

Unit 9:

Coaching and mentoring



Teacher Education
through School-based
Support in India

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Introduction

Most of us have at some point in our lives benefited from the generosity of a friend or family member who has listened to us as we have struggled to come to terms with a challenge or a problem. In this unit you will learn about the qualities associated with coaching and mentoring, some of the skills and techniques associated with them, and how to use them in your conversations with teachers, children and their parents and/or guardians.

Increasing international evidence demonstrates that leaders can significantly improve the performance of their organisations and communities through coaching and mentoring (for example, Barnett and O'Mahony, 2006). By applying such strategies, leaders can significantly improve the performance of the individual being coached or mentored, while contributing to the success of their organisation. In schools, especially those that do not earn revenue, leaders rarely have control over the resources but they do have the ability to create a school culture that values everyone in the school and emphasises the importance of relationships. Practising coaching and mentoring in your school and sharing the skills with colleagues will contribute to richer relationships between teachers and children, which will directly impact on the quality of learning and achievement.

During your work on this unit you will be asked to make notes in your Learning Diary, a book or folder where you collect together your thoughts and plans in one place. Perhaps you have already started one.

You may be working through this unit alone, but you will learn much more if you are able to discuss your learning with another school leader. This could be a colleague with whom you already collaborate, or someone with whom you can build a new relationship. It could be done in an organised way or on a more informal basis. The notes you make in your Learning Diary will be useful for these kinds of meetings, while also mapping your longer-term learning and development.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- facilitate and take part in a conversation with a member of your staff or another colleague where you are both in agreement about the outcomes of the discussions that take place
- mentor colleagues
- hold coaching conversations.

1 What coaching and mentoring have in common

Most people speak of coaching and mentoring as if they were the same thing. While they are two different approaches to working with individuals and teams, they do have one important thing in common. Both depend for their effectiveness on being able to develop strong, trusting relationships with the person who the coach, or mentor, is helping. Learning how to hold consensual conversations is really important in forming such relationships.

A consensual conversation is one in which the two speakers are in harmony. While the purpose of their conversation may not be to seek agreement, they do agree about how they will:

- listen to understand each other
- show true interest in what the other person is sharing
- show respect and value for the other person and for the views they express.

As school leaders, you may be used to having people agree with you just because of who you are. Holding consensual conversations may therefore be a skill that you may have to learn and practise often!

It is important to remember that two colleagues casually talking with each other about their work is simply a 'chat'. When their conversation is deliberately designed to help one of them address a problem or seize an opportunity, it could be described as a 'purposeful conversation'. So what's the difference between a purposeful coaching conversation and a purposeful mentoring one?

Activity 1: What sets coaching and mentoring apart?

Make notes in your Learning Diary about what you think the difference is between coaching and mentoring.

Now read the following two collections of definitions. When you have finished, look back at your own definitions and see if you want to adjust them before reading the discussion that follows.

The coach

1. 'The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.' (Downey, 2003)
2. 'We believe that coaching is primarily about performance ... The core concept of our approach is that the individual or team being coached already has the resources within them to move forward and that the coach's primary role is to help them access these resources.' (The School of Coaching, undated)
3. 'Coaching is about performing at your best through the individual and private assistance of someone who will guide you to keep growing.' (Gerard O'Donovan)
4. 'Unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.' (Whitmore, 2003)
5. 'Coaching is about developing a person's skills and knowledge so that their job performance improves, hopefully leading to the achievement of organisational objectives. It targets high performance and improvement at work, although it may also have an impact on an individual's private life. It usually lasts for a short period and focuses on specific skills and goals.' (CIPD, 2009)
6. 'A professional partnership between a qualified coach and an individual or team that support the achievement of extra-ordinary results, based on goals set by the individual or team.' (ICF, undated)
7. 'Coaching is directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and development of skills by a form of tutoring or instruction.' (Parsloe, 1995)
8. 'Facilitating the unleashing of people's potential to reach meaningful, measurable goals.' (Rosinski, 2003)

The mentor

1. '**MENTOR:** 1. *capitalised*: a friend of Odysseus entrusted with the education of Odysseus' son Telemachus. 2. (a) a trusted counsellor or guide; (b) tutor, coach.' (Merriam-Webster definition)
2. 'Mentoring is a developmental relationship between a more experienced individual, a mentor, and a less experienced partner, a mentee. Through regular interactions, the mentee relies on the mentor's guidance to gain skills, perspective, and experience.' (Menttium, undated)

3. 'Mentoring is a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else. We all have a need for insight that is outside of our normal life and educational experience. The power of mentoring is that it creates a one-of-a-kind opportunity for collaboration, goal achievement and problem solving.' (USC CMIS, undated)
4. 'Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.' (John C. Crosby)
5. 'Mentoring is a term generally used to describe a relationship between a less experienced individual, called a mentee or protégé, and a more experienced individual known as a mentor. Traditionally, mentoring is viewed as a dyadic, face-to-face, long-term relationship between a supervisory adult and a novice student that fosters the mentee's professional, academic, or personal development.' (Donaldson et al., 2000)
6. 'The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.' (Benjamin Disraeli)
7. 'A mentor typically performs multiple roles, beyond that of an advisor. A mentor makes a special and often personal investment in the career development of a protégé. Often, a mentor is also:

- 'A teacher – helping the protégé develop critical skills and hone unique talents.
- 'A role model – providing an example and modeling best practices.
- 'A friend – providing crucial psychosocial support and encouragement.' (Arizona State University, undated)

Discussion

The mentor is usually an experienced specialist in their chosen field and, ideally, is also a wise person who has lived an interesting life. They bring to their mentees their considerable experience and knowledge of the subject to be discussed. Typically, they will come up with answers to questions and solutions to problems. The best of them though, however, have the ability to ask really good questions that help their mentee come up with their own answers. However, the mentor has in mind what the answer is. Over time they act as our guides on a road that they have already travelled.

As a professional, you will either choose your mentor or have them chosen for you. Your conversations on the phone or face to face could sound like this 'This happened today and I don't know what to do,' or 'I am really struggling with how to understand this concept.' A mentor might say, 'I think it might be a good idea to...,' or 'So this is what you need to understand....' A coach almost never would!

Most of us have benefited at some time from the support of a mentor in our personal or professional lives. In almost every family there is a wise 'uncle' or 'aunty' who is consulted before any life-changing decision is taken. As a school leader, you will certainly have to undertake this role, whether it is

supporting a colleague through a crisis or helping them improve their classroom practice.

A coach is there to help you to come up with your own answers to issues that you are struggling with. Their most common tool is the question and their most valued characteristic is the quality of their listening. The job of a coach is to draw out the thoughts, ideas and concerns of the coachee (the person they are coaching). They do this first to help them decide what exactly they want to talk about. Thoughtful questions as a consequence of listening intently are accompanied by regular feedback to the coachee, replaying what they have said in order to help them 'hear' their own thoughts and ideas. The coach's persistent refusal to contribute their own ideas is essential for the coachee to come up with their own solutions, not those of the coach themselves!

The coach's only agenda item should be to help the coachee to understand more clearly what they want to achieve and what they need to do. Internationally, many school and business leaders have a coach with whom they meet regularly. As a school leader, you could be coaching a newly appointed colleague starting their journey as a teacher. Your most common request is likely to be, 'Tell me about ...,' while your most common habit will be to sit still and say nothing. This may be the biggest challenge of all for you in learning this new role.

At times, the conversations may touch on personal issues. It is important to remember, however, that your purpose is to help the individual solve a professional problem with a view to improving their performance.

Activity 2: Who do I need to listen to?

In this activity you should think about the sorts of challenges you and your colleagues face in school that would benefit from one or more purposeful conversations. Work on the first part of the activity alone. You might wish to encourage others to offer their ideas for the second part.

Reflect on the following prompts and jot down your thoughts in your Learning Diary:

- What are all the different jobs people do in your school, whether they are paid for doing them or not? Include parent helpers as well as cleaners.
- Identify the sort of issues or incidents that have arisen for them in the last week, such as the high wind creating more dust, student absences, late students disrupting the first lesson.
- Consider what sort of conversation is most likely to be fruitful and where would be most suitable to hold your meeting.

Discussion

The reasons for talking with someone about issues that might impact on their performance are so various as to make it difficult to catalogue them. Usually,

however, it is likely to relate to something that has recently been troubling someone, without any obvious solution coming to mind. It could relate to an unexpected challenge, a new responsibility, a difficult professional relationship or simply a job that they know they are not doing well enough.

Remember that coaching conversations can take place in a corridor, a canteen, a playground or even on the bus going home. Your office, if you have one, is probably the worst place to try to talk to someone, because of the power issues associated with that environment. The subject of the conversation will often determine the venue. Mentoring someone to create learning displays would probably best be held in a classroom, while addressing the under-performance of one of their colleagues will need to be somewhere where neither of you will be disturbed. Often the best answer is to walk and talk.

Now copy the table below into your own notes, add more blank rows and fill it in.

Colleague role	Issue/incident/opportunity	Type of conversation: coaching or mentoring	Venue	Commentary

Discussion

The Coaching Matrix here is partially filled in to provide an example of how to complete it. Every leader's matrix will be unique and will change week by week.

Colleague role	Issue/incident/opportunity	Type of conversation: coaching or mentoring	Venue	Commentary
Teacher	Family illness	Mentoring	Anywhere where they can have a cup of tea and not feel uncomfortable	You will want to be as supportive as possible to the member of staff without breaching the rules by which you are bound
Subject head	How to deal with an under-performing member of staff in their department	Coaching/mentoring	In their office or classroom, as long as you will not be disturbed	Although it may be necessary to provide some guidance, the aim is to help the head of department to come up with the solution to a problem they have been avoiding all year. This conversation is not about the under-performance as such. It is about developing the skills and confidence in the subject head to tackle the issue
Helper	The quality of litter collection noticed on a recent walk around the school	Coaching	The corridor/classroom that prompted the conversation	This is a normally conscientious member of staff with high standards

2 Preparing for a conversation with a purpose

Good coaches and mentors share many values and practices. They make sure that the place, time and mood are right. The purpose of the conversation usually determines where to meet. While sometimes the session can be for just a few minutes, normally it will be at least half an hour.

The coachee or mentee needs to know that this conversation is focused entirely on them. As a coach or mentor you should therefore choose a time and place to suit them, and where they won't be disturbed.

There are some really important dos and don'ts regarding the setting of the conversation:

- Turn all mobile phones onto silent and put them away.
- If you are sitting, arrange the seats at an angle to each other and far enough apart so that the mentee or coachee doesn't feel intimidated. This is especially important if the conversation is between a man and a woman. Do not sit behind your desk!
- If you, as the coach, need to take notes, you should ask if it's acceptable. (You should also check whether the coachee wants to take notes as well.)
- Maintaining eye contact is really important, but if the coach finds it difficult then they should choose a point just above the eyes to focus on.
- Agree how much time you will spend together.

And now it is time to have the conversation!

Preparing for a conversation as a coach

From the moment you start the session, your only focus should be the person sitting with you.

Your first job is to make your coachee feel at ease. After you ask them what they want to talk about, just **listen**. When they pause, say 'Tell me more about ...'

Stay as still as possible. Anything that distracts the speaker will stop the flow of their thoughts. Watch how they sit and how they hold themselves. Try to **mirror** their shape in how you sit without being artificial. You should subtly mirror their body shape when they change position, for example when their hand moves to their throat or they lean forward with hands clasped.

Coaching can be very tiring, because you have to listen so hard. You need to provide feedback to the speaker on what they are saying, so you sometimes have to work very hard at remembering. Don't be worried about taking notes of a few key words or phrases that you have heard. Coaches normally ask

permission, in the form of 'Would you mind if I took a few notes?' When you give feedback, as you should regularly, use phrases such as 'When you began, you talked about ... Then you went on to describe ...', 'Which of these interests you most?' and 'What would you like to focus on to start with?'

This early stage can take quite a while, because the first idea that the coachee talks about may very often not be what is uppermost in their mind. Don't be hasty and push them too soon. Allow the conversation to take its natural course.

Once you are confident that your coachee is clear about what they really want to talk about, you are probably ready to establish with them what they want the outcome of the conversation to be. This might take the form of the following statement: 'So by the end of the session, I would like to ...'. To do this you will need to explore with them what a successful outcome would look like. By getting the coachee to visualise the outcome, it gives them something concrete to work towards.

Throughout the session, watch how the coachee's expression changes and how their hands move. These are important clues to their feelings. But most importantly, listen really closely to the words that your coachee uses: for example, 'I feel **utterly** unsupported', '**No one cares** about the children, really' or 'He **always** acts like that when he is challenged.' Your response to statements such as these could include:

- 'Just now you used the phrase, "always". Is it that what you really meant?'
- 'Can you tell me a little more about that?'
- 'Did you mean no one?'

Coaches call this form of enquiry activity 'breaking the code'.

Your final task as the coach is to agree the outcome of the session and what the coachee is committing to. Get them to write down the actions they intend to take and agree a timescale within which they will be completed. Your session should always end with the coachee making a tangible commitment such as 'In the next three weeks/tomorrow/before we meet next time, I will ...'

By summarising their thoughts and clarifying any remaining uncertainties, your coachee will be much more likely to choose a next step that they are comfortable with adopting and realistic enough to be do-able! Finally, repeat to them what they have committed to and agree the date for your next coaching session.

Preparing for a conversation as a mentor

Activity 3: How does a mentoring conversation differ from a coaching one?

Bearing in mind the differences in the definitions of coaching and mentoring that you read above, what do you think would be different from the coaching session above if it was a mentoring discussion? Make notes in your Learning Diary.

Discussion

Putting your mentee at ease is just as important for the mentor as it is for the coach with the coachee. Because you are taking on the role of a more knowledgeable professional, offering your experience and expertise, it is possible that your mentee could be really intimidated by you if you don't start things off well. It is therefore even more important that you remember that if you remain seated behind your desk, it won't matter how warm your smile is or how confident your handshake is – your wisdom will not leave the room with the person who needs it most! The smile in your eyes, the way in which you draw the mentee into the room, how you settle them comfortably and sit with them – all these things will make starting the conversation much easier.

As before, it is courteous to ask for permission to take any notes and make it clear that the mentee can make notes too, if they wish.

It doesn't matter how you introduce the conversation, but it is likely it will be as a consequence of a previous interaction:

- 'When I bumped into you at the DIET ...'
- 'When we were talking the other day ...'
- 'When I popped into your classroom yesterday ...'
- 'When you joined us, we agreed that we would have a weekly chat to ...'

As you help your mentee to work out how to take their next step, your aim is to help them to reach a successful outcome. You may well take a more active role and begin to bring your experience and expertise into the conversation after you have listened to their concerns and thoughts. It is very important to remind yourself of a simple rule, however. If the idea is yours rather than theirs, then they won't own it. And if they don't own it, they won't succeed in making it happen. As a mentor you should not provide the solution, but be the conduit for the discovery.

As before, the mentee should establish what they want to do. To help them with this, it is often helpful to summarise what you have heard, what your contribution has been and what areas you have covered together. You should then agree the outcome of the session and what your mentee is committing to.

3 Coaching upwards

Now read *A Moving Drama* and respond to the questions about it in Activity 4.

A Moving Drama: a one-act play

The characters:

- Ashok, a good and honourable secondary school principal.
- Zahir, his conscientious, loyal friend and deputy principal.

The two main characters are stuck in traffic on a Thursday night bus home at the end of a long day.

Ashok	You know I told you about the TESS-India leadership units? Well, I've been studying one. It's interesting, and the message is clear – I should be spending more time walking around the school and visiting the classrooms. I recognise the value of this, but it's almost impossible with the size of my in-tray and the district officer breathing down my neck.
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The bus jerks forward and then comes to a sudden halt, waking up his vice principal sitting next to him.

Zahir	Haan? Sorry?
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Ashok	I was just saying I don't have time to visit the classrooms. Where can I find the time to walk around the school and help teachers! I'm an administrator. I already take my own tenth grade Mathematics class.
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Zahir	I know that! You're never late for the lesson, you are almost always smiling on your way to the classroom and you enjoy teaching your children almost as much as they enjoy being taught by you! Think about the impact you could have on the children if you were to spend time in the classes of other teachers.
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Ashok	Yes, but ...
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Forgetting protocol, Zahir interrupts Ashok.

Zahir	But sir, don't you remember talking to me about your own principal, his relationship with the boys
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and how he was always dropping into your classroom?

Ashok

Times have changed. He didn't have half my paperwork!

Someone presses the bell for their stop and Ashok is saved from an increasingly uncomfortable conversation. They are quiet for a few minutes until they entered their colony.

Ashok

I apologise, Zahir. I'm just tired and grumpy. Too many papers, too many reports!

He is unusually silent as they walk towards their colony. When they stop outside the entrance of his block, Ashok breaks the silence.

Ashok

Actually, I have been thinking that I would love to spend more time in other teachers' classrooms. I know I didn't tell you, but when you were at the block training last week, I went out to find Mr Banerjee. I didn't see him in his classroom, even though the children were there. I eventually tracked him down reading the newspaper in the staff room and sent him back to his class. That got me thinking about what it is like for our students. So I spent the next hour going in and out of classrooms. While Rehnuma was obviously pleased to see me and welcomed me in to her classroom, most of the others wondered why I wasn't in my office! I am sure if I do this regularly it will make the school better for the students. But how am I to manage it? Administration, teacher support, talking to students and visiting the classrooms!?

Zahir

Why don't we talk about that on Sunday? Let's just enjoy our weekend with our families. You know I will help you!

Activity 4: Coaching upwards

Coaching upwards is what the best Vice Principals do instinctively. There is a story of one Vice Principal who was happiest when the Principal introduced one of the Vice Principal's ideas as their own. Your task as a leader at whatever level is simply to work to enable students to be the best they can be.

1. Having read *A Moving Drama*, put yourself in the place of Zahir. Imagine it is Monday morning and you are about to meet up with Ashok, your Principal. Just how will you help him to find the time to visit his teachers' classrooms?
2. Where will the time come from?
3. Are there things that he does at the moment that he could do differently, or in less time?
4. Are there some things that he should not be doing at all?
5. How are you going to start the conversation?
6. Most important of all, how are you going to behave when you sit down with him?

Using your Learning Diary, prepare for the session by answering the above questions.

Discussion

Mentors and coaches don't have to be more senior, older or even more experienced. They are chosen for many reasons – for example:

- because they are valued for who they are
- their reputation goes before them: someone else has recommended them because they have benefited from speaking with them
- they are a friend or close colleague.

In *A Moving Drama*, the coach is both a friend and a colleague. The fact that he is less senior than the person he is coaching is irrelevant. While his manner shows that the coachee is more senior, there is no question about the respect that both have for each other.

Zahir would not have to know the answers to questions 2, 3 and 4 himself. His role is to help Ashok think them through and come up with his own answers. He would need to make this clear at the start of the conversation by saying something like 'Have you thought more about the issue you raised with me on the bus on Friday evening?'

4 Qualities needed in coaches

Activity 5: The coaching leader

1. Read [Resource 1](#). Identify in your Learning Diary which aspects of the knowledge, personal qualities and actions described in the resource will:

- enhance your capacity as a leader
- be required to be a really effective coach or mentor.

2. Either on your own or with a trusted colleague or friend, reflect on:

- which of the professional qualities you already have as personal strengths
- which quality you could develop to enhance your ability to hold productive purposeful conversations.

Discussion

Clearly all of these qualities will enhance your capacity as a leader, but a surprising number are also required to be an effective coach or mentor. These include:

- knowing about codes of conduct, professional ethics and secular values
- having the strategies to promote individual and team leadership
- understanding the significance of interpersonal relationships, and how to create a positive culture and climate focused on vision
- being able to enthuse, inspire, develop and sustain individuals and teams
- demonstrating integrity, respect and high moral standards
- building a collaborative learning culture and treating people fairly, with dignity and respect.

Activity 6: Developing new coaches

1. Using the matrix you completed in Activity 2, identify coaching opportunities with two members of your school community who have asked for your help or who you believe need support. If possible, one should be a member of your teaching staff and the other a member of the administration or support staff in your school. Choose those whose issues are not too large or personal. Decide whether these are likely to be coaching or mentoring conversations, and then find an opportunity to talk to the individuals concerned, agreeing a time and place to meet.
2. Now take a deep breath – it is time to be a coach or mentor! Before you begin, refresh your memory of the various tips and ideas in this unit. Perhaps write yourself a short aide-memoire on a piece of card to have with you in the session.
3. Record your reflections in your Learning Diary as soon as possible after you have finished the sessions. In what ways do you think you either

assisted or made it less easy for the coachee or mentee to find their way towards a resolution to their issue? What would you change next time?
4. How might you gather the feelings of your coachee or mentee?

Discussion

It is probably easier to think of all the things you did wrong or could have done better, but do try to spend a few minutes thinking about the things you did right.

If it is the first time you have tried this technique, the atmosphere may well have been awkward and strained. Don't be put off. The power relationships involved are always likely to make it difficult on the first few occasions, particularly with someone who is not part of the teaching staff.

If your coachee or mentee does not avoid you over the next few days, you can be assured they have not been harmed by your conversation! If they smile at you or share their progress ahead of the next meeting, you should be very pleased. Do not attempt to follow things up outside the next planned meeting.

5 Summary

This unit emphasises the importance of developing purposeful relationships with members of the school community to create a consensual environment in which children and teachers thrive. This can be done through mentoring or coaching techniques, some of which have been presented in the module. They are intended to provide you with a skill set or to enhance your already existing capacity to bring about continuing improvement to standards in your school. Coaching and mentoring are both powerful techniques that you (as a school leader) can use to harvest the potential of your teachers and help transform them into the excellent teachers and leaders you want for your school.

6 Resources

Resource 1: Draft National Professional Standards for Indian School Principals

Area 5: Personal Values and Attributes

Knowledge

Knows about:

- Codes of conduct, professional ethics and secular values
- Strategies to promote individual and team leadership
- The significance of interpersonal relationships
- How to create a positive culture and climate focused on vision

Professional qualities

Is committed to:

- Personal credibility and presence, being a role model for the whole school
- Being visible and accessible
- An ability to lead change
- Leading by example
- Risk management

Is able to:

- Enthuse, inspire, develop and sustain individuals and teams
- Negotiate, influence and manage conflicts

Actions:

- Demonstrates integrity, respect and high moral standards
- Develops and maintains a culture of high expectations
- Builds a collaborative learning culture
- Treats people fairly and with dignity and respect

7 Related units

- TDU 4, *Leading learning and teaching*
- TDU 8, *Leading teacher professional development*
- TDU 14, *School self-evaluation*

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