

# Mentoring & Coaching: Consulting for Capacity Building

Building schools' capacity in developing mentoring and coaching skills is a key part of the National Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Capacity Building Strategy. This short paper outlines a project that aims to develop clarity about the nature of effective mentoring and coaching in order to secure coherence, excellence and a positive impact on teaching and learning in the next phase of development of the National CPD Strategy. Philippa Cordingley and her team from CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education) lead and co-ordinate the project with support and guidance from a reference group of practitioners and an advisory group, which includes Dr David Leat (University of Newcastle), Dr Hazel Hagger (University of Oxford) and Professor Anne Edwards (University of Birmingham).

- to promote mentoring and coaching as a means of improving teaching and learning;
- to develop understanding of the core principles and characteristics of effective approaches to mentoring and coaching as a framework for CPD providers and facilitators, CPD co-ordinators and other school leaders to work towards;
- to illustrate ways in which schools could use CPD activities to enable teachers and others to use mentoring and coaching as a means of professional and school development; and
- to build on the existing approaches to mentoring and coaching which are embedded within a range of national strategies.

**The objectives for the project are:** A recent international systematic review<sup>1</sup> of the impact of collaborative continuing professional development on classroom practice identified a range of benefits associated with particular kinds of CPD. The benefits were wide ranging; from increased self-efficacy (teachers feeling like they could really make a difference) to an emphasis on teaching with less telling; from motivation and a willingness to take risks to a deeper commitment to regularly accessing research and evidence. Consistent throughout the review was a

clear focus on and evidence of improved learning outcomes for pupils. Also consistent were key characteristics of the models for CPD that could be linked to such benefits.

- opportunities for collaboration with both peers and experts;
- observation, feedback and shared interpretation of classroom experiences;
- processes to encourage, extend and structure professional reflection and dialogue;
- sustained programmes which enable teachers to embed new practices in their own context; and
- scope for teachers to identify their own starting points based on their own analysis of their pupils' learning needs.

## They were:

The CPD models featuring these characteristics *and* linked to evidence of improved outcomes for teachers and pupils were based around well-developed arrangements for specialist and peer support. Although the processes are given different names in different contexts, the terms *mentoring* and *coaching* seem to capture the broad spectrum of related activities in this approach and have been identified by national policy-makers as being important forms of CPD in schools.

## Clarifying terms

Early work in the project has focused on developing a framework for building common understandings about different aspects of mentoring and coaching. We have been approaching this from four different angles: activities, roles, purposes, and contexts.

Both coaching and mentoring involve drawing on a wide range of **activities** matched to the particular needs of the individuals who are being supported. In some cases activities are used more predominantly by coaches than mentors and vice versa and/or more by specialist coaches and mentors than peer coaches as shown in figure 1 - overleaf.

In thinking about **roles** it is helpful to explore what a mentor or coach might *offer* to support learning:

<sup>1</sup>Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI) with GTC, NUT and CUREE October 2003 How does collaborative CPD for teachers of the 5 – 16 age range affect teaching and learning?



A **mentor** is an experienced and trusted adviser, normally a teacher or leader with experience of the role or organisation into which the mentee is being introduced. In education, the role is commonly associated with both professional and personal responsibilities.

A **mentor** may offer expertise and professional wisdom on pedagogical or leadership matters, providing support in the development of new skills, whilst also advising on concerns about general welfare and career choices. A mentor will support an individual as s/he experiences shifts in professional identity, taking an active role in defining the learning agenda at the start of the relationship in the light of their additional knowledge and experience, but gradually enabling the mentee to take an increasingly active role in shaping their own learning. A mentor, drawing on the expertise of a range of colleagues (e.g. subject specialists), will act as a broker and communication channel to construct a coherent learning programme for the mentee. Mentors might make recommendations that coaching be included in a

learning programme. They might also act as coaches but this is not necessarily the case.

A **specialist coach** offers expertise to help teachers review and develop established practice or integrate new ways of doing things. This might for instance, relate to a curriculum innovation or pedagogical approach (e.g. Thinkin Skills, Assessment for Learning). The coach will be more knowledgeable and expert in the particular innovation or approach and will offer support for implementation and evaluation of the new practice. A specialist coach may be from an external organisation but might equally be a more senior or more junior colleague within school.

**Peer coaches** offer each other a commitment to reciprocal learning with integrity and mutual support during that process. Peer coaching is linked to specialist support and functions to extend or embed such support in day-to-day practice. For example pairs of practitioners will make a formal agreement to work together to follow up specialist inputs on aspects of learning and teaching. The reciprocal

commitment to learning together is very helpful in creating a safe-to-fail environment. Most often, peer coaching will take the form of a sequence of (i) building a shared understanding of learning goals, (ii) joint planning and tightly focused classroom observation (often using video) followed by (iii) structured dialogue and analysis of the activities under observation. Peer coaching is most effective when it is sustained over a period of time, preferably at least one term.

A need for mentoring might emerge within a coaching relationship but would be pursued outside it.

They also appear to occur in different **contexts**. Mentoring is common in the support of initial teacher training and education (ITE), in the support of induction for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and in supporting teachers moving into leadership roles. Coaching may also feature as a part of mentoring in these contexts but is more likely to form part of ongoing professional and skills development.

A **learner** being mentored or coached has a particular role and some responsibilities too. They must take an increasingly active role in setting their own learning agenda and analysing their practice. They are responsible for responding constructively to the questions and/or suggestions of mentors and coaches and for thinking and acting honestly on the way their skills and understanding are developing.

The **purposes** of mentoring and coaching appear to be distinctive:

**Coaching** is normally used to support the process of reviewing established or emerging practice. It is focused on innovation, change or specific skills

**Mentoring** is usually concerned with supporting practitioners whilst they make a significant career transition; for example with becoming a teacher or school leader.

#### **Initial Teacher Education**

Mentoring, coaching and tutoring exist as three closely related strands of activity throughout initial teacher education. The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) is encouraging regional ITE partnerships to develop increasingly explicit approaches to mentoring, coaching and tutoring and to support and train those who take on the roles of mentor, coach or tutor. Their aim is for regions to use the shared circulation and cross-moderation of practice as a vehicle for creating increasing coherence, first regionally and ultimately nationally.

#### **Newly Qualified Teachers**

NQTs draw upon the support of mentors, coaches and tutors depending upon their particular needs. There is a strong emphasis on moving away from dependency and passing through the standards towards a long-term cycle of continuing professional development. As NQTs' practice develops, so their progress towards increasingly active participation in coaching relationships grows. However, NQTs are still able and even required to work both within mentoring and coaching frameworks when experiencing difficulties.

#### **Developing Classroom Practice**

Throughout their careers, practitioners will encounter new understandings about teaching and learning and developments in the curriculum that may require them to extend their teaching repertoire. Coaching is a strong feature of the Key Stage 3 and Primary National Strategies and has been used effectively in the introduction of new pedagogies such as CASE and CAME (Cognitive Acceleration through Science/Maths Education) and Thinking through Geography/History. Advanced Skills Teachers may employ peer and specialist coaching in their repertoire in working with colleagues. Training Schools often have well-developed mentoring and coaching frameworks.

## Leadership Development

Mentoring and coaching both feature in several stages of leadership development. Mentoring is seen as a particularly important aspect of support for colleagues who are new to leadership roles. People who are beginning to work as school leaders have significant experience of school leadership as a member of the school community and are thus better placed than trainee teachers to identify their own learning needs, although they too will rely more upon a mentor than a coach in identifying the learning agenda. More established school leaders draw on both coaching and mentoring as they tackle major new strategic changes. Many National College for School Leadership (NCSL) programmes include mentoring and coaching.

### Who can be a Mentor or a Coach?

Our development work is seeking to identify the skills required for acting as a mentor or coach from the activities set out in figure 1. The skills are hard to acquire and evaluate but they are crucial to success. Many researchers and providers of mentoring and coaching emphasise that poor mentoring and coaching are often worse than no professional development at all because they can destroy confidence or build dependence. In order to combat this risk many providers put in place frameworks such as formal learning agreements to inhibit poor practice and scaffold good practice.

It may be possible to identify key stages of progression in developing the necessary skills. This could involve an individual starting with being coached, working through reciprocal coaching with peers, followed by specialist coaching of colleagues and eventually achieving sufficient experience and expertise to be a mentor. Thinking about CPD in this way raises some challenging questions. What arrangements are needed to support practitioners to become effective mentors and coaches? Is it possible to accredit this kind of learning and experience?

What is clear is that both coaching and mentoring draw heavily upon skills in facilitating the learning of pupils and colleagues in their organisational contexts. We think we are also discovering that being a mentor or a coach is itself a rich source of continuing professional development in which the process of making tacit knowledge and expertise visible and explicit for a colleague to access creates an opportunity for deep reflection and learning for both participants. This resource does not yet appear to be viewed strategically.

### What else can you tell us?

We would like to learn more about the skills and processes involved in mentoring and coaching and to discover models of effective mentoring and coaching in practice. If you can offer feedback on the content of this paper, or insight into what it takes to be an effective mentor or coach please contact the project team. We would also like to hear from you if you can indicate schools, groups of schools and other partnerships where effective mentoring and/or coaching takes place.

### We look forward to hearing from you.



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