CHAPTER 5

RESPONDING POSITIVELY TO COACHING AND MENTORING

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Standards addressed

- Q8 Have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation, being prepared to adapt practice where benefits and improvements are identified.
- Q9 Act upon advice and feedback and be open to coaching and mentoring.
Introduction

Teachers are not born, they are made. They improve their practice by learning. To learn, we need to be open to criticism. To be an effective teacher you need to be prepared to critically reflect on your practice and to adapt it in an innovative and creative manner. You must be observed teaching and be involved in discussions about your planning and preparation. You must work with experienced practitioners on monitoring, assessing and reporting on learners’ progress. Ultimately you must be open to criticism from other teachers and be able to respond to this. This process is often referred to as coaching and mentoring. This chapter will establish what we mean by coaching and mentoring and analyse how the process of mentoring can encourage you to become reflective and innovative in your practice.

A thought

Throughout history the individuals who made the greatest impact, those producing the most outstanding achievements, have always been self-motivated. The most successful entrepreneurs and business leaders are always those who have acquired superior self-motivation skills. An important part of the coaching and mentoring process is to help performers find, harness and enhance their self-motivation. (MacLennan 1999: 19)

However, Blandford (2005) suggests that to become successful teachers, ‘Trainee Teachers need support in school from mentors who are qualified to do the job and able to devote time to it’ (in Child and Merrill, 2005).

What is coaching and mentoring?

Standard Q9 requires you to be open to coaching and mentoring but what is the difference? Downey (1999) suggests that:

Coaching is an art in the sense that when practised with excellence, there is no attention on the techniques but instead the coach is fully engaged with the coachee and the process of coaching becomes a dance between two people moving in harmony and partnership. (In Parsloe and Wray 2000: 41)
In other words, coaching is a process in which the learner’s performance develops and improves as a result of being supported by someone who has the subject knowledge, skills and techniques required in the area in which the coaching occurs (Parsloe and Wray 2000: 42). The DfES (2005) defines coaching as:

... a model of professional development designed to support and accelerate teachers’ learning. It provides ongoing collaborative support for processes such as planning, trialling, reflecting on and evaluating lessons with the objective of enhancing teaching and pupils’ learning. The focus is on deepening specific skills within a supportive and challenging relationship. (p. 4)

Mentoring has its roots in Greek mythology where Athena, the goddess of wisdom, crafts and the domestic arts, took on the form of Mentor, who was Odysseus’ wise and trusted counsellor. The story goes that while Odysseus was away from home for ten years fighting in the Trojan Wars, Mentor was entrusted to become the guardian and teacher of his son, Telemachus. From this it became a Greek custom to pair young boys with older, wiser and trusted counsellors, usually a friend of the boy’s father or an older relative. It was hoped that the boy would emulate these knowledgeable and experienced men. Such wise and trusted counsellors have since been known as mentors. Murray (2001) defines mentoring as:

a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or more experienced person with a less skilled or less experienced one, with a mutually agreed goal of having the less skilled person grow and develop specific competencies. (p. xiii)

According to MacLennan (1999) mentors will have the pedagogical acumen to provide you with the support you need to develop your new skills as a classroom practitioner. Parsloe (1999) suggests that a good mentor is someone who is a good motivator who can advise and instruct without interfering or imposing solutions. A good mentor allows the learner to make mistakes and encourages the self-management of the learning process. S/he should be adept at assisting in the evaluation process by being an effective questioner and listener without being judgemental. Therefore coaching is essentially an enabling process while mentoring is a supporting process (Parsloe 1999: 34). The key difference is that coaching helps performers to unlock their ability by learning with someone while mentoring is provided by someone from whom performers learn (MacLennan 1999: 4–5). You will experience both during your training.

A thought

Have you ever consciously acted as a coach or mentor yourself? For example, you may have coached youngsters in a sporting technique or an aspiring musician to tackle a difficult passage. Or have you ever done something which has made you
think that you sounded like your parents, modelling their behaviour and mannerisms unconsciously? We are both consciously and unconsciously open to coaching and mentoring and our actions are influenced by those around us. However, our personalities also help us to define our behaviour and actions.

Consider ways in which you could coach or mentor in a lesson that you are teaching or supporting. Add these to lesson plans and check, once the lesson has been delivered, the effectiveness of your own mentoring.

The Centre for Understanding Research Evidence in Education (CUREE) suggests that coaching and mentoring make a significant contribution to a learner’s professional development and are an effective form of continuing professional development (CPD) to ‘embed change and sustain improvement’ (DfES 2006). CUREE has produced a national framework for coaching and mentoring which shows that many features of coaching and mentoring naturally overlap. As a trainee teacher, you will be mentored by an experienced practitioner, normally the class teacher or specialist subject teacher in your placement school, who has taken on the role of supporting your development. It is also likely that you will be supported by other members of the school community acting as coaches.

The DfES (2006) outlines ten principles for effective coaching and mentoring. These describe coaching and mentoring as being ‘a learning conversation’ with an experienced practitioner who will help you to identify and clarify your learning needs and support you in your gradual development as a teacher. These practitioners should help you to reflect on, review and refine your practice and provide you with opportunities to develop and extend your repertoire through the sharing of planning and by observing them or other practitioners. They should encourage you to experiment and to ‘take risks’ while helping you to develop your teaching performance and professional skills over time in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

To summarise, you should not feel isolated in your training. You should have a mentor and access to coaches and mentors who are there to work with you. They will support and assist you through talking with you and by providing opportunities for you to observe excellent modelling. You should be encouraged to take risks and to try out new ideas or theories, all within an atmosphere of trust. Your learning environment must be low risk in which mistakes are seen as part of the process of learning and becoming an effective and even a good teacher. Mistakes and weaknesses must be recognised and reviewed and your targets agreed but, at the same time, your strengths and successes should be celebrated. However, this is a two-way process and you need to be highly proactive in the training process.

The world’s most effective trainer

It is vital for you (and indeed your mentor) to understand that you are not expected to become a clone of your mentor. The role of your mentor is to be a facilitator to help you
to develop as a teacher by encouraging you to make your own choices, decisions and mistakes (Kortman and Honaker 2002: 20). If you want to achieve your goals you need to be self-motivated; MacLennan (1999: 33) suggests that ‘the world’s most effective trainer is you!’ and that self-motivational factors include:

- being focused on a purpose;
- having an intense sense of direction;
- having an opportunity and a requirement to learn new skills on an ongoing basis;
- being willing to experiment;
- having a feeling of total ownership;
- having a willingness to do whatever is required to achieve results;
- developing a willingness to persist in the face of adversity.

(MacLennan 1999: 10)

So, what is expected of you? Being open to coaching and mentoring is not enough; you cannot be complacent and need to be proactive in determining your own learning and development experiences in order to achieve them. You can adapt Shulman’s (1987) cyclical principles for the knowledge required for teaching when you reflect on your own learning and on the feedback provided following coaching and mentoring activities that you have experienced. The cycle is comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, reflection and new comprehensions (in Hoult 2005: 15). In the opinion of Argyris and Schön (1975) ‘reflection is essential to educators’ capacity to think not only about their practice but also about how they think, their implicit theories, and the sense they make of their experiences’ (in Kortman and Honaker 2002: 25). Therefore, to be effective, reflection must be related to action, which can both precede or follow the reflection (Wragg 1994: 125).

Observations

It is part of your responsibility to make focused observations of others to identify ways of improving your practice. Wragg (1994: 78) suggests that ‘looking at one’s own or someone else’s teaching can be an important part of initial teacher training’. The aims of classroom observation are to:

- analyse what is actually going on in the classroom, e.g. how space and time were used, what sort of questions were asked, what were the pupils actually doing;
- develop an understanding of what are acceptable standards for classroom teaching and what is not acceptable;
- broaden your knowledge of the variety of teaching and learning styles available;
- understand in what circumstances pupils will and/or will not achieve;
- discover the ways in which teachers perceive and think about classroom events.
Achieving focus

To improve teaching through observation you need to decide the focus of the observation with your school’s coach or mentor. It is essential that you are clearly aware of what you are going to observe and how you are going to observe it before you go into the classroom. You must make written records of your observations and then, with reference to appropriate reading around your focus, evaluate and reflect on the observations that you have made. Finally, discuss these with your coach or mentor. You must be sensitive to the fact that such observations in school can lead very quickly into areas which are sensitive for the school, the teachers and its pupils. Thus observations should be conducted in a sensitive and unobtrusive way and with due regard to the confidential nature of the activity. Remember that both teachers and pupils have the moral right not to be observed or questioned by you and you should respect this at all times. If the observation produces results which are in any way contentious they should be discussed with the school staff before they are committed to paper.

The focus of observation activities should be related to the Standards and to areas identified by your coach or mentor. They include observations of both pupils and teachers. Observation of pupils is included as ‘by studying what pupils do, observers can learn a great deal not only about the impact of teaching on the learner, but about the child’s perspective and the influence that individual and groups of children have on the lesson’ (Wragg 1994: 87). Observations of other teachers does not necessarily mean that you just

**INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. Look at a recent evaluation. Did you set such specific SMART targets or are they vague? (SMART is the acronym for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related goals.) Did you set yourself too many targets? Rewrite the evaluation being more specific about these targets, ensuring that they are SMART. Discuss this with your mentor and review a subsequent lesson plan taking account of the targets that you set yourself. Remember to increase the challenge and expectations that you set yourself over time.

2. Look at two or three of your most recent lesson evaluations and target-setting activities. Do you find that you keep setting the same targets for your development? If so, discuss this with your mentor and consider how you might address these targets successfully. For example, you might observe other teachers in the school who are successful with this issue and discuss with them how they deal with it. You could ask your mentor to teach a lesson that you planned together addressing your targets. Don’t forget that there are lots of great books and useful articles out there designed to help you to address such issues!
observe them teaching; you could, for example, observe them supervising an activity outside the classroom, marking work or presenting at a parents’ evening or school event. Alternatively you might observe them by focusing on a specific area such as inclusion, classroom management or their use of questioning. Some possibilities are outlined below.

**Inclusion**

- How curriculum support assistants are used to support teaching and learning.
- How pupils with special educational needs, children for whom English is an additional language, or gifted and talented children are supported in the mainstream curriculum.
- How teachers differentiate to encourage learning and to motivate pupils, for example by task, by outcome, by the use and deployment of resources and materials, by assessment or by organisation (seating).

**Classroom or behaviour management**

- How assertive discipline can be used to promote acceptable and good behaviour as a tool for classroom management.
- How behaviour modification encourages effective discipline and control in the classroom.
- How teachers use factors such as the amount of time allocated, room layout, whole-class and group work and different activities to ensure that pupils’ interest and attention is maintained.
- How the teacher at different points manages transition effectively during the lesson, day or week.
- How the teaching and learning of pupils is affected by pace.
- How teachers either avoid or deal with confrontation.
- The effects of rewards and sanctions on control, motivation and discipline.

**Other foci**

- Verbal interaction (what teachers and pupils say to each other; who does the talking and about what; question and answer, choice of vocabulary and the pitch of the voice).
- Non-verbal interaction (movement, gesture, facial expression).
- Professional skills (questioning, explaining, arousing interest or curiosity).
- Teaching styles.
- Strategies relating to the assessment for and of learning.

To follow up these observation activities you could interview teachers. Of course, you also need to read the research around the issues addressed to enable you to reflect on these and put the theories into practice.
Planning and teaching collaboratively

Being able to plan is an essential aspect of learning how to teach. One of the best ways to learn this skill is by working collaboratively. Good coaches and mentors should encourage you to plan and teach collaboratively and should be prepared to model activities. However, as mentioned above, you are not expected to become their clone.

Time should be set aside regularly to enable you to check through your planning but also to observe the planning of your mentor. This will enable you both to review and reflect on the activities planned or proposed and for you to discuss or to anticipate possible problems with the planning. It is also a good idea to teach collaboratively and then review this teaching together following the lesson and to plan follow-up lessons. Another good activity is for you to teach using your mentor’s plan with your mentor making a reflective observation of this or by your mentor teaching using your plan with you making an evaluative observation of this.

GROUP EXERCISE

Think about a lesson that you have recently evaluated and, using this evaluation and the lesson plan, discuss your reflection related to the targets set and consider different solutions to issues that arose in the lesson. Share different evaluations from other group members.

Self-reviewing techniques

Good teachers continually develop theories about what it is they are doing. By using self-reviewing techniques such as critical evaluation of your own teaching you can identify specific ways of improving your practice. Writing lesson evaluations helps you to record the journey through your development and allows you to review your thoughts and to refer back to earlier practice and experiences. It is useful to keep some form of log book on your development as a teacher so that you can easily refer back to it to trace key ‘moments’ in your development.

It is important for you to evaluate your teaching after the lesson as soon as you can do so in a calm and reflective manner. It is important to concentrate on whether learning has taken place within the lesson, and not to put too much emphasis on discipline or classroom management problems. Attempt to evaluate the lesson honestly by being reflective and analytical and by focusing on the targets that you set yourself. In order to make progress it is just as important to build on existing
strengths as well as to overcome weaknesses and with this in mind, it is vital that you identify good features of the lesson along with areas for improvement. If the execution of the lesson differed in any way from the lesson plan, the reasons for this should be considered and discussed. You should evaluate your lesson by answering sets of reflective questions, which, according to Kortman and Honaker (2002: 25), ‘creates opportunities for individuals to reflect aloud or be heard by one or more colleagues and to be prompted to expand and extend thinking through follow-up questions’.

The following set of questions could be used as a guide to encourage reflection. For your own development, you should aim to think of more or alternative questions:

- Were all the pupils actively engaged in their learning throughout and what evidence do you have for this?
- Were pupils motivated and enthused by the materials you chose to teach? Did you structure and present your material effectively?
- What did pupils learn and how do you know?
- Did you plan for the effective use of formative and summative assessment? How do you know?
- Were the materials and/or activities appropriate, stimulating and challenging? Why do you think this?
- Was the pace and timing right? How do you know this?
- Were your questions asked or phrased well, well-timed or at an appropriate level? How do you know?
- Was there too much or too little teacher input? What makes you say this?
- What were the learning problems and what was particularly successful? How do you know?
- What will you need to do differently next time and how do you know this?

Application to teaching

Observe your subject mentor teach a lesson and together evaluate this. Work together to plan the follow-up lesson which you should be prepared to teach.

Look at one of your lesson evaluations and the lesson plan for which it was written. Working with your subject mentor, reflect on this evaluation and plan a follow-up lesson. You will probably want to discuss how areas for development will be addressed and plan pupil tasks and activities to help address your targets. Your mentor will need to observe and evaluate you teaching this by discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the plan.
Setting goals and challenges

Whatever you do, do not focus on too much at once: pace yourself and increase the challenge within the targets that you set yourself. Then outline your new personal targets for the future and plan the follow-up lesson. Alternatively, you could look at your original lesson plan and annotate this by using questions such as those listed. (The problem with this method is that you tend to evaluate everything without focusing on your specific targets.)

Reflecting on your teaching and planning is integral to the learning process. To effectively evaluate your teaching you must set SMART targets for the achievement of these. Setting yourself such goals enables you both to evaluate your practice and to consider strategies for developing this practice. It is essential that SMART targets are set as a result of discussions with your mentor; however, you should be clear that they are your targets and not specified or imposed by your mentor. It is vital that you have ownership and that they are what you are comfortable with and clear about what you need to work on. For example, following discussions with her mentor and her self-evaluations of her own teaching, Jenny found that her questioning was disjointed and did not challenge the pupils. She produced a SMART target reflecting on this. She was specific about her problem – developing questioning and encouraging pupils to think more and thus be more challenged – and was encouraged by her mentor to write her questions down, thinking about possible answers and probing questions. Jenny also decided to observe other teachers, focusing her observation on the questioning of pupils. In addition, she read some materials and documents suggested by her mentor. To check she was achieving her goal, Jenny video recorded herself both at the start of the trial and after a week to see how she had developed. The results were positive, as she was able to use feedback from other mentors and the video recording to help her to develop her questioning skills.

Reading and researching into practice

Whatever you do, you cannot develop as a good teacher without understanding the theories related to the practice and then putting these theories to the test in your teaching.

By thinking about the events, the observed person achieves a greater awareness of self and an increased understanding of how he or she enacts the role of school leader. This awareness and understanding encompasses areas such as personal and professional values and priorities, theoretical and applied knowledge, preferred modes of action, and strengths and limitations one brings to the leadership task. As participants carry out multiple cycles of observation and interviewing, they are able to examine how policies, practices, and resources are linked as a system in their school. (Barnett 1990, in Kortman and Honaker 2002: 25–6)
Reading around the areas that you are addressing through your goal setting helps you to move along the reflective cycle by encouraging you to review your beliefs and your practice in the context of other practitioners’ experiences.

**Summary**

- Be proactive in your own learning and development by always being open to coaching and mentoring and by seeking help and advice.
- It’s a good idea to evaluate by annotating your lesson plans and then using these to plan subsequent lessons but sticking to your foci.
- Be prepared to observe other practitioners with the focus on your own targets; evaluate how these practitioners were successful.
- Don’t try to address everything at once – set yourself SMART targets.
- Review lesson plans and units of work regularly to make sure that different styles are catered for and that you are being creative and innovative.
- Ensure that you have regular meetings and feedback from your mentors.
- Be creative in how you evaluate yourself, for example using video to help you to reflect on your practice.
- Be prepared to do some reading round the issues being addressed.

**Key reading**


**References and bibliography**


Website