

## **The benefits and impacts of a coaching and mentoring programme for teaching staff in secondary school**

Paul Allan, 11 Elwyn Road, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 2EL  
Email Contact: [elwynroad@hotmail.com](mailto:elwynroad@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This study attempts to produce evidence to establish whether teaching staff in schools in the UK, who undertake coaching as part of their continuous professional development, will enjoy benefits and impacts upon their professional and personal lives. There is a paucity of empirical research on this subject. Coaching in schools is at an early stage and there have been calls by professional bodies to produce evidence of its benefits and impacts. This study does this by conducting an intensive coaching programme for three teaching staff in a secondary school wishing to develop coaching: a senior and a middle manager and a junior member of staff. The study was approached as an action research project. Data were collected in a variety of ways, including formative evaluation reviews, data from reflection notes and from an extensive summative feedback evaluation questionnaire. It also included third party evidence. This has resulted in the production of evidence that appears to support some of the claims of a number of professional organisations and writers

**Key Words:** Coaching, teachers, continuous professional development, evidence of benefits, impacts

### **Introduction**

There were several key factors that motivated this study. Firstly, it is acknowledged that there is a paucity of empirical research on this subject. Secondly, coaching in schools is at an early stage and there have been calls by various professional bodies, including the General Teaching Council (2005), to produce evidence of its benefits and impacts. Finally, as a former senior leader in schools (to Community College Principal/Head teacher level), I was keen to contribute something that may be of use to the development of coaching and mentoring in education. More generally, a number of writers argue the importance of assessing the benefits of coaching. Zeus (2002, page 25) states, "Coaching is an emerging profession and there is a lack of empirical studies testifying to its effectiveness" and Hall (2006) quotes Professor Lane of Middlesex University:

*People are coming up with unsurprising results that coaching is wonderful. What we really need is to ask is whether interventions really have an impact, and whether some of the measures are just perceptions.*

(Hall, 2006, Page 22).

Therefore, this study attempts to produce evidence to establish whether teaching staff in schools who undertake coaching as part of their continuous professional development, enjoy various benefits. Are the claims that the experience will have a positive impact upon their professional and personal lives true?

In order to find out, I coached three teachers (two female and one male) over the period February to May 2006: a senior manager; a middle manager (head of subject department) and a junior member of staff (two years experience). I focussed on the following research question: *What are*

*the benefits and impacts to staff who undertake a coaching programme as part of their professional development?*

This paper sets out the context of the research, the key literature that influenced the study, the reasons for the methodology used (action research), the methods of data collection, the limitations of the study, the main findings and some recommendations from the research participants about setting up coaching as part of continuous professional development in schools.

### **Context of the research**

The study took place between February and June 2006 in an 11-16 mixed secondary school that serves an urban area in the South West of England. Pupils come from a broad range of backgrounds, including some areas of significant deprivation. This school had taken part in my initial pilot case study that focussed on their interest to introduce coaching and mentoring as part of staff and student development initiatives.

The school's last Ofsted<sup>1</sup> judgment in 2004 was very positive. It noted that the school has the capacity to be more effective. Overall, the school is improving after previous difficulties and the 2006 GCSE results were the best ever with 41% of Year 11 student achieving 5 or more subjects at grades A-C.

This school is set in the context of a local authority that has the intention of supporting the development of coaching and mentoring throughout its schools. This has been pursued through the work of a Task Group (of which I was invited to be a member) that focussed on a number of issues including:

- Supporting and developing leadership and management skills
- Developing understanding of coaching and mentoring
- Identifying the impacts of coaching

### **The literature on benefits and impacts**

There is little literature available on this subject. Much of the literature that does exist extols the virtues and potential of coaching and mentoring. There is little evidence about how coaching has achieved tangible and robust evidence of pupil or staff improvements in performance.

The Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE, 2005) has issued material to assist schools that wish to develop coaching and mentoring. Although CUREE has conducted case studies of a small number of schools that have introduced coaching and mentoring, they also confirm that further work needs to be done to measure the benefits and impacts of coaching programmes.

Rhodes (2004) contributes evidence of the benefits of coaching and mentoring in supporting the professional practice of teachers. He refers to a number of potential benefits to teachers in receipt of coaching and mentoring support, including enhanced confidence and self esteem through the mutual support offered by colleagues. He also suggests (see Rhodes and Houghton Hill 2000) that the engagement of support using coaching and mentoring activities by teachers may assist

---

<sup>1</sup> The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) is a non-ministerial United Kingdom government department, established on 1st September 1992. It is responsible for inspecting the standards of schools and teachers in England.

with the transfer of teacher learning to student learning, resulting in greater impacts within the classroom and the potential to raise student standards and attainment.

Some perceived benefits and impacts for teaching staff are also identified by Thomas et al (2004), following his practical experience of coaching and mentoring in schools. They are:

1. Enhanced personal effectiveness ( work smarter, not harder)
2. Improved performance of students
3. Encouragement of reflectivity and professional growth
4. Improved understanding of how to motivate others
5. Creates more effective teams
6. Develops techniques for constructively challenging unhelpful behaviours, including negativity and limiting beliefs
7. Improves tolerance of adults and young people
8. Enhances energy and job satisfaction
9. Opens creative thinking pathways
10. Enhances awareness of the setting of realistic goals for adults and others

### **Methodology**

There are a number of models of action research, many of which are based on McKernan's (1991) premise that action research is research by practitioners to solve their own problems and to improve their practice. Therefore, the researcher is personally involved in the issue or problem being studied and seeks to change or improve a situation. In this case, the school had expressed an interest in working with me to explore ways of developing coaching and mentoring and how it could be of benefit to them.

McNiff (2003) argues that a commitment to educational improvement is a major feature of action research. This commitment involves developing relationships with people that help them to grow and that this results in 'educative relationships.' According to McNiff (2003, p.19), this is "helping people to live in life affirming ways," which is consistent with a key coaching principle. Therefore, action research is a suitable approach to a study of the impact of coaching upon teaching staff in schools and how this may lead to educational improvements.

Cohen and Manion (1994) also refer to action research as a procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. Whilst in traditional qualitative research the researcher stands outside the research and observes what other people are doing, McNiff (2003) notes that in action research, the researcher can also be the centre of the research with a focus on self improvement. In this study I coached the staff and received feedback from them in order to reflect upon how I could improve my own practice.

Another reason why action research was chosen is that the intervention does not necessarily need to finish when the research ends. Participants can continue to review, evaluate and improve practice. It was my aim that when my research had finished, the school would have the opportunity to be able to continue to develop its coaching programmes and how to measure its impacts. This is now happening in a variety of ways (see Appendix below).

### **Data Collection**

To prepare the three teacher participants, an initial briefing/induction meeting was arranged. The aim of the meeting was to provide an understanding and awareness of the coaching process and the basic principles of coaching. It also enabled the participants to explore their expectations of what coaching could do for them and to establish ground rules. This was important in dealing

with confidentiality and ethical issues. A draft ground rules paper was discussed that covered a wide range of ethical issues, including a commitment to adhere to the European Mentoring and Coaching Council's Code of Ethics. This meeting also clarified the six methods used to collect data. These were:-

1. **The initial coach preparation form.** By completing these forms, participants were able to analyse the issues on which they wanted to focus and to relate them to their strengths, weaknesses and their values. This was helpful in preparing for the coaching sessions and in building a profile of the participant. Zeus (2002 p. 88) emphasises the importance of this in order to assist in the overall summative assessment of the coaching programme:-

*It is crucial that the learner recognises that the (initial) assessment is not only a useful means of exploring and 'diagnosing' his or her unique situation, but is also a building block in structuring a personalised development plan or desired outcome list.*

Some of the topics that participants identified in their 'desired outcome list' at this stage included achieving:

-  Better work/life balance
-  Greater job satisfaction
-  Better working relationships with colleagues and students
-  Improved professional practice

To assist with the initial assessment and to build the profile of the participants, the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire (1987) was also administered.

2. **Coaching session preparation forms.** Each of the participants completed the preparation form following each coaching session and used it and the reflection note to record what action they intended to take prior to the next coaching session. They also noted what they had achieved.
3. **Reflection notes.** This enabled participants to reflect on the coaching sessions. I pointed out that I would also be completing a reflection note of each session and that it would be useful to exchange these to compare and discuss prior to the next session. The practice of both the coach and the learner completing reflection notes at the end of each coaching session enabled us to 'warm up' prior to each session by reflecting on what had happened at the last one. It helped to maintain trust and rapport and provided formative feedback of the impacts of the coaching.

The importance of reflection as part of the coaching process is supported by a number of writers. Rhodes (2004) stresses the importance of self reflection as a learning tool, which is also emphasised by Thompson (2001) who suggests that coaching without reflection will not enable learning to take place. This is supported by West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998) who point out that both coaching and reflection are required in order to produce a consolidated and internalised learning experience. The idea that reflection appears to be closely linked to learning is supported by Moon (1999) who offers a definition of reflection as: *'a mental process with purpose and/or outcome that is applied to a relatively complicated or unstructured idea for which there is not an obvious solution'*. (page 152).

4. **A formative group evaluation meeting** that took place approximately half way through the programme. Shotton (1998) argues that when making impact assessments it is critical

that they are formative as well as summative. His argument is that it is relevant (in the context of basic education aid programmes) in enabling participants to learn on the job and be more responsive to local needs. This could also apply when assessing the impact of coaching on participants regarding their ability to develop their professional practice in relation to the needs of their organisations.

5. **An end of programme summative evaluation** adapted from a 180 degree feedback questionnaire that each participant completed on their own.
6. **Evidence from third parties (the external perspective).** Participants were invited to ask two people – a colleague and a close friend or relative - to complete a simple set of questions that sought to establish whether or not there had been any impact on behaviour and attitudes following the coaching programme.

It is important to note that the data generated from these sources is consistent with action research methodology. Cohen and Manion (1994) state that action research is a step by step process that is constantly monitored through a range of methods including questionnaires, diaries, interviews and case studies. Nevertheless, the study did have limitations, which I sought to address as follows

The findings were therefore, derived from the following data:

- 16 coaching sessions; six with one; five with the two other participants.
- 29 reflection notes: eighteen by me; five by one; two by another and four by the third participant.
- 11 coach preparation forms: 4 by one; 3 by another; and 4 by the third participant
- The notes from the formative evaluation meeting
- Three summative feedback questionnaires
- Two third party questionnaires.

### **Reliability, Validity and Bias**

In any research it is important to ensure that the data is reliable and as valid as is practicably possible. Reliability is the extent to which a test or a procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. Validity relates to the degree to which the data is accurate and whether the data collection methods measure what they are supposed to measure. I will now address how I attempted to make the data as reliable and as valid as I could. I will also address the issue of bias.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the views of the participants of the impact of the coaching upon them. As I was the coach and the researcher, it was important to ensure, as much as is possible, that my views did not influence those of the participants. I did this in a number of ways:

- Interviews or questionnaires, as data collection methods, conducted on a one to one basis, were avoided. Mason (2002) illustrates the difficulties of eradicating bias because she argues that however structured the researcher makes them, interviews are always social interactions and *'you cannot separate the interview from the social interaction in which it was produced'*, Mason (2002, page 65). Furthermore, the participants indicated that they all preferred to complete the summative evaluation questionnaire on their own as they did not want to be influenced, not only by me, but by the others in the group.
- The summative evaluation consisted mainly of questions formulated by an independent body that use it as 180 degree feedback from participants of coaching to their coaches. It is

designed to identify areas of strengths and improvement and the impact of the coaching programme upon the participants.

- The use of reflection notes is a highly personalised way of participants' capturing their thoughts and feelings about their experiences. It can be carried out in their own time and place. Moon (1999) discusses reflection as an evaluative tool and refers in particular to part of the process as '*dialogic reflection*' (page 75) that involves the participant stepping back from the event and exploring with the self the reasons for the event. Reflection was a major tool in this study to capture data. Therefore, it was difficult for me to influence this process.
- Mason (2002) notes that validity of research can be increased by providing a multi-dimensional perspective of a phenomenon. The use of different sources of data is a way of corroborating evidence. As I presented the data from the variety of sources listed above, I was able to cross check perspectives and opinions, thus allowing triangulation (a multi method approach to data collecting) to take place. Furthermore, these perspectives were captured formatively over the time scale of the coaching programme and this strengthened the multi method approach of corroborating the evidence. In this way, triangulation was used to interpret findings and test alternative ideas to enable a full and balanced study that pointed the analysis towards clear conclusions. The use of triangulation is also important regarding the reliability of data.
- The use of third party evidence, as part of the summative evaluation, also helped in combating bias and in corroborating the evidence from the participants.

### **Findings and Conclusions**

The main findings focused on the professional and personal benefits and impacts that the coaching programme had upon the participants.

It may be helpful here to illustrate examples of a 'benefit' and an 'impact' from the data. The examples also make clear the distinction between the two:-

#### **One participant benefited as follows:**

*Coaching has helped me to clarify my thoughts and my proposed actions.....where I am going and how I am going to get there. (from the summative questionnaire)*

#### **For another participant, coaching had an impact upon her behaviours/actions.**

*I am raising my profile in briefings. I am being more proactive in meetings. I lead more initiatives. I am giving presentations. (from a reflection note)*

When making conclusions about the data I also considered the extent to which benefits and impacts had occurred in relation to the claims of Thomas et al (2004) referred to earlier.

The data did not provide evidence to show that the coaching programme had created more effective teams (Thomas et al, 2004, Point 5). One participant in particular, led several cross school teams and some of the topics he raised at coaching sessions did relate to his management and leadership of these teams. However, whilst I gained the impression that some of his plans and targets had been in relation to how to lead, support and plan for these teams more effectively, the data showed no evidence that these teams had become more effective as a result of the coaching he received.

There was no evidence to show that coaching had improved the performance of students (Thomas et al, 2004, Point 2) but there was evidence from the data to show that the professional

performance of the participants had improved. This latter point was supported by the participants themselves and, more importantly, by third party evidence. My reflection notes lead me to believe that participants were becoming more skilled and confident in their work, thus leading to enhanced personal effectiveness (Thomas et al, 2004, Point 1). Two participants in particular believed that they had found ways of working with colleagues more effectively and in working smarter and not harder.

Two participants indicated that they had gained an improved understanding of how to motivate others (Thomas et al, 2004, Point 4). The data showed that they had successfully found ways of working more effectively with a range of colleagues and in harnessing their support in achieving tasks. This, for one participant, was a key aspect of a new professional role. The other participant was able to manage and lead an extra curricular project more effectively and harnessed and nurtured the voluntary support that was needed from colleagues. The data showed that the participants had been able to develop their professional relationships with colleagues in a variety of productive ways.

The data provided some evidence, perhaps indirectly, to support Thomas's Point 5, regarding tolerance of adults. Two participants, in particular, had a better understanding and appreciation of the school's management and communication systems and the constraints and pressures that are within it. Whilst initial perceptions had resulted in the feeling that aspects of their work had not been adequately supported by the school's leadership, coaching had provided new insights into how to make better use of the support systems that are already in place. There was no evidence to show that the coaching programme had resulted in improved tolerance in the young people with whom they worked.

There was strong evidence from the data, relating to all three participants, to support Thomas's Points 3 and 6: encouraging reflectivity and professional growth and developing strategies for dealing with negativity and limiting beliefs. Participants were more reflective and were committed to their professional development. They were also more aware of how negative and limiting beliefs can impair personal and professional growth. More importantly, they recognised when this was happening and how to deal with it.

The data showed evidence that all three had, to varying degrees, gained enhanced energy and job satisfaction (Thomas et al, 2004, Point 8). One participant had appreciated the opportunities that coaching provided to discuss plans and initiatives and to move them forward. In this regard coaching had provided a fresh impetus. Another participant was now more content with her role and how to cope with the demands of it; demands that were causing a degree of negativity within both work and personal contexts. Another participant, in particular, had developed a considerable appetite for her new role, which resulted in an enhanced sense of job satisfaction. This provided the motivation to apply for, and succeed in gaining, an even more challenging role within the school. The impact of the coaching programme had played an important part in providing the motivation to apply for the post and to prepare for the interview.

As discussed above, all participants benefited with regard to developing problem solving (Thomas et al, 2004, Point 9). This is well illustrated from the notes of the formative evaluation meeting, which referred to the fact that participants felt that coaching allowed them the time and space to think and reflect and therefore to develop more creative solutions. They referred to the fact that the normal life and culture of the school, which is not untypical of most schools, is that the pace and pressure upon staff allows little opportunity for quality time to plan and review. Lots of things are done 'on the hoof,' which in the words of the participants '*stultifies creative thought*'.

Finally, the data also indicated that all of the participants had engaged with the process of setting realistic goals and targets, (Point 10), as a result of coaching. All three indicated that they had

benefited from this. The goals that they had identified and committed to played a major factor in their successes.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Overall this study has produced evidence to support the research question, namely that the benefits and impacts to the staff who took part in the coaching programme as part of their professional development are:

- Enhanced personal effectiveness and the ability to work smarter and not harder;
- Greater reflectivity and professional growth;
- The development of techniques for constructively challenging unhelpful behaviours, including negativity and limiting beliefs;
- Enhanced energy and job satisfaction
- Improved problem solving skills.

The summative feedback questionnaires also asked participants to give advice about the best ways of setting up coaching, as part of continuing professional development, should the school wish to develop such a programme. There are a number of recommendations that arise from their comments and these are discussed below.

With regard to identifying suitable coaches, one participant stated that it would be important to choose willing, open minded colleagues who are able to establish trusting relationships. Another said suitable coaches would need to be selected. This accords with the recommendation from the formative evaluation meeting, where all three participants were of the view that it would be important for colleagues to pair up with someone with whom they have an affinity. They also believed strongly that what is important are the qualities of the person who is doing the coaching and not their professional status or what they have achieved in other contexts. This suggests that clear criteria should be identified regarding the qualities and skills that are required of the people who will be coaches.

The participants took the view that people who have experienced coaching should articulate its benefits so that others can 'buy in' to the process before the coaching begins. In addition, a clear explanation of the coaching process needs to take place before it starts and coaching needs to be given quality time: it should be seen as an important priority, within the busy life of the school.

When introducing coaching, its 'bottom up' empowering potential that can lead to significant personal and professional benefits should be stressed. In addition it should be made clear that coaching is a non-threatening but nevertheless rigorous and challenging process. It is not a soft option.

Coaching should not be introduced as a management/government initiative! In essence, it should be presented as something that staff can 'buy into' if they so choose. It is to assist them in the challenging and valuable work that they do: they will own and control the process. It is not something that is done to them: it is something that they choose to do to themselves.

One of the outcomes of this study is that the school is now training teaching and non teaching staff in coaching skills so that coaching can be established as an important part of its staff continuous professional development policy. The school also wish to develop coaching for its students. The accredited training programme that staff are following is shown as an appendix.

## References

- Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (1994), *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge.
- CUREE (2005), *Principles of Mentoring and Coaching*, Coventry: CUREE (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education).
- General Teaching Council (2005), *Teaching - Autumn Journal*, London: GTC publications.
- Hall, L. (2005), *Wise Council in Coaching at Work - Special Launch Issue*: London: CIPD.
- Honey, P. & Mumford, A (1987), *A Manual of Learning Styles*: P. Honey Publications, Maidenhead.
- Mason J, (2005), *Qualitative Researching*, London: Sage.
- McKernon (1991), *Curriculum Action Research: A handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner*: Kogan Page, London.
- McNiff, J. Lomax, P. & Whitehead, J. (2003), *You and Your Action Research Project*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Moon, J.A. (1999), *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Presage M (2005), *What mentoring means*: General Teaching Council Journal, London: GTC Publications.
- Rhodes, C.P., Stokes. M, & Hampton, G. (2004), *A Practical Guide to Mentoring, Coaching and Peer-networking*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Rhodes, C.P. & Houghton-Hill, S. (2000), The linkage Of Continuing Professional development and the Classroom Experience of Pupils: Barriers perceived by Senior Managers in some Secondary Schools, *Journal of In-Service Education*, 26(3), 423-425.
- Thomas, W. & Smith M (2004), *Coaching Solutions: Practical Ways to Improve Performance in Education*, Stafford: Network Educational Press.
- Thompson, M. (2001), Towards Professional Learning Communities? In D. Gleeson and C Husbands (Eds): *The Performing School: Teaching and Learning in a Performance Culture*: London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Shotton, J. (1998), *Education Research: Evaluating Impact*, London: Department for International Development.
- West-Burnham, J. & O'Sullivan, F (1998), *Leadership and Professional Development in Schools: How to promote techniques for effective professional learning*, London: Financial Times.
- Zeus, P. & Skiffington, S. (2002), *The Coaching at Work Toolkit*: Australia: McGraw Hill.

*Paul Allan is a senior manager and leader (including Principal of a Community College) with over 30 years varied experience in many aspects of secondary education, adult education and youth and community services - now a freelance coach, lecturer, trainer and consultant with a growing expertise in developing coaching and mentoring in organisations.*

**Appendix**  
**Accredited Coaching/Mentoring Course, Academic Year 2006-2007**

**Background and Aims**

*This course has been devised as a result of a successful coaching programme, involving a small group of key staff who have been working on an action research project during the course of the 2005-2006 Academic Year. The aim is to support staff in exploring coaching as a professional tool to: improve their professional practice; develop learning; improve their support of colleagues and develop their leadership skills.*

**Course Content: Underpinning Knowledge and Coaching Skills**

*Four two hour sessions covering:*

- History/background of coaching and its development within schools
- Coaching in relation to Mentoring, Counselling and other Therapies
- Coaching Models
- Coaching skills, tools and techniques: theory and practice
- The use of reflective practice in coaching: theory and practice
- Coaching processes and protocols; the ethics of coaching
- The evaluation of coaching: its benefits and impacts on individuals and organisations

*Each of these sessions will involve activities in which participants will practise the coaching skills, tools and processes that they will need for their coaching practice.*

**Coaching Practice**

*Participants will experience and practise coaching by being coached and by coaching others. This will involve: (NB a session is normally of 1 hour duration)*

- Being coached for at least four sessions.
- Planning, organising and delivering a coaching programme of at least four coaching sessions with two colleagues, i.e. carrying out a total of at least 8 coaching sessions.
- Being supported in their coaching practice by a coach/tutor for the equivalent of two sessions

**Time scale**

**Autumn Term:** The first two knowledge and skills sessions. Participants begin planning coaching programmes and undertake practical coaching sessions.

**Spring Term:** The second two knowledge and skills session and further practical sessions.

**Summer Term:** A concluding session to review the course, evaluate its effectiveness and plan any further activities. All practical coaching sessions to have been concluded by half-term. After half-term, participants to complete impact reports or assignments that will be assessed as part of accreditation by Plymouth University (Integrated MA Programme) or the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).