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Coaching: An Apprenticeship Approach for the 21st Century

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Abstract

Coaching, an apprentice-based approach to support professional and personal development towards achieving set goals, is a well-established practice in the fields of sports training and management and one of the fastest growing professional development methods in the education field. How the coaching partnership fosters leadership and improves practices that directly impact on the social/emotional development of students and their academic achievement is of interest to educators, policy makers and school communities alike. Recent findings have started to define the type of leadership that results from a coaching partnership, the lasting benefits on teaching quality and the positive impact on student performance. By reviewing and reflecting on the current literature on this apprenticeship approach, this article explores strengths and strategies that could further contribute to the organization of schools around high learning outcomes for all students while fostering leadership and accountability at the management, classroom and student levels.

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Coaching: Un Enfoque de Aprendizaje para el siglo XXI

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Resumen

Coaching, un enfoque basado en el aprendizaje para apoyar el desarrollo profesional y personal hacia el logro de los objetivos fijados, es una práctica bien establecida en los campos de entrenamiento deportivo y de gestión, y uno de los métodos de desarrollo profesional de mayor crecimiento en el campo de la educación. Cómo la relación de coaching fomenta el liderazgo y mejora las prácticas que afectan directamente al desarrollo social / emocional de los estudiantes y su rendimiento académico es de interés para los educadores, políticos y comunidades escolares. Hallazgos recientes han comenzado a definir el tipo de liderazgo que resulta de una relación de coaching, los beneficios duraderos en la calidad docente y el impacto positivo en el rendimiento de los estudiantes. Al revisar y reflexionar sobre la literatura actual sobre este enfoque de aprendizaje, este artículo explora las fortalezas y estrategias que podrían contribuir aún más a la organización de las escuelas de alto nivel de aprendizaje para todos los estudiantes, a la vez que fomentar el liderazgo y la responsabilidad en la gestión, en el aula y el alumnado.

Palabras clave: coaching, liderazgo y responsabilidad sobre los resultados

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Insights into the organizational systems, instructional practices and student academic behaviors in underperforming schools set the context for the needs and benefits of leadership and instructional coaching. These insights are grounded on three main facts: First, average school leaders spend most of their time on tasks that remove them from those that relate to instruction. The emphasis on management does not necessarily lead to increase student engagement and academic performance (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) Secretariat, 2013; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE), 2010). Furthermore, "the general underperformance of schools can be directly attributed to a failure to implement three simple, well-known elements: a common curriculum, sound lessons, and authentic literacy." (Schmoker, 2011). Second, there continues to be a need to better understand what high quality education and differentiation look like, as the following commonly found scenario illustrates: As the teacher delivers a carefully plan lesson, with clear learning targets, he organizes the students into collaborative teams to ensure differentiated instruction. However, a closer look at student behaviours will reveal that in one of the groups, students are busily and mindlessly filling our worksheets and a few other students are sitting in front of a computer, but neither the worksheet exercises nor the skills practiced at the computer are aligned to the lesson targets. The need for a better understanding of differentiated strategies and effective scaffolds are critical to ensure that all students work towards grade level competencies. (Schmoker, 2011; City, Elmore et al., 2009). Third, low teacher expectations are one of the main reasons of student academic failure (Loeb & Plank, 2008) and most frequently, the students who fall behind day in and day out, such as those seating in classrooms illustrated in above example, are recent arrivals learning the language of the school, students with limited formal schooling and/or students from disadvantaged home (Boykin & Noguera 2011, Soto-Hinman, 2009).

As a result, the academic experience of these students and that of failing schools presents a compelling need for improved school practices and thus avoid   a cycle of failure that as Canada expresses (Tough, 2009), should be avoided: "There's just no way that in good conscience we can allow poverty to remain the dividing line between success and failure in this country, where if you're born poor in a community like this one [Harlem], you stay

poor. We have to even that out. We ought to give these kids a chance." (Tough, 2009). The improvement of leadership through coaching is one of the strategies that can support the transformation of a school, as evidenced by growing body of academic papers reporting on successful schools (ICLE, 2010).

The Apprenticeship Approach

The apprenticeship approach to learning resonates with most educators. This principle acknowledges how in traditional cultures the apprentice learns from observing and working alongside a master and within an actual physical working environment. In this manner, the apprentice acquires skills, complex knowledge and forms of social behaviour in consonance with the culture of the working setting. The master guides the process and gradually releases responsibility to the apprentice as he or she performs the tasks confidently. This dynamic process includes five phases: 1) Modelling: The learner keenly observes the execution of a task or craft while listening how the master articulates all the steps with precision and using terminology and language specific to that trade. 2) Approximating: The learner experiments with the task or the craft under the guidance of the master. The master engages the learner in a reflective practice to examine his actions and prompting him to think and plan what he plans to do to improve upon them. 3) Fading: The learner, still within the safety net of the master's support, shows that he can innovate within the parameters he has been practicing 4) Self-directing: The learner begins to take ownership of the process of planning and executing the craft and only seeks the support of the master when needed and 5) Generalizing: The learner understands and masters the craft and demonstrates this mastery by applying the skills to other domains and /or innovating beyond the specific trade of the initial task (Hansman, 2001).

This apprenticeship is a dynamic process in which the master exerts an influence on the learner, but also one in which the learner interacts and influences the work environment. As the learner becomes more skillful in the job and demonstrates his talents, his contributions begin to be noticed and appreciated. At the end of the apprenticeship process, the learner has become an expert and a member of that work environment and prepared to lead a novice through the process. In this way, the apprenticeship process allows for the continued transfer, sharing and creation of knowledge and

skills. In addition, this approach can help a master to gain more complex knowledge or refine his skills at a deeper level. Thus, it is a continuous teaching and learning process where skills and knowledge are constantly created, shared, refined and refreshed (Barab & Hay 2001; Pratt, 1998).

Coaching: Definitions and History

Coaching is defined as "giving advice and instruction to (someone) regarding the course or process to be followed" (Merriam-Webster, online dictionary). It is a goal-oriented process by which the learner gains knowledge and skills towards the accomplishment of set goals. These set goals may also include the advancement of professional, the individual's psychological and subjective well - being and general life experience (Grant, 2005). Sometimes we use the words coaching and mentoring as synonym, but there is a clear distinction between them; whereas a mentor is a role model with experience that a learner might aspire to emulate, the coach becomes an expert partner and trusted advisor that encourages the learner to see the bigger picture, rethink a given assumption, or consider a new practice within the context of his particular school or context towards the accomplishment of clearly established goals.

The origin of coaching is rooted in the behavioral sciences and in the business literature. In 2005, Grant published an annotated bibliography citing a total 634 of peer-reviewed publications between 1937 and January of 2011. The study of coaching as a strategy of change through the understanding of the psychology of motivation and the value of good communication linked to productivity and growth has been extensively documented (Morgan, H. Harkins P & Goldsmith, 2005, Scott, 2004).

The research of the business industry into productivity and competitive models has also drawn from classical works, most notably the Japanese manual on martial arts The Book of Five Rings that was written around 1645 by Miyamoto Musashi and became a best seller when Donald Krause (1999) adapted it as a strategy and coaching manual for executives. And whereas coaching was initially promoted to address issues of low performance, the competition and fast pace of today's global economies recognizes the value and impact of coaching as a strategy for leaders and key personnel (Morgan, 2005). In the education field, the use of coaching to motivate, provide peer support and increase the knowledge and skills of school leaders and teachers

towards higher student achievement may have started later than in the sports and business fields, but today it is one of the most recognized leadership development practices for teachers, school leaders and Professional Learning Communities (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marzano, 2012; DuFour et al., 2006), despite the fact that the research supporting its effectiveness appears to be inconsistent (Reeves, 2009).

Learning Through Guided Practice

It is increasingly clear that the practices of reflection and continuous learning are essential characteristics of effective leaders. Today's fast-moving environment requires dynamic planning and the ability to create and share knowledge to respond to new ideas and new challenges with speed and precision. Therefore, school leaders and company executives benefit from the guidance of a coach when assessing the shifting realities of their environment as well as the underlying assumptions and culture of their organizations (Morgan, 2005; Senge, 2006). This ability, or as Scott (2004) states, the courage to interrogate reality, is key to the guided practice of coaching. In order to lead effectively, the school leader or the company executive needs to learn how assess without laying blame, seek the input of others to construct a shared vision and action plans that empower teams and individuals towards achieving shared goals and objectives.

Remarkably the word empowerment so popular in the last decade of the 20th century is hardly found in today's literature. By contrast, the term coaching has become increasingly popular. Is there a difference in meaning between empowering teachers and coaching teachers? In the best seller Zapp! In Education, Byham (1992) states that it is through the empowerment of a teacher that we empower students to think, make decisions and become responsible for their own academic progress. In his book, Byham offers a clear argument against professional development that is based on lecturing and turnkey training. He also argues against role-playing. Teacher empowerment equips teachers with the skills to be better teachers and build their confidence and motivation, but it requires repeated practice in the job. Thus, the importance of empowering teachers first and then, developing empowerment in the student.

Recent work in instructional coaching has shown that focused and actionable feedback from peers, consultant coaches and/or supervisors takes

a very active role in the improvement of instruction (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013; Danielson, 2007; Marzano 2012). In this context, instructional coaching encourages teachers to work hard, strategically and with perseverance to effectively respond to the challenges posed by high competency expectations (Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS), 2010; PISA, 2013) and the learning gaps of struggling students, against a more traditional and conformist approach of low expectations and modified curriculum, characteristic of traditional settings and still pervasive in many failing schools (Salavert, 2010). This type of instructional coaching empowers teachers who not only acquire content knowledge and skills to improve instruction, but and most importantly, as learners themselves, they develop the presence of mind and habits that accelerate learning in their students.

Leadership Coaching

Leadership coaching, a standard practice in most accomplished organizations is becoming a crucial training tool for today's school leaders who as a result of greater autonomy and results-oriented accountability, face increasingly complex and expanded responsibilities. Regardless of their years of experience, school leaders require additional support in order to successfully improve student outcomes and sustain a school's overall success. Some of these coaching practices include, for example, coaching principal to principal during a school's learning walk (LearningWalk[SM], 2004), coaching as a component of an aspiring principals university program (Darling-Hammond, 2007), or coaching by an outside expert and trusted advisor. In this partnership, the coach seeks to support the successful implementation of an action plan aligned to specific performance goals. As the conversations grow deeper and richer, the coach encourages the school leader to think about the effectiveness of the school structures and its systems as well as their effect on the learning environment, the actions of teachers and those of the administrators. According to Senge (2006), "some of these key interrelationships can be seen among the degree of teacher collaboration, and the rigor of the student learning environment"(p. 44). To that end, the role of a coach is to encourage the leader to consider the school's action plan within a bigger picture, such as the district goals and the demands of the current competencies, rethink a given assumption including,

for example, raising expectations for students with interrupted formal education, and when appropriate, lead the incorporation of cutting edge research practices through on-site professional development towards improved and lasting change.

The Leadership/Executive/Transformational Coach

The question of whether a leadership coach is a colleague from another school, an expert consultant or a university faculty is less relevant than the profile and skills of the leadership coach that are directly related to the expectations for the school and the performance goals of the school leader. According to the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE, 2010), an executive or leadership coach is an experienced leader with a history of making positive change; a visionary and goal setter with the capacity to grasp the reality of others and guide them in articulating their own vision and plan of action. This coach is a team builder and an effective communicator who can analyze and interpret data from a variety of sources, and most importantly, a professional who understands the value of feedback. That is, the coach knows when and how to provide specific and relevant feedback to enable school leaders make sound and timely decisions. Finally, an executive or leadership coach is an educator who believes in success for all students and acts accordingly. This coach supports programs that hold all students to rigorous expectations, and if necessary, guides school leaders in the reorganization of the school around effort learning education and the realignment of school goals and plan of action to ensure appropriate alignment with grade level outcomes for all students.

What is the Leadership Style that Results from Coaching?

The coaching partnership can be a transformative experience for school leaders and for their schools. School leaders see coaching as a way to continue to improve their own practice. They also recognize that as a result of this partnership they improve how to interact with their teachers, modeling the learning that they expect from them. In the context of creating and sharing knowledge throughout the school organization, these school leaders promote the type of learning environment defined by Tichy, (2002) as " […] interactive teaching in which the students [teachers and other

adults] are encouraged to process what they've heard against their own experience and knowledge. They then become the teachers, sharing their knowledge and insights with the leaders." This interactive quality between the school leader and teachers fosters collaboration, deeper conversations and ongoing reflection about school practices. Such interactions probably play a prominent role in favoring the emergence of a school culture that focuses on student learning. For instance, in describing the explicit and implicit aspects of leadership, MacBeath (2013) states that leadership is – "what leaders do when they accomplish well what is formally expected of them" and implicitly, leaders are "the conscience, or moral compass, of the community-doing what is right, just and equitable." (p.84). However, it is the tension between these two forms of leadership what enables this school leader to engage with its members and create learning communities (Jolonch, Martinez and Badia, 2013).

The desired transformative outcome of effective coaching has been succinctly summarized by Scott (2004) in one powerful statement, "the conversation is the relationship". It is through the power of fierce conversations that an organization can move from micro -managing, mediocrity and isolated activities to an organization with clear priorities, shared enthusiasm towards professional growth and a collaborative culture. The implications of how a school leader interacts with his or her staff, how he or she engages teachers in real conversations towards common objectives and a shared vision are some of the determining factors of continued school success. The evidence of the impact of fierce conversations which are the type of conversations between the coach and the school leader favors the conclusion that leadership coaching gives rise to the type of leadership that enables school transformation and sustainable change.

During the coaching process, school leaders become apprentices learning under the guidance of a trusted expert in their own workplace. The coach uses protocols that enable the school leader to practice and develop better listening and communication skills, as well as modeling and reflection routines towards the achievement of individual and organizational performance goals. This is a school leader who believes in the vision of the school and the people who shape his/her learning organization. This type of leadership is aligned with the highest level of executive capabilities, that Collins (2001) identifies as Level 5 type leader, in a hierarchy of five levels: 1. Highly capable individuals, 2. Contributing team members, 3. Competent

managers, and 4. Effective leaders. Effective leaders are capable of significant change, but change is often linked to their own persona and their own ambitions. By contrast, the impact of level 5 leaders is enduring; these are leaders who combines a high level of personal humility with an incredible ambition, but their "ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves" (Collins, p.21, 2001).

Another model that responds to improved leadership practices is the Quadrant D Leadership Framework: "Quadrant D leaders seek ways to change and improve the system. They are quick to recognize areas where there is greater potential to support student success, and they strive to create the systems to ensure that school community realizes that potential" (p. 29, ICLE, 2010). The leadership framework developed by the International Center for Leadership in Education conceptualizes the development of leadership in a framework set along a vertical (knowledge) and a horizontal (application) continuum and divided into four sections or quadrants. Within this framework, there are four types of leadership levels. The first two types, the Authoritative (A) and the Collaborative (B) run along the application or horizontal continuum, but whereas type A leadership focuses on management and tends to act independently based on a sense of positional authority, type-B leaders seek the participation of staff and students at all levels of the organization. As a leader acquires additional knowledge and becomes more reflective and innovative, collaboration and decision- making are enriched by additional possibilities, new programs and the incorporation of forward thinking research- based practices (Creative Leadership, C). Lastly, Quadrant –D leaders as indicated above, exhibit skills that combine experiences and knowledge, which make them adaptable and creative at the same time. In this school environment, there is evidence of distributive or shared leadership (Wilhelm, 2013; MacBeath, 2013) not only among teachers who take responsibility for a variety of tasks such as facilitating inquiry meetings, but among students who also take a significant leadership roles in the school and are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. The leadership of a Level-5 type or that in the D-quadrant is leadership style that school leaders should seek to develop, even when day-to-day demands and decisions may require to take actions that seem better fit for styles that belong to a different level or to a different quadrant.

Instructional Coaching

Instructional coaching is an approach to teacher training that aims at improving the quality and effectiveness of classroom practices towards increased student achievement. A distinct characteristic of coaching when compared to other forms of professional development such as turnkey training, is that coaching is job-embedded and takes places regularly over a period of time and in the classroom of the teacher receiving coaching. Instructional coaching can assist teachers in developing and delivering instructional strategies that are content specific, and they may be identified with their specific subject, e.g. Math coach, Literacy coach, Bilingual coach and/or a Technology coach. However, there is a general understanding of the roles that these coaches need to support, that is, build content knowledge and inspire teachers so as to foster their professional growth (Puig & Froelich, 2010).

Gains in skills and knowledge are accompanied by leadership development, which is a key characteristic of successful schools and successful school districts (Marzano & Simms, 2012: Heller, 2004). The coach may use a variety of strategies towards this goal, including the use of specific protocols to facilitate a presentation of a successful classroom practice at a faculty meeting, guided conversations following classroom observations on the implementation of a new strategy, or a collaborative review of student portfolios to discuss the effectiveness and the impact of a new practice. In the United States, teachers can apply for National Board Certification that is considered the gold standard of teaching (NBPTS, 2013). The application requires the submission of a portfolio that consists of a few selected lessons plans, student work and video clips as evidence for the gold standard instructional practices of the applicant. By offering the opportunity to video brief segments of a lesson and engaging in analysis, review, and feedback from a coach –and other peers, teachers aspiring to the national gold standards and those receiving coaching tap into their leadership potential and feel empowered by their own capacity and ability to improve professionally and also personally.

The Instructional Coach

Depth of knowledge in the content area, instructional experience in the teaching of the subject and strong interpersonal skills are essential traits of an instructional coach. In response to the rapid growth of instructional coaching and to ensure the implementation of research-based practices with accuracy and effectively, the International Reading Association (IRA) in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a position statement regarding the qualifications of a reading coach. This association emphasizes the importance of selecting as coaches teachers with expertise who also hold a recognized certification in their particular specialization, such as that of a reading specialist (2004). And the Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Center states that, "the job description of a literacy coach is as multidimensional as reading itself. One must possess the social skills of a seasoned politician, the knowledge of an ivy-league professor, the experience of a veteran teacher, and the flexibility of a gymnast" (FLaRE, 2008). These criteria are certainly applicable to instructional coaches across content subjects.

The instructional coach is also an expert who can facilitate the development and implementation of data driven lesson plans with evidence of student progress, such as 'quickwrites' posted on a 'parking lot' chart. He also guides the teacher in the use of formative assessments so as to modify, adjust, and extend the lessons as student advance in the study of the subject matter. Frequently, he demonstrates the implementation of the lesson through in-class modeling, which provides opportunities to observe the teacher, and most importantly encourages the teacher to try out and practice new strategies. An instructional coach may also guide the teacher through the steps on how to incorporate a language objective into a well-planned lesson so as to integrate the study of new vocabulary and language structures into the flow of the lesson to support the learning of second language students –as opposed to the practice of teaching vocabulary words in isolation (Chamot, A., 2009). Formative feedback is an essential component of the coaching process, but feedback may also be the specific focus. To that purpose, an instructional focus may gather low inference observations and then provide differentiated coaching with timely and constructive feedback according to the needs of the teachers to refine a particular practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013; Coggins & Diffenbaugh, 2013; Reeves, 2009).

Inquiry Teacher Teams and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)[1]

Under the guidance of an instructional coach, teacher teams can learn to analyze and triangulate data from different sources as they look closely at instructional practices and their alignment to the needs of the target students. For instance, a coach may help identify inquiry target groups, define benchmarks and long-term goals and facilitate or co-facilitate regular meetings of these teams throughout the school year (Salavert, 2013b).

According to City, Elmore et al. (2009), and Talbert & Scharff, (2008), the introduction of successful innovations in small scale can make a significant difference in the process of school transformation. These steps, which may seem small, can generate the critical force that leads to large-scale change when the school or the district has established the structures and systems that support these innovations. The theory of change behind this model postulates that to extend the sphere of student success in a complex organization, one must "stay small". That is, teacher teams work systematically and creatively –often with the support and guidance of a coach –a colleague, an administrator or a consultant, to improve the outcomes of a targeted group of students. Together, they drive the implementation of strategies that can work for their particular students and evaluate their impact towards achieving ambitious end of year learning goals. The outcomes of these teams then inform the instructional and/or organizational practices of the school thus creating the conditions for an innovating learning environment, and a school culture that promotes evidence-based student achievement (Salavert, 2013).

This counter-intuitive and paradoxical theory also applies to Professional Learning Communities or PLCs. These are teams that undertake sustained professional collaboration, making decisions and taking actions to improve school performance. However, Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) report that granting teachers greater responsibility regarding their jobs, including curriculum development, will not necessarily improve instruction, because there is a learning process, an apprenticeship /coaching type learning process that fosters the skills and collective responsibility to achieve shared goals for student learning (DuFour, 2006).

What is the Teaching Style that Results from Instructional Coaching?

During the coaching process, teachers –regardless of years of experience, acquire new knowledge and practice strategies that help them make teaching intentional and purposeful for their students. Teaching becomes less about covering a curriculum than ensuring that all students make progress towards competencies that are fundamental to their school success. As a result of the instructional coaching, teachers also feel better equipped to address diverse and challenging student populations, more confident in raising their academic expectations and more effective guiding them in the acquisition of the language of the school and the subject matter.

   A successful coach works strategically and intentionally to develop mastery in the learner, but they both know that their success depends on the support provided by the school environment, otherwise as Goodwin (2013, p.78) indicates "coaching can fall flat" and have no positive impact on student achievement. By contrast, when a school leader creates the time and the space for peer coaching among staff members, teachers exchange feedback regularly, role-play practices for each other, and strengthen collaborations that "the result is high-speed, high-quality teacher development" (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013, p.47). Some school leaders take the role of instructional coaches; Principal Jones, for example, leads as inter-visitations in her school to acknowledge and celebrate teacher practices (Salavert, 2013a). In this way, the apprenticeship process allows for the continued transfer, sharing and creation of knowledge and skills. In addition, their approach can help a master teacher gain more complex knowledge or refine his skills at a deeper level. It is a process of continuous teaching and learning where skills and knowledge are constantly created, shared, refined and refreshed (Barab & Hay 2001; Pratt, 1998).

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The Apprenticeship Model in the 21st Century Classroom

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Today's predominant view of education, as reflected on competency –based systems, is that every student has the ability and the right to learn regardless of their social, linguistic , or cultural backgrounds and experiences. It is increasingly clear that student effort and not necessarily aptitude results in school success (Resnick, 1998; Resnick, Spillane, et al. 2010; McConachie & Petrosky, 2010). This is the first of the eight principles that define today's

learning-centered classrooms. They assert the premise that every student has the capacity to learn. Measuring success based on hard work implies that the curriculum is the same for all students and that teaching should be organized for effort. The research around reading and writing by Calkins (2001, p.21) adds a discovery dimension to student effort when talking about "children as great world builders". Calkins' reading and writing workshop model embraces the principle of effort as well the other seven principles based on Dr. Lauren Resnick's (2001) research which include: clear expectations, accountable talk, recognition of accomplishments, fair and credible evaluations with systemic anecdotal observations and individual conferencing, in a classroom environment where children are authors, readers and writers thus creating an authentic and purposeful learning environment.

In order to set the conditions for a purposeful and constructive learning environment, schools must focus on the three variables that constitute the instructional core (City, Elmore et al. 2009), that is the teacher, the learner and the contents. These variables are interdependent and in constant motion. Thus, a change in any of these variables has an impact on others and on the final result. A student's academic success results from the quality and frequency of the interconnections between student, teacher and content. In a classroom where teaching is predominantly lecture-based and the students remain mostly receptive and passive learners, the interconnections among content/ teacher/learner are far less frequent that in classrooms where students understand the purpose of the lesson and actively work toward meeting its objectives. The teaching and learning flow in a student- centered classroom engages teacher and student in a constructive and formative partnership that influences the classroom environment in ways similar to those that exist in a coaching partnership and/or apprentice situations. These are classrooms where students are encouraged to reflect on their progress by sharing what they have learned and by asking questions about what they did not understand. In these classrooms, teachers use this ongoing formative feedback to inform their lessons in a continuous, differentiated and enriching loop.

Perspectives

Recent work in the education field has aimed at better prepare school leaders and teachers towards increased student achievement through coaching. Closing the achievement gap to ensure that all students meet the rigorous demands of today's competencies and to properly prepare them to succeed in today's global market remains challenging, but coaching offers a significant opportunity to develop the leadership capacities of school leaders and teaches with a direct and powerful impact on student learning. This article highlights several characteristics of leadership and instructional coaching that seem worth of attention.

They are as follows:
- One of the learning principles that certainly resonate with all educators is that of 'apprenticeship'. This principle acknowledges how in traditional cultures the apprentice learns from observing a master modeling and executing a task that he practices under his guidance.
- Coaching leverages leadership growth, which has a direct impact on a school's organization and culture. Leadership for learning results in an engaging school environment where students feel supported; an environment that fosters the acquisition of complex thinking and knowledge, stimulates students' intellectual curiosity and fosters the development of responsibility through effort, rigor and effective learning practices/strategies.
- The teaching/learning process is best illustrated by the quality of interaction between teacher and student. An effective teaching/learning process includes interactions rich with modeling, questioning, opportunities for practice, and the gradual release of responsibility that helps the student become an independent and life-long learner.

The systemic collaboration and actions around leadership and instructional coaching to improve student outcomes is characterized by a partnership built on an apprenticeship approach that stimulates the acquisition of knowledge and the mastery of skills and expertise in the learner. The reciprocity of this process also enables learner to influence his work environment including his colleagues while enriching the expertise of the coach thus nurturing mutual respect, leadership and knowledge. When these processes become part of the school environment, and they are

modelled by the school leaders, teachers and students, they become an instrumental role in establishing the conditions for a rigorous and collaborative culture that encourage the implementation of cutting edge research, and supports teachers to continuously improve upon their practices towards successful learning outcomes for all students.

Notes

[1] A **Professional Learning Community**, or PLC, is one of the names given to a group of educators that meets regularly to share expertise to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. Other terms used are *professional learning groups, collaborative learning communities, critical friends groups, and communities of practice.*

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