

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

COACHING AND MENTORING

Introduction

The EIS welcomes the investment in establishing and promoting coaching and mentoring initiatives in Scottish education. Coaching and mentoring have the potential to contribute significantly to improving learning and teaching, and contribute to the wider professional development framework that continues to evolve in the context of *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century*.

Coaching and mentoring is neither cheap nor a substitute for other forms of learning and professional development. Coaching and mentoring is about encouraging and promoting professional development based on existing capacities and the potential for improvement. Schools and colleges will only be able to progress in relation to their existing capacities for collegiality and leadership, and their ability to source and prioritise the necessary investment in terms of time and money. It is important to guard against over-ambition and over-zealousness where the lack of necessary resources can often lead to poor implementation.

The EIS supports a model of coaching and mentoring which is primarily about developing and enhancing collegiality, and developing professional confidence among teachers – a model of coaching and mentoring primarily for, and by, teachers. The EIS would resist any unnecessary commercialisation of coaching and mentoring, and would question any need to import models from elsewhere which were not consistent with aims and principles outlined in this paper.

The development of mentoring and coaching is fairly well established in many schools for probationers, and features as part of the Scottish Qualification for Head Teachers and also Project Leadership schemes. There is a need, however, for a clear focus on coaching and mentoring initiatives for supporting classroom teachers, including specific initiatives which build coaching and mentoring capacities themselves, and not simply building management capacities.

Over time coaching and mentoring may become part of professional development for all teachers. EIS Learning representatives can play a significant role in such a development.

It is important, however, that coaching and mentoring is not seen as the dominant vehicle for promoting professional development. The issue of resources, particularly time, cannot be avoided; there is also a clear financial requirement. A longer-term strategic outlook is necessary in order to create structures and systems and to identify funding to support coaching and mentoring initiatives.

The EIS would support a focus on the following aims and principles within a framework of openness, effective communication, mutual trust and collaboration:

- Structured professional dialogue
- Setting personal and professional goals within a context of self-evaluation and self-direction
- Developing trust and a tolerance of different approaches
- Learning agreements at school and local level which establish ground rules and acknowledge imbalances in power and accountability
- Acknowledging benefits to mentors and coaches themselves
- Combines internal and external support
- Collaboration with colleagues
- Experimenting and observing
- Using resources effectively to protect and sustain learning and teaching.

However, clarity of purpose is important even if precise definitions may prove difficult. There is plenty of effective mentoring and coaching practice developing in Scottish schools and important work is being undertaken in our schools and, also, universities such as Aberdeen, Glasgow and Paisley. Recognition of what a coaching and mentoring culture looks like, and an understanding of what it can offer are important. *It is a matter of priority that the Scottish educational community establish working definitions linked to illustrative examples of practice.*

An emphasis on coaching and mentoring may help focus on a model of professional development that is essentially collegiate in nature, which is preferable to notions of 'charismatic leadership' based on apparent exceptional character and personality traits. A focus on skill, knowledge and effort as opposed to charisma is much more productive, helpful and practical, and certainly more amenable to influence and development, and therefore, to coaching and mentoring. This is a gradual process which takes account of personnel, priorities and resources.

The potential barriers to progress are unexceptional in the context of any significant initiative: existing capacities and prevailing organisational culture may support, or impede, progress in the area of developing collegiality, a prerequisite for successful coaching and mentoring; a lack of understanding including a superficial notion of delegation; a lack of time and resources; competing priorities within traditional structures; and an overdependence on imported models which may be inappropriate to the specific context. Coaching and mentoring is not about making judgements, creating dependency, imposing others' agendas and initiatives, nor confirming habit, routine or long-held prejudices.

Conclusions

Coaching, mentoring and collaborative learning can be powerful tools in promoting professional development and effective professional action. The EIS has an important role to play in the context of promoting a commitment to professional development and lifelong learning. Coaching and mentoring is not a panacea but part of a wider solution. If coaching and mentoring can help develop a culture of improvement which

is humane, sophisticated and intelligent then we should embrace the potential that it presents for pupils and teachers in making schools better places to learn and work.

There is no one single template for coaching and mentoring, imported or home-grown. It is important to recognise the range of forms of mentoring and coaching whether informal, expert, or collaborative; self-directed learning in the form of critical reflective enquiry and self-evaluation can also be seen as a form of self-coaching.

The EIS recognises the potential benefits of coaching and mentoring which,

- Have an important role in school and departmental improvement.
- Promote individual and collaborative professional development at school level.
- Promote critical reflection and self-evaluation.
- Promote professional dialogue.
- Increase professional confidence.
- Build leadership capacities across the school.
- Improve the quality of learning and teaching.
- Improve pupil motivation and learning.

Recommendations

- 1 The EIS recognises the potential for professional learning and development and promoting effective professional action within the framework of *Teaching for the 21st Century*.
- 2 The EIS will monitor and track the introduction of coaching and mentoring initiatives at local level in order to ensure quality and effectiveness.
- 3 The EIS commits to study the evaluation of projects at national, local and school level.
- 4 The EIS, in partnership with other stakeholders will seek to settle on a clear definition of what is meant by mentoring and coaching.
- 5 The EIS will seek to ensure that EIS learning representatives are well informed with regard to appropriate coaching and mentoring arrangements.
- 6 The EIS welcomes the existing modules available at the Universities of Paisley, Aberdeen and Glasgow and will seek to work collegially with these institutions in supporting coaching and mentoring in the context of professional development.
- 7 The EIS will encourage the seeking of agreement at LNCT level with regard to coaching and mentoring, based on the principles outlined in this paper.

Appendix One

Proposed definitions

Generally speaking, a *coach* would tend to focus on skills and performance which involves feedback to the learner in order to promote self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-learning. The coach does not necessarily have more experience than the coachee and coaching can take place between peers and staff at different levels.

A *mentor* would focus on capability and personal and professional growth perhaps at critical stages of a teacher's career such as probationers, NQT, early years teaching, Chartered Teacher, Principal Teacher, Senior Management and Head Teacher, in order to facilitate professional and career development. A mentor would undoubtedly use coaching skills as part of this quality relationship but would normally be a more experienced colleague familiar with the role, culture and context in which the mentoring applies, using the expertise s/he has in the field to support the development of skills and knowledge.

January 2008