year teachers in your school?

This is an important and pivotal piece of developmental work for these teachers, for which there should be some kind of formal professional recognition. Fortunately, the General Teaching Council (GTC) for England, has set up the Teacher Learning Academy (TLA), that gives teachers the opportunity to obtain this recognition. By submitting a short presentation of their learning journey, during which they have been supported by their coaches, the teachers receive certificated professional recognition for the developmental work they have carried out as a part of the school's EPD programme.

Another advantage of this approach is that it has proven to be a good introduction to the performance management process for these relatively new teachers. The areas that they choose to look at with their coach also tend to become part of their performance management targets, thereby providing them with another layer of support to help them meet their performance review objectives.

There are clear long-term advantages for a school that wants to establish a 'culture of coaching' with new teachers in this way. The more opportunities these new teachers are given to engage with co-coaching, the more they will be refining and developing their own coaching skills. This is a solid investment for any school, as these staff will then be able to continue to use these coaching skills with other members of staff as they become more experienced – a 'home-grown' approach to developing coaching within a school.



Summary

NQTs have the ability to co-coach each other, and should be encouraged to do so. As they are experiencing many of the same issues, they can also provide each other with the solutions. They can prove to be a valuable and effective resource for each other.

Coaching is also a very powerful tool for supporting teachers in their second year of teaching. It can provide them with the support and encouragement to set their own developmental targets and then address them with a clear and effective action plan.

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Electronic resources

Go to www.sagepub.co.uk/allison for electronic resources for this chapter

Coaching prompt cards

NQT co-coaching – lesson observation review sheet

Useful websites

www.curee-paccts.com/

www.tda.gov.uk/teachers/induction/cedp.aspx