

# Coaching : An educational psychology perspective

Dr John Munro<sup>1</sup>

Coaching as an approach to effective self-managed learning has been used extensively in organisational and business contexts. It has been shown to be an effective teaching-learning approach for assisting individuals to improve performance, leading to increased professional knowledge and practice. It has been used less in formal educational contexts. This paper shows how it can be used to enhance the knowledge and performance of both educators and their students.

***How coaching differs from other types of intervention*** It differs from other types of intervention, such as traditional expository teaching, counselling and performance training in its focus on the extent to which it involves

- common goal setting by teacher and student.
- a single focus or uni-directional knowledge change. While traditional expository teaching and counselling purposes are often reasonably broad, for example, to learn maths and English, to be less anxious, to have a more positive self concept, the focus of coaching is usually single; to improve how well a person runs, reads, interacts with peers, to have a more positive self-concept as a reader.
- a focus on self-motivation. Without it, alternative interventions that focus more on extrinsic motivation may be necessary initially.
- drawing on, valuing, respecting and auditing what the learner already knows
- the student monitoring progress to the desired goal; the coaching provides means for the on-going "reality checking".
- an on-going high-trust partnership that may differ from the traditional teacher/student roles.
- the incorporation of personal creativity into the teaching and learning.
- the coach taking account of the context in which the learning will occur (for example, the complex organizational dynamics and politics in which learning will occur).

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was written to present an educational- developmental perspective on the use of coaching by psychologists at the Combined Colleges (Vic.) Professional Development Day activity on coaching on 13 November, 1999 at the Hawthorn Campus of the University of Melbourne. Dr Munro is convenor of the College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists (Victoria) and College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists (National).

- the exploration of previously unknown options, more productive ways of operating.
- the quality of a limited duration. While many interventions have a more open ended quality, coaching, with its restricted focus, is seen as having a limited duration. The focus on the limited duration needs to be balanced with the need for a criterion level of performance; in many coaching contexts it will be more appropriate to specify specific terminal criteria goals than a particular time duration .

***Coaching on a continuum with other types of intervention*** Coaching, at least in some contexts, may be seen on a continuum with other approaches to learning. It that may be preceded by other learning activities and feed later into others. Its boundary with other types of teaching frequently becomes blurred. The coach may, for example, need to engage in counselling, training or traditional expository teaching procedures during sessions. While these activities are used to pursue the explicit negotiated goals, the intervention would be seen as coaching. In other words, coaching can include the use of counselling or direct instructional procedures in the service of the explicit goals.

In educational contexts coaching could be discriminated from other approaches to instruction or intervention on the basis of

- who decides the knowledge to be learnt
- the processes used to learn
- the contexts in which the knowledge is learnt.

Coaching may, therefore, draw on techniques that are also used in counselling or other areas of teaching. Similarly, work principally in counselling and other areas other areas of intervention may draw upon coaching techniques.

***Metaphors for coaching*** The metaphors we have for coaching can help us understand its unique features. The dominant metaphors for coaching are

- the elite sports coaching metaphor
- the 'life' coaching metaphor

Both have the characteristic of the highly motivated learner with the single minded, one-directional focus, a commitment to improve, a coach who observes and interprets the learner's knowledge and abilities at any time, who makes adjustments to the teaching at any time and who provides feedback that encourages the learner to continually strive for higher goals or levels of achievement.

**Cognitive coaching** Educational psychologists are interested not only in behavioural or performance coaching but also on coaching learners to improve aspects of their thinking and learning, their attitudes and dispositions and their beliefs (Costa, 1993); Gottesman & Jennings, 1994). The coaching is intended to assist them to

- think more broadly, to see a wider range of options, to look at ideas from different perspectives,
- become more independent in their learning.
- learn more flexible, confident problem-solving skills,
- improve their self-efficacy and self-concept.
- their planning ability, self-monitoring and management and their consolidation and review ability.

Coaching in this area may assist learners to improve

- how they go about operating cognitively and thinking, for example, coaching adult illiterates to learn the processes of reading, coaching air traffic controllers to improve their spatial awareness and ability to maintain separation between aircraft
- their self-esteem, self-worth and self-concept, for example, coaching adolescents in more adaptive self-talk in social interaction contexts, coaching victims of severe illness, road accidents and other traumas to take an active role in their recuperation
- their attitudinal knowledge, their beliefs and dispositions, for example, coaching students to develop more positive attitudes to co-operating, coaching teachers to deal with some of the stressors in their work contexts, coaching students to attending school or to learning maths .

Cognitive coaching is emerging as an important aspect of educational coaching. Its aim is to increase learners' awareness of their metacognition, that is , aspects of their personal thinking processes

### **The framework for coaching in the educational psychology approach**

The aim of the coaching is to foster active, self-regulated learning directed to performance in the presence of positive feedback. This is usually implemented via a performance or action plan that involves analysis of the cognitive-affective and information processing aspects of the context.

Although coaches working in the educational-developmental psychology framework differ in how they implement their coaching regimes, many would follow a sequence that includes fostering at least some of the following student-coach interactions:

- introducing the coaching approach.
- identifying, explicating a desired solution or goal. Learners differ in how well they can do this and to provide guided assistance that matching individual ways of learning. During these

early stages of the interaction we would be keen to develop an initial impression of how the learner goes about learning and feels about themselves as learner.

- mapping these into a pathway, creating a clear vision of the outcome. This pathway is important in the educational contexts; learners may not be able to see the pathway to their desired outcome.
- engaging existing knowledge; students are prepared for the pathway by
  - activating what students already know that is relevant to the learning. It is important to clarify explicitly what is known for both the learner and the coach. Students' existing knowledge may be stored in different forms; in experiences, in episodes and images, in procedures, in linguistic or verbal forms. It may be necessary to stimulate the same knowledge in two or more ways.
  - identifying how the person prefers to learn; there are a number of aspects of this.
  - organising the learning context to facilitate progress
  - by negotiating how the coaching, teaching will be delivered.
  - recoding existing knowledge to match the teaching. If there is a mismatch between the format of the coaching information and students' existing knowledge, the coaching is likely to be less effective, student will feel less secure and the learning will take much longer and less satisfying.
  - negotiating the feedback and progress-monitoring schedule.
  - by being prepared attitudinally and emotionally; taking care of self efficacy, possible feelings of insecurity, relaxing the student.
- initiating the teaching; begin to move towards your goals
  - present the teaching information in two or more modalities
  - scaffold the change in knowledge or procedures
  - assess change in performance in an ongoing way
  - adjust coaching tasks and information presented in terms of levels of difficulty
  - present the teaching in a sequence that optimises learning
  - provide useful (digestible) feedback
  - learner display the new knowledge/ operations initially under coach's control and with control gradually moving to learner

- consolidating, reviewing change in knowledge how it can be used, transferred, generalised problem solve using the new knowledge
- reflecting on the learning actions used; taking responsibility for on-going management of performance in area being coached. The educational psychology coaching approach coaches learners to manage the change themselves by learning the ways of thinking / learning.
- investing positive emotion in the ideas / procedures learnt. In educational psychology learners engage in coaching for several reasons, not all of which are to do solely with the goal of self-improvement. It is important that learners invest positive emotion in the ideas learnt because this may lead gradually to self-improvement in the area for its own purposes.
- learners seeing themselves making progress, monitor their learning
- learners storing the new knowledge in long term memory, practising to retrieve it, imagining themselves using it in the future, linking it with what they know.
- learners automatising the new knowledge

This set of interactions, while broadly sequenced, need not be implemented only in this order.

**Contexts in which educational-developmental coaching is implemented** Educational-developmental psychologists use coaching in a wide range of contexts (Brandt, 1989; Costa, 1993; Gottesman & Jennings, 1994), including

- coaching to enhance learning, to improve the capacity to learn and to display knowledge.
- coaching for improving social interaction.
- coaching to enhance self-concept, self-esteem.
- ADD Coaching, to assist adults with ADD to deal with the behavioural concomitants.
- coaching to improve teaching effectiveness.
- coaching a group of teachers or a school to incorporate changes in their practice.

**The theoretical background on which coaching in the educational psychology context is based.** The model on which the educational and developmental coaching is based derives from contemporary theories of knowledge change and focuses on conditions under which knowledge change and transfer is facilitated. Key areas of knowledge necessary to implement an effective coaching program include an awareness of

- how existing knowledge is stored and retrieved, the multiple ways of knowing.

- self-efficacy , self attribution theory; what learners believe about themselves as learners of a domain area.
- motivation to achieve in a particular area.
- information processing; how learners process information, different learning and cognitive styles, how personality influences this process, the amount of information learners can process, how well they manage the information processing capacity.
- principles of knowledge change; how the processes and structures involved in learning, such as thinking space and short term memory, can be used most effectively for a particular learner learning.
- knowledge recoding and transfer; how knowledge that learners acquire can be proceduralised in particular contexts.
- developmental theories of learning; how the capacity to learn by coaching is determined by the learner's level of development in various key areas. This is important across the lifespan. Some educational psychologists currently work in the context of rehabilitative learning in the recuperative phase following illness, injury or trauma, particularly in elderly people.
- individual differences in learning; how the capacity to learn by coaching is determined by the learner's particular approach to learning and learning preferences, how the learner's culture influences the coaching.
- self management and regulation, metacognitive processing; how learners can gradually take control of the coaching themselves, particularly in the context of cognitive coaching.
- collaborative learning models for peer and cognitive coaching.
- feedback theory.
- social learning theory.

**What assumptions does your framework make ?** The educational psychology approach assumes that coaching is more likely to be successful when learners

- can see, in a specific area of life, a gap between what their goals and abilities lead them to expect and the actual level of accomplishment and satisfaction.
- believe that they can achieve the outcomes and see that significant others also believe this.
- are motivated to achieve these goals.
- have a positive attitude or motivation to self-change.
- can visualise a pathway to the goals.
- believe that the coach can assist them, has expertise in the area, is a competent teacher or leader.
- can form a positive, sharing, working relationship with the coach.
- see that the coach values what they know, is positive about what they do know and is prepared to begin teaching here.
- know they can learn in their preferred ways.
- feel the teaching context will permit them to take risks without being threatened, to explore options, to question ideas, to seek guidance and support without threat.

- see how they can have a role in the learning, can explicate and use what they know or can do, believe they can learn and make progress, see that they can manage in part the rate of information presentation.
- can explicate performance expectations.
- begin to move towards their goals.
- read and use the feedback provided.
- gradually take control of the learning.
- consolidate, review, integrate what has been learnt, see how it can be used, transferred, generalised.
- see themselves making progress, monitor their learning.
- take responsibility for on-going management of the learning.

These are some of the key conditions that facilitate learning and enhancement under educational psychological coaching.

**The skills and competencies required to implement coaching ?** To put in place these conditions, the educational psychologist needs to be able to

- identify, negotiate and unpack the preferred outcomes, assist with effective, manageable goal setting.
- modify and negotiate the learning pathway.
- assess entry level of performance.
- ascertain the learner's approach to learning.
- facilitate learning in a partnership, explain what is expected, use scaffolding effectively, use prompts that are gradually withdrawn, trend from attention demanding to automatic performance.
- recognise and use teachable moments, know when to intervene and when to fade.
- create a climate of communication, mutual respect, allow for open lines of communication.
- possess good interpersonal skills, build a relationship of mutual respect.
- guide the learner to go beyond the 'comfort zone' in accomplishing these goals
- observe, monitor performance efficiently, practise good listening and observational skills throughout.
- communicate performance expectations efficiently.
- move control of the learning to the learner, assist learner to develop self-improvement plans.

It was noted at the outset that coaching has been used less in formal educational contexts than in some other areas in which psychologists work. This paper attempts to show that educational and developmental psychologists bring a unique approach to coaching and to solving. It is reasonable to expect that this area of psychology can contribute to the overall evolution of coaching and that, in the

future, coaching will play an increasing role in its work. This paper shows how it can be used to enhance the knowledge and performance of both educators and their students.

## **References**

Brandt, Ronald. (1989). *Readings from Educational Leadership: Coaching and Staff Development*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Costa, Arthur. (1993). *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools*. Christopher Gordon Publishers.

Gottesman, Barbara & Jennings, James. (1994). *Peer Coaching for Educators*. Technomic Publishing Co.

Robbins, Pam. (1991). *How to Plan and Implement a Peer Coaching Program*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

*Teacher Peer Coaching (Hot Topics Series)*. (1989) Phi Delta Kappan.