Issue 16

# CollectivED Working Papers

Working Papers from CollectivED;
the Centre for Mentoring, Coaching
and Professional Learning

A University Research and Practice Centre where collaborative
conversations create powerful professional learning

April 2022

Special Issue:  Postgraduate Legacy
Papers [1]

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# Introduction to CollectivED and Issue 11

## *by CollectivED Director Rachel Lofthouse*

CollectivED The Centre for Mentoring, Coaching & Professional Learning is a research and practice centre based in The Carnegie School of Education. We form a community of professionals, academics and students with shared interests. Our aims are to:

- Encourage and enable collaborative conversations which create powerful professional learning
- Build capacity of educators to create contexts which support inclusive career-long and profession-wide learning
- Remove barriers to professional development
- Increase opportunities for educational change through enhanced professional agency and well-being

The research undertaken by the CollectivED community relates to formal and informal professional learning and practice in all sectors of education. Our research focuses on:

- teacher education and professional learning at all career stages
- learning through mentoring, coaching, digital pedagogies, workplace and interprofessional practices
- teachers' and leaders' professionalism, identity, wellbeing, self-efficacy and agency
- educational policy and partnership

In Issue 16 we have gathered together papers that represent the legacy of practice and thinking from postgraduate study. Ashok, Cathy, Suzanne, Gemma, Melanie, Daniel and Paula are all alumni of the Leeds Beckett University PGCert in Coaching and Mentoring for Education Practitioners. Sarah undertook coaching and mentoring modules as part of her Masters in Practitioner Enquiry at Newcastle University. It is wonderful to share their papers on how their practice and thinking were impacted by their study.

We conclude Issue 16 with notes on our working paper contributors.

# Recognising the legacy of postgraduate study

## *A think piece working paper by Rachel Lofthouse*

This think piece is an adapted version of an article published in Schools Week in 2019.  It concludes with a consideration of the 2022 professional learning landscape in England.

I have worked in initial and continuing teacher education for over two decades, directly in two universities in the north of England and in partnership with many UK colleagues in similar roles. Between us we have created and sustained the core features of university schools of education, which for decades have offered diverse and productive routes for postgraduate professional development for teachers and school leaders.

At the start of the coalition government our rich history was interrupted when Michael Gove, then education secretary, branded university teacher educators and researchers as "the Blob". In this simple utterance he seeded division and doubt; proposing to teachers that they had no need for the generative relationships possible through school and university CPD or research partnerships, or the professional learning opportunities offered through masters degrees in education.

A policy-led cull of provision followed. The relatively new masters in teaching and learning, developed between universities, schools, subject associations and the other specialist groups such as the National College of School Leadership, and targeted at new teachers and middle leaders, was abruptly unfunded and the national provision as it was then was effectively closed.

Teachers studying on part-subsidised masters' courses found their subsidy scaled back each year and then fully withdrawn. The numbers studying on postgraduate part-time courses nosedived. The ability of universities to attract new students was further undermined as teachers reported bigger workloads, as salaries and school budgets were impacted by austerity, and as universities had to increase fees.

For some of us, myself included, it felt like the significant contribution we had

been making to developing teaching as an evidence-informed and well-qualified body was being rapidly eroded. More importantly, it made a highly valued and valuable route to career development less accessible to teachers.

Thankfully universities are resilient, and while we may not appear as agile or (as one tweeter suggested) as "cool" as the new players, we are still here. We tend to outlive the whims of ministers and secretaries of state – and while doing so we adapt and modify our provision.

We offer teachers face-to-face and distance learning courses that create a diversity of professional learning opportunities through connecting scholarship with the development of practice. At Leeds Beckett University, teachers and school leaders can study masters' level courses in inclusive practice, coaching and mentoring, leading mental health in schools, childhood studies and early years, creative writing and drama in education, SEND and race and education. Across the sector the choices become even wider with, for example, courses in curriculum, assessment, practitioner

enquiry, leadership and subject specialisms.

Our courses are relevant, evidence-informed, taught by academics embedded in local, national and international research communities, and our cohorts are diverse. We rarely have the luxury of huge marketing budgets, so you might have forgotten we are here, but for many teachers who have studied with us, and still do study with us, we are pivotal in their development.

In 2019 I met someone who started as a history teacher, but is now a senior leader in a special school. As he talked about his professional journey and his ambitions for his colleagues and students, he smiled broadly while recalling how his masters had transformed his professional practice and understanding, giving him insights and motivations that he carried with him every day that he stepped through the school gate. You can't argue with that legacy of learning.

So, where are we now? 2021/2 brought a new suite of national provision the re-modelled and re-franchised NPQs in England, and the number of courses

available through that route keeps growing. We have entered an era of ever-increasing centralisation of continuing professional development for new recruits and existing staff in state schools. The Department for Education (DfE) has created what it calls a '**golden thread**' of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), the Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). These have been welcomed by organisations such as the **Education Endowment Foundation** who suggest that these new initiatives and reforms are 'hugely encouraging' in recognising the importance of teacher quality in narrowing the 'disadvantage gap'. They go on to say that it is essential that professional development is 'well designed, selected, and implemented so that the investment is justified'.

Putting aside (not that we should) the existence of an ever-growing disadvantage gap – fuelled by economic and social policy that goes well beyond educational contexts, as well as evidence of continued negative impacts of DfE policy and budgetary decisions on many already disadvantaged schools – we should be careful that evocative and rhetorical phrases such as 'the golden thread' don't incite a narrowly defined, acquisitory approach to professional learning.

It is too early to judge the new NPQs, but the education profession can only be enhanced by a richer offer of professional development. The opportunities we can offer to learners can only be enhanced when teachers and leaders are enabled to think more critically and more expansively about teaching, learning, inclusion, social justice and the role of schools in the 21st century. Being able to do so comes in part from the having opportunities to read, to debate, and to write. They also come from richer professional dialogues.

In this issue of the CollectivED working papers educators who have completed post-graduate study related to coaching and mentoring reflect on their work towards creating those rich dialogues. These demonstrate diverse and context-specific legacies of their own professional learning.

# Support for School Leaders: Thoughts and Proposals

## *A think piece working paper by Ashok Venkatesh*

### The Context of School Leadership

School leadership is a demanding job. Headteachers in England work in a context which is both complex and problematic, often hostile. This makes the need for effective support urgent and shapes what support is required. In making sense of the position of school leaders, the 'Ecological Systems Approach' of Bronfenbrenner (1979) is useful. Headteachers face challenges at every level:

*Macrosystem*: The prevailing culture is characterised by both high expectations of what schools should achieve, and by severe constraints on what is possible. Successive UK governments have promoted the importance of education as the key to national success, and nevertheless starved schools of the necessary resources. All governments have for many years emphasised accountability, often of a kind which is explicitly harsh. Social disadvantage is seen as something *schools* must address, instead of being ameliorated by wider government action.

*Exosystem*: Ofsted inspection acts as a direct threat to the careers of school leaders through published reports, but also has a more insidious impact: school leaders are haunted by the contrast between what their school is doing, and 'what Ofsted wants'. This can lead to a climate of fear, which can infect an entire school via its effect on leaders.

*Mesosystem*: Political leaders have promoted a culture of competition, now supplemented by academisation. School leaders are discouraged from cooperation, and often feel isolated, maintaining the façade of 'strong leadership' against a background of corporate manoeuvring which can sometimes see headteachers as disposable.

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*Microsystem*: The pressure for ever improving results means that relationships between leaders, teachers and pupils are often under strain. There is now pressure to look after staff and pupil wellbeing, with headteachers arguably being forced to create a mess, then being expected to clean it up! Where schools are under particular pressure, due to perceived 'underperformance', a toxic atmosphere can result, where leaders, teachers and pupils make each other's lives miserable in a spiral of decline.

*Individual*: Lack of time and attention for family life may lead to problems which then feed into a vicious circle of professional and personal decline. School leaders are often motivated by a deep desire to improve the lives of children and are vulnerable to self-criticism if they feel that they are failing to do so.

*Summary*: There is a huge gap between the fantasy of what education is expected to deliver and the reality of what is possible. This must inform our views on what school leaders need in terms of support. Schools in the most challenging circumstances are particularly impacted by the problems described above and suffer the greatest issues of leader burnout and rapid turnover. If we are serious about improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged pupils, then support for school leaders becomes even more important.

## Approaches to Support

At an individual level, school leaders need support in dealing with their lives, both personal and professional. Currently, many do access counselling, CBT, and other forms of therapy, as well as life coaching. This is often arranged *ad hoc*, and funded either by the leader or their employer, where public provision is not available. Some service providers specialise in working with school leaders. One important benefit of such support is the provision of a safe space for leaders to discuss their feelings honestly. There are barriers to school leaders accessing such support, both practical, and psychological (stigma attached to mental health issues). This means that leaders most in need of support may not receive it, and recourse

to counselling may come too late, when early support may have avoided a situation deteriorating to the point of crisis.

In their professional lives, leaders are sometimes provided with coaching, which is directed at improving their performance, and is usually funded by their employer. This is valuable in many cases, but I think problematic as a 'solution' to the problems facing school leaders. Access to coaching is not equal, with many headteachers missing out. More worrying still is the use of coaching as part of a pathway to dismissal: leaders are provided with a coach only when their performance is already judged as inadequate. This increases the stigma associated with 'needing support', making leaders reluctant to acknowledge their needs. Fundamentally, there is a structural problem with the relationship between leader, coach and employer. Successful coaching relies on honesty and openness between coach and coachee. How far can this be achieved when the coach is employed by, and may report back to, the employer?

Headteachers have a need for sources of support which can strengthen them in making the right choices. Strategic decisions must be made, and these may have far reaching consequences. There are pressures to act unethically, and leaders need support to do the right thing. Davis (2018) identifies a need for 'brave leadership'. External support for leaders could, I believe, be vital in supporting sound, ethical leadership in difficult times. Leaders also need help in understanding the wider context of their work. Many pressures result from political and economic agendas over which they have no control; understanding this could help to avoid excessive self-criticism as well as direct their attention towards effective action.

The needs of school leaders for support are many and varied, ranging across personal crises, specific advice on daily work, reflecting on effective job performance, building moral character, and engaging with the political context. So, what characteristics would we look for in an effective programme of support for school leaders?

This coaching must be **independent** of the employer, so that the trust on which

good coaching rests can be established. It must also be **informed.** For all the benefits of a 'clean coaching' approach, I believe that in this case (school leadership) more effective coaching would be delivered by coaches with real knowledge of the context. When we add the need for coaches to be **credible,** then a strong case can be made for using school leaders (or ex-leaders) as coaches, after appropriate training. Support must also be **flexible,** recognising the dynamic context in which leaders work, and adapting techniques accordingly. Given the isolation characteristic of school leadership roles, I would argue that coaching should also be **collaborative.** It should encourage positive interaction between school leaders, rather than being seen as 'fixing' individuals.

All headteachers should be entitled to a structured programme of support. This would start with an induction programme, supporting leaders through the inevitable challenges of the early days of headship, with frequent contact with a coach. There would then be an expectation that the leader makes use of ongoing, regular support throughout

their career. The fact that it is an entitlement means that we could avoid the stigma of being 'someone who needs support', ensuring that all leaders get what they need. The model used would be a flexible approach, using some 'clean coaching' techniques, but allowing for more of a mentoring and guidance role when this is more appropriate, maybe particularly during the early months of headship. The term 'supporter' may be more apt than 'coach', and supporters must be informed and credible people, probably ex-leaders. The whole process must be organised centrally, and independently of employers. This is vital if school leaders are to have full confidence in the process, with the interests of the leader being central, rather than those of the employer or the school. Funding would clearly be an issue, and it may be naïve to expect that all employers will voluntarily fund a truly independent system. However, I would argue that there are huge costs at present arising from leader burnout and turnover, and hence substantial savings from supporting school leaders. Government should surely take on responsibility for the programme, with central funding to

ensure equality, or a duty on employers to contribute.

## Impact of New Technology

The use of videoconferencing technology, necessitated by the Covid crisis, may have certain benefits for school leaders. Firstly, it reduces the time and cost of person-to-person support, by eliminating travel time. Secondly, it would facilitate linking leaders with supporters in other parts of the country, avoiding issues of confidentiality and conflicts of interest where there are local links. Avoiding excessive time commitment and proximity could even mean that *serving* school leaders could act as supporters, with coaching seen as part of the natural professional development of experienced leaders, and beneficial to both parties.

## The Wider Picture

One valid criticism of coaching and support for school leaders is that it does nothing to address the underlying structural issues which lead to many of the pressures on leaders. Hence support programmes could be seen as a sort of 'field hospital' which patches people up enough to return them to the trenches, only to see them come back for more help when sufficiently wounded. I would accept this critique and believe it could be addressed through the programme. There is a strand in coaching which argues that the coach is potentially an 'activist' promoting the development of a better system, rather than a neutral observer (see for example Du Toit and Sim (2010) and the work of groups such as Philosophers Stone Collective). One approach is to support leaders in standing up to organisations which are making unreasonable demands on them and others and contributing to social harms. An individual could take action, but much more powerful would be collective action by school leaders (and their coaches/supporters). Coaches could play a vital role in linking up school leaders, all of whom face similar issues, and encouraging collaboration, rather than competition. Hence a programme of support for school leaders is seen not simply as helping individual leaders (vital though that

work is) but also could act as a force for

good in the development of the

educational system.

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# Making space: Facilitating collaborative and critical talk amongst early-careers teachers and their mentor/coaches

## *A practice insight working paper by Gemma Short*

*Context: Secondary school in England, recently completed a PGCert in Coaching and Mentoring for Education Practitioners. This practice insight working paper is substantially based on the work completed as part of the portfolio for this PGCert.*

The life of a teacher in school is hectic and in the last years teachers (along with other school staff) have been suddenly thrown into the eye of the storm of a global pandemic, dealing with rapid changes to their jobs. Teachers face a daily onslaught of demands, challenges, and emotions. The emotional rollercoaster of teaching will always have an impact on teachers' mental health. But we rarely get time and space to stop and think, to reflect, and be listened to.

With teacher retention still a pressing problem, and particularly acute amongst early-career teachers, it seems important to give these teachers this time and space. My work has been concerned with facilitating this space, using as a launchpad a pilot program of coaching/mentoring of early-career teachers in my school. Since I started developing this practice schools have begun the early-careers framework, which became statutory in September 2021. Mentoring is given a significant role in the early-careers framework. However, we know from experience with ITTE and NQT mentoring, that in schools this can often be deprioritised, with mentors not given significant training or time to fulfil their roles or develop their practice. With schools about to embark on a significantly

expanded amount of mentoring, and incoming early-career teachers likely to have had their development so far disrupted by Covid, the insights from my practice may in some way support schools in developing this mentoring.

Drawing on the Thinking Environment (Kline, 1999), as well as work on teacher talk and teacher agency by Biesta et al (2017) and Horn & Little (2010), and on types of mentoring by Kemmis et al (2014) I developed and set up the ECTea* and Chat (*other drinks available!) as "an opportunity for early-careers teachers and their mentor/coaches to get together and share ideas, problems, and chat about lessons, learning and teaching in our school whilst enjoying a cup of tea and cake" (taken from an initial invitation email).

So what exactly is ECTea and Chat? It was a voluntary, hour-long session to which both ECTs and their mentor/coaches were invited. Held in the school library, in order to have comfortable seating, and an informal room layout, but without the

interruptions of the staffroom, with hot drinks and snacks provided. Crucially, I had secured space within the school CPD calendar. This meant the sessions were not an 'extra burden' on top of an already busy schedule, but part of paid directed time. Sessions all had a broad theme to frame discussion, which so far has included behaviour for learning, work-life balance, and the impact of covid-19 on education, usually framed as a thinking question.

The sessions had both informal and formal parts, and followed this format:

1. An informal chat as people arrive, getting themselves a drink and snack, and catching up.
2. A thinking round where everyone shares their initial thoughts or feelings on the broad topic of the session without interruption from others. A volunteer starts the thinking round, and then people contribute one after the other clockwise around the circle.
3. Thinking pairs: one person in the pair talks for three minutes, while the partner listens without interrupting, the partner then asks

clarifying or questions to deepen the speaker's thinking for a further three minutes. Pairs then swap and repeat, before drifting into small talk.

4. A final thinking round where I asked people to share what they were thinking about now to close the formal part of the session

5. Time for more informal chat over drinks and snacks. There was no definite end to the session, rather people tended to drift away at a point that suited them.

To gain insight into the impact of the ECTea and Chat I recorded the reflections of some of the participants.

Participants reflected on sometimes feeling "alone and isolated from others", but during the ECTea and Chat being able to discuss "things [they] would normally internalise and not have a chance to speak so freely and openly about," and having "stress and anxieties validated by speaking to other people". All those I recorded talked about "opening up". This can be recognised as similar to the conversational routine

Horn and Little (2010) call 'normalising' – having your feelings or experiences validated by your colleagues. Existing cultures in my setting supported this, however I think the structure of the thinking rounds and thinking pairs also made it much less likely that a participant sharing their experience would be cut off, or intercepted by a joke or throw away comment before they could finish, and ensured others were truly listening in order to be able to sympathise and reflect back to the participant later. Normalising is important, and was clearly valued by the participants, but on its own could become 'group moaning'. Horn and Little also identify this: "If teachers had shared only their own experiences ... the conversation could have developed into little more than a gripe session, perhaps emotionally comforting or even cathartic, but not necessarily generative for the teachers' learning." This structure also allowed some of the other conversational routines Horn and Little identify as important. The thinking pairs could be compared to the conversation routine that Horn and Little call 'specifying', and so the conversation doesn't become just

'normalising' without interrogation of the problem, not leading to learning and ultimately not giving the problem-teller agency. The back-and-forth nature of the clarifying questions and response from the problem-teller serve to allow the problem-teller to clarify and reframe their original problem on their own terms, in their own mind, rather than the passive participant of other's advice.

The thinking pairs structure also allowed for some 'generalisation', after each person has done one problem posing and interrogation round, the pair can drift into small talk. Though I could not hear all the conversations, from the pairs I took part in myself and from participants' reflections, I can see that this time was used, at least to some extent, for generalising the problem to principles of teaching.

Horn and Little (2010) identify that an "endemic tension between 'figuring things out' and 'getting things done'" can constrain learning. The ECTea and Chat was not a department or year team meeting; there was no 'agenda'; and many of the participants did not usually work together so could not fall back into 'task talk'. It was designed and presented exclusively as a space for problems of practice. Was this why the space was so valued by the participants who reflected on it being "refreshing", a "rare opportunity", to "slow down", "time to actually think"?

In developing the ECTea and Chat I was very aware of the problems of facilitating teacher talk that is transformative, rather than constrained by the difficulties teachers find themselves in and the prevailing ideologies and practices. I wanted to provide a framework that enabled teachers perspective on these difficulties, to evaluate them, and see ways past them, to change their situation and gain agency. A framework that could be a counterweight to performativity.

Teacher talk can make a crucial difference in teacher agency. Biesta et al (2017) identify that where teacher talk allows for perspective on the situations they find themselves in, it allows teachers to perceive room for

manoeuvre by allowing for evaluation of the current situation, and thinking about alternative ways of acting. Does the ECTea and Chat structure allow for that perspective, and thus evaluation? The teacher talk in the ECTea and Chat certainly did open up "windows onto the here and now" (Biesta et al, 2017) and allow teachers to verbalise views on the current situation. The question is, to what extent teachers were able to have perspective, and scope for critical evaluation of the situation and to take decisions about alternative courses of action?

Biesta et al (2017) identify that biographical, generational, and differential experiences (in different schools, settings or contexts, or at different times when different ideologies were prevalent) had an influence on the views expressed by teachers, but also the extent to which they evaluate their situation, and orient to the future, and on the actions they then take. The ECTea and Chat, by involving ECTs with between 2-4 year's experience, and mentors with a range of experience, exposed participants to the

teacher-talk of others, providing and modelling external perspective and evaluation. This is hinted at in one of the participant's reflections who commented on the "opportunity to meet with other staff, some who were newer than me … some who had been in the profession for longer than me … having practical solutions put forward, sometimes they came from more experienced staff and sometimes from newer staff". They also commented that "you had a wider range of views", contrasting it to events they had experienced before with "just brand-new staff, so everyone was talking but nobody had any solutions because everyone was new". This could be important when thinking about mentoring in the context of ITTE and the ECF – do trainees and ECTs get exposed to a wide variety of professional opinions and experiences – or just that of their specific mentor? Could group mentoring activities like the ECTea and Chat support this, whilst also benefitting the mentors?

Mentoring is a contested practice – and the mentoring that happens in schools

takes a variety of forms. I have been particularly influenced by the work of Kemmis et al (2014) in identifying different mentoring practices, and their conclusion that different types of mentoring produce different "kinds of dispositions" in mentees and their mentors as well as producing different kinds of learning. Kemmis et al identify a type of mentoring they call 'mentoring as collaborative self-development', which they contrast to other types but particularly to 'mentoring as supervision'. Kemmis et al argue the latter is likely to develop a disposition of compliance in the mentee, and of supervision/surveillance in the mentor. Instead developing "dispositions towards engagement in a professional community committed to individual and collective self-development." Kemmis et al discuss a variety of practice architectures (doings, sayings and relatings) and how they influence the type of mentoring being undertaken. From this I concluded that the language surrounding the ECTea and Chat was very important – that it must not be concerned with standards, or monitoring performance (even self-monitoring), or be seen as a 'remedial'

group of 'extra support' for teachers who were seen to be 'struggling'. Although never suggested to me in my setting, it has been done in schools, and I think it would have fundamentally undermined the group if it had been narrowed down in that way. Kemmis et al identify peer-group mentoring as a practice that facilitates 'mentoring as collaborative self-development', where participants share professional experiences and "the group acts as a forum for collective reflection that includes dialogical giving and receiving of support and help". Also, that "the meetings function as a sounding board where the teachers dare to ask 'silly' questions without performance pressure". They also identify the importance of seemingly trivial things like hot drinks and snacks which can set the tone for the session as a welcoming and safe place, where participants feel able to open up.

There is a lot of potential for this model of group mentoring to be developed further. Unfortunately, the ECTea and Chat has been significantly disrupted by Covid, and whilst we managed to

organise a virtual event during the first period of school closures, the pressure of other activities has prevented me from continuing to organise them this academic year. Particularly I think there is scope to explore how the group could develop its own life, with participants having ownership over its proceedings and direction, which Kemmis et al identify as a key feature of "mentoring as collaborative self-development", and I think could have a significant role in securing the group as a space for critical discussion separate from the usual pressures of schools.

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# The Cultivation, Germination and Propagation of the Professional Learning Ecosystem

## *A practice insight working paper by Melanie Chambers*

*This reflective paper draws on learning and insights from recently following the PGCert in Coaching and Mentoring at Leeds Beckett University, and the reflections it prompted on experiences within my own setting.*

In this paper I propose a three-step model of *cultivation, germination,* and *propagation* to build a school PLC, which works alongside nature, offering the right conditions, tools, and processes to prepare our school ecosystems for the sustainable development of initiatives; coaching being one tool to help shed our outer husk and bring water, oxygen, light, and warmth to our germinating ideas.



The Growth of a Professional Learning Ecosystem

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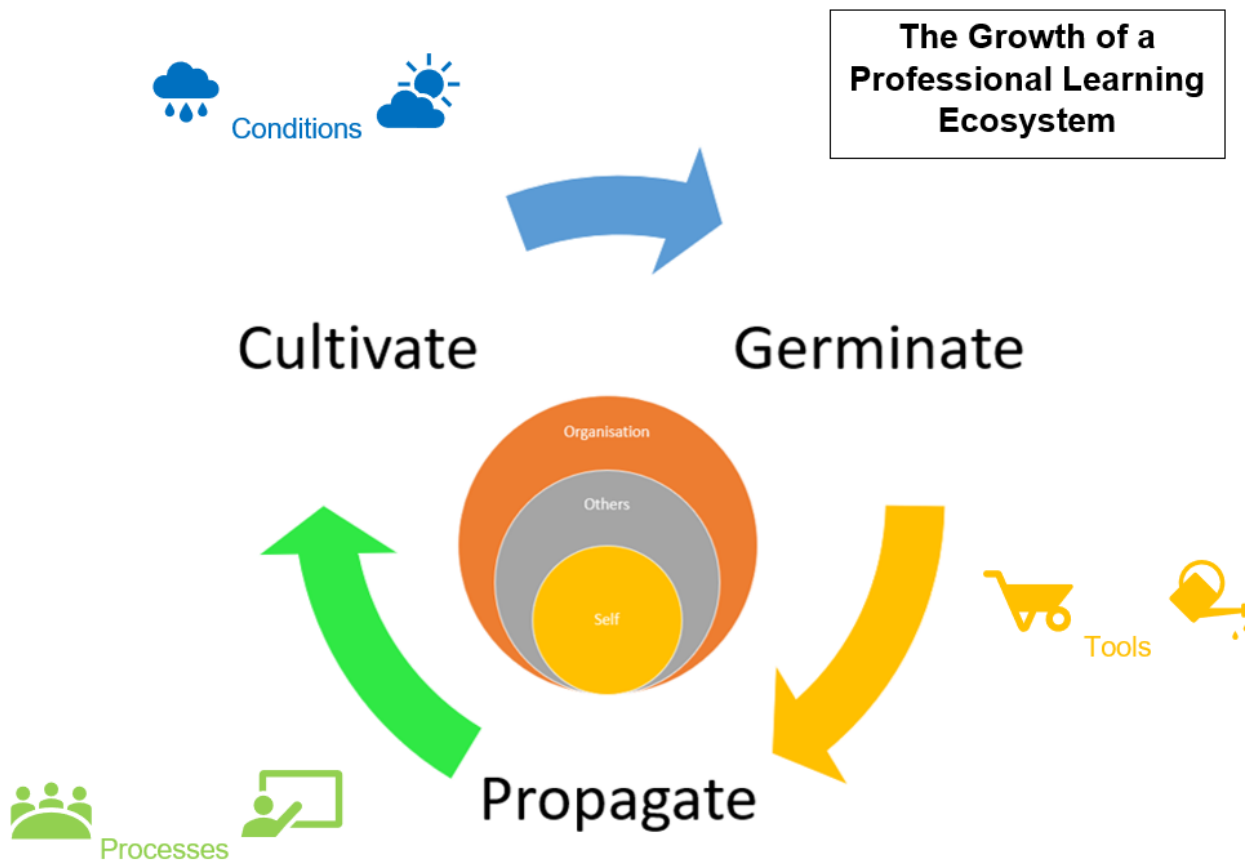CARNEGIE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## Figure 1: The leadership conditions for growth of a whole school PL ecosystem

For the last nine years, I have led as a Deputy Head at The British School of Brussels (BSB), a British, international school in Belgium. Since 2017, our school Principal has led us through a cultural shift. In terms of professional learning (PL), we have moved from a sporadic, directed model of PD for teachers, to an ongoing, intrinsically motivated, self-accountable model of PL for all, that is collaborative and unites the whole school. The professional learning community (PLC) model in our school aligns its principles to many set out by Stoll, et al. (2006) and is a '*whole school model*'[1] that fosters learning and is underpinned by distributed leadership.

Following the last eighteen months of the pandemic, adapted ways of working, a sense of environmental and physical disconnection coupled with rapid-response, crisis leadership, the time is now ripe to re-examine our school cultures. Links between natural environments and human, social, and political tensions are not new and with our current renewed appreciation for our physical learning environments, now is the moment to consider how we can tend to the growth and development of our learning landscapes.

Considering the *cultivation, germination, and propagation* of learning, the table below provides examples of the conditions, tools and process that have supported each stage of development at BSB. The terms '*self*', '*others*' and '*organisation*' have been used, in keeping with our school rationale to observe the layers of the school PLC ecosystem. Using this structure, we can see that at each layer, school leadership has a role to support growth. In the next section of this working paper, I will review a selection of examples from each phase in our school context.

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[1] Harris, A., Jones, M. Huffman, J.B. (2018) classify PLCs into three types: *whole school, within school and across school*. The model in our school meets their *whole school* definition where: '*...the entire school is considered to be operating as an entire* *learning community by adhering to certain shared norms and values (DfES, 2005; Hipp, Huffman, Pancake & Olivier, 2008).*'

| The Growth of a Professional Learning Ecosystem | | |
|---|---|---|
| Self | Others | Organisation |
| **Cultivate:** 'to prepare and use land for growing plants or crops'[2] <br> 'to try to develop and improve something'[3] | | |
| *Conditions: sunlight, air, water.* **Tools:** *plough, cultivator, harrow, leveller.* **Processes:** *Removing weeds, removing boulders, irrigating, aerating, fertilising* | | |
| **Condition**: Open-door to (PL) leadership <br> Support to review scenarios that don't go to plan <br> No-blame culture <br> Removal of barriers <br> Support for staff to find 'best-fit' role/best place for growth <br> Time given for PL <br> **Tool:** mentors for new and ECT staff | **Tool:** Time given for PL <br> PL library and recommended reading <br> Talk and walk in the park offered in non-contact/lunch <br> PLPs given copies of 'Collaborative Professionalism' and 'Indelible Leadership' <br> **Conditions:** Teams ownership of meeting time and focus <br> Collective autonomy favoured | **Conditions**: Established Whole-school PL ways of working <br> Entitlements and responsibilities of PL shared <br> Invitational and distributed leadership promoted <br> Trust <br> Time <br> Investment in leadership development and progression <br> 'Best-fit' role development supported <br> Self-accountability holding greater importance than hierarchical accountability <br> PL valued by school leadership <br> **Tools:** Staff wellbeing supported by use of leisure facilities/ catering/ healthcare/counselling |
| **Germinate:** 'to (cause a seed to) start growing' <br> 'to start developing'[2] | | |
| *Conditions: water, oxygen, warmth.* **Tools:** *seeds, planter, stake, marker, lighting, watering can.* **Processes:** *water, activate, grow roots, shoots and leaves* | | |
| **Tools:** Individual PL Coaching, leadership coaching, instructional coaching, 'contextual coaching' <br> External critical friends <br> EQ Coaching for self | **Tools:** Group coaching appreciative reflection <br> 4 Ws and an H <br> Question Storming <br> Thinking rounds <br> Thinking/feeling/saying/doing brainstorm <br> Think/feel/act cards <br> Radar Chart Mapping <br> External critical friends <br> The PL Hub <br> Relationship mapping <br> EQ coaching in team <br> PLPs following GROWTH coaching training <br> Staff electing to follow GROWTH coaching training <br> Kotter 8 step model <br> **Processes:** Professional Learning Partners enquiry in multiple fields | **Processes:** Professional Learning Partner Roles <br> Autonomous PL <br> **Tools:** Appreciative reflection <br> Leadership coaching <br> Research & Development support <br> Keep/Bin/Tweak exercises <br> All staff invited to attend PL days sessions offering insights into coaching <br> Staff survey and feedback <br> **Conditions:** Invitational approach to PL |

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[2] oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english

[3] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english

| | Coaching enquiry and experimentation into instructional coaching, leadership coaching, post PL coaching and vertical practice coaching | |
|---|---|---|
| **Propagate**: 'to produce new plants from a parent plant'<br>'to spread an idea, a belief or a piece of information among many people'[2] | | |
| *Conditions: Oxygen, water, warmth.* **Tools:** *Trowel, fork, pruning knife, grafting wrap.* **Processes:** *cutting, digging, layering, grafting, planting, budding, fertilising* | | |
| **Tools:** External critical friends | **Tools**: PLPs using skills from GROWTH coaching training to support others<br>PLPs enquiring into coaching<br>PLPs training others to coach (instructional coaching)<br>**Conditions**: leadership role-modelling<br>**Processes:** Coaching added to existing structures.<br>Staff-initiated PL mini-sessions<br>Staff-led Teachmeets<br>Staff-led Mindmeets<br>Staff-led PL book club<br>Role of leadership to connect and join up thinking<br>Recommending reading<br>**Tools:** Creation of PLP maps<br>External critical friends<br>Coaching<br>Mentoring<br>The PL Hub<br>Relationship mapping<br>Professional learning conversations | **Tools:** WS PL options map<br>Staff Professional Learning Newsletter<br>Pop-up sharing showcases<br>Staff-made Professional Learning videos<br>External experts and critical friends' support<br>**Conditions:** Whole school approach<br>Autonomous Professional Learning<br>Distributed Leadership<br>Resourced and updated library open to staff<br>Time<br><br>**Processes:**<br>Staff-led PL days<br>Mixed groupings in PL activities<br>Creation of informal and formal roles<br>Training School Accreditation<br>Creation of alternative to appraisal through staff-led group (Autonomous Professional Learning)<br>Teaching Together in Europe initiative<br>Adding Coaching to pre-existing structures<br>Presentations to Board of Governors<br>Staff participation in external conferences |

## Cultivate:

Within our school setting, several conditions have been observed that promote cultivation: significantly those of trust, time, and choice. It has been significant at an organisational level that the planning, direction, and leadership of our PL days by staff, for staff has made a clear statement in terms of trusting staff to be self-accountable and hold autonomy to support student learning and whole school development through their PL. Time has been given to do so on PL days, in addition to freeing up directed meeting time and providing cover.

The cultivation to allow these conditions has been a key component to the success of our coaching enquiry. For our staff, this has meant ensuring that as a school the right conditions are in place before moving forward with coaching. Understanding more about our PL context and established culture has helped this process. Working with the '*Four Bs of collaborative professionalism*' (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) matrix has been a helpful tool to understand our developing PLC. Through enquiry, we have observed that PL conversations are a natural and established part of our practice. To cultivate the right learning conversation conditions, Stoll (2012) observes the importance of social interdependence and Lofthouse & Thomas (2017) consider the concept of a social space as a supporting component to collaborative partnerships and effective coaching (Lofthouse, 2019). Valuing the social nature to PLC growth has allowed collective efficacy to develop as a strong and valued component and has supported our introduction of coaching into these established ways of working. A member of staff recently reflecting on their focus work noted: '*The underlying culture was already there, so that made everything easier!*'

Moreover, the introduction of Autonomous Professional Learning (APL), in place of previous systems of appraisal, has brought balance between hierarchical accountability versus genuine staff-led learning. In turn this has led to greater staff agency.

Through allowing staff to develop in areas of their own interest at a pace in

balance with their own career trajectory and growth, we have witnessed the strengths, skills and knowledge of staff that may have otherwise been hidden. Given the right conditions, all staff should have the opportunity to flourish. An attentive cultivator has the role to track growth and conditions. When ideas are slow to blossom, new possibilities can be considered to support growth. Leadership lessons can be drawn from the philosophy of the New Perennial movement that attempts to balance human intervention and nature, and in this case by: '*putting the right plant in the right place without modifying the conditions*' (Biggs, 2015). A courageous leader will tend to this by playing to staff strengths, igniting their interest by allowing them to shape a role around their strengths and develop agency.

The aforementioned conditions at BSB have invited innovation, allowed for leadership opportunities, and contributed to the building of trust in a no-blame culture.

### Germinate:

The development of skills and tools to support the germination of ideas and initiatives creates a more intentional facilitation of staff-led projects. LeFevre et al. (2020) consider '*intentionality is about using one's power to take planned action so that outcomes are the consequence of deliberate planned actions.*'

Staff-led enquiry groups can be rich in knowledge, but facilitation may be needed to develop beyond the group's ideas. Self-pollination and the circulation of a group's knowledge can only occur for so long, and at some point, further diversity and cross-pollination is needed to challenge ideas for stronger growth. Several tools have been witnessed in our setting to support the germination process. Working with an external coach to understand EQ and what that brings to the team dynamic has built trust, allowed for honesty and humility, and created an understanding of a project as a joint learning venture.

Further tools have helped balance facilitation whilst remaining mindful to not control the direction the group's enquiry. In a similar way to how the minimalization of a Japanese rock garden is deliberate, offering a blank page *'open to individual interpretation'*

that *'provokes the questions'* (Biggs, 2015), not offering suggestions at the start of a project can allow for genuine staff creation of an initiative. The use of Q-Storming® (Adams, 2015) to 'provoke questions' has aided thinking to develop.  At BSB, the technique has worked best with clear guidelines: any questions are allowed even if they feel off-topic to encourage new thinking; questions need to be generative and judgement-free; and all questions should be framed using the collective, personal 'we', rather than 'you' or 'they' to encourage ownership and *'collaboration as shared labour for a common purpose'* (Lofthouse & Thomas, 2017).  This tool has triggered reaction and built new ideas, it has formed the direction of subsequent meetings, helped us to collaboratively shape our professional learning days and created a vision for coaching in our school to be documented and shared.

An additional tool that has worked successfully to assist sense testing initiatives from other staff perspectives, has been the collective contribution towards a thinking/ feeling/ saying/ doing brainstorm to create empathy

and build strategy.  The following use of the Kotter model (Kotter, 2014) has aided to develop a more strategic understanding of next steps, plotting progress in the process of change.  This has especially helped build leadership skills for staff who have who have strong enquiry skills, but had not faced leading initiatives of their own before.

## Propagate

In our own school context, part of the success of staff-led initiatives has been witnessing their growth to reach a stage of propagation.

As staff, we have seen how several structures can act as a trellis or frame to support and guide the growth of coaching within a school.  One being using the GROWTH model (Campbell, 2016) to support our conversations, and the other The Global Framework for Coaching in Education (© Growth Coaching International.  Published in Campbell & van Nieuwerburgh 2018b).  The use of such models has allowed specialised areas of enquiry: post PL coaching and instructional coaching to support professional practice; student coaching to support success and well-

being; and leadership coaching. Additionally, a new hybrid form of coaching is starting to develop to support operational staff in their specialised areas of work, along with teaching staff who are looking to make vertical curriculum connections. Considering it as a 'hybrid' allows a recognition of the complexity of its development and the significance of the creation of links across the school. It has grown organically from staff need in a bespoke setting, drawing similarities with the concept of 'contextual coaching' as observed by Hollweck and Lofthouse (2021) to '*promote the sharing and deepening of expertise, good judgment, collective responsibility and inquiry, as well as candid, constructive and respectful dialogue.*'

The process of working with trusted, critical friends has brought new perspectives and expertise to several areas of our school enquiry. The role of the critical friend who can incorporate both 'support' and 'critical' concepts as outlined by MacPhail, Tannehill & Ataman (2021), has been instrumental in helping the PLPs to further spread their learning across the school.

My role as a leader that sits alongside staff, but also within the Extended Leadership Team has enabled me to share staff-led enquiry with members of LT and regularly present to the Board of Governors, ensuring all parties are informed and prioritise the PL initiatives at a macro level in school policy, spending, staffing and developments.

The propagation process witnessed at BSB draws parallels with the actions of leaders to 'mobilise' PLN activities in Brown and Flood's (2019) study, including: 'staring small', 'providing updates to staff on what was happening and why', and 'sharing practice to encourage others to take it up' and actions to 'formalise' including: 'informing governors' and 'incorporating it into school policy.'

*"A crisis of some sort…can mean that the PLCs development is halted or indeed reversed."* (Stoll et al., 2006)

Over the last 24 months, restrictions to normal ways of working, due to the pandemic, have hampered some of our natural relationships. Our PL hub is a physical and social space for collaboration and connection but was

less frequented during the pandemic. Oudolf and Kingsbury (2013) remind us however that '...*human impacts on natural ecosystems result not necessarily in a loss of nature, but in a new nature*.' Negotiating with this 'new nature', our PLPs made mini videos, bookmarks, and posters to summarise the key points of their enquiry. They have used electronic platforms to share their 'S.I.P. of the week' (Sharing Insights into Practice) as a basis for coffee-break conversations. They have used break-times and non-contact time to walk the campus, visit classrooms and workspaces of staff. They have checked in with staff, developed relationships and left bookmarks as 'ambient reminders' (Brown & Flood, 2019) of our PL learning. The walked and talked connections they have mapped are a 'living dynamic', (Sherman & Teemant, 2020) spun as a rhizomatic web across the campus from one faculty to another.

## Negotiating with nature in a 'New Perennial' Leadership

Emerging from the crisis, the school leader needs to transition to their future-focused, preferred leadership to avoid the danger of crisis ways of working becoming the norm. Coaching may have an important role in this space to unveil this wider and more fruitful thinking.

In unpredictable times, control and order may offer a semblance of stability. Considering a horticultural analogy, within times of uncertainty we have witnessed how the rigid block planting, trimmed topiary, and controlled symmetrical design features of Renaissance Gardens have offered notions of control and power to counteract the unpredictability of the time. An important leadership lesson to be learnt from Robinson's critique of Victorian formal planting however is that such '*disciplined lines may eventually strip us of our identity*' (Biggs, 2015).

Such degrees of control, however, may bring apprehension to some leaders. In this case, a contrasting model may be to consider a return to nature, following a rewilding philosophy of: '*sitting back and observing what happens*' (Tree, 2018). However, in a garden left untended, not all nature will survive.

Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) remind us that '*collaborative cultures don't happen by themselves*' and '*require some guidance and intervention*', therefore, in terms of nature versus nurture, a complex balance is needed that requires a '*nuanced leader*' (Fullan, 2019) who can balance the Yin and the Yang for a positive and harmonious landscape.

A PLC is a growing, living and shifting ecosystem. Attempting to add structure to something that thrives through nuance and entangled relations may appear a contradiction, but by valuing joint work and interdependence some solutions are offered to this complexity.

As a place that is held between the Renaissance Garden and Rewilding, leadership lessons can be drawn from the New Perennial or Dutch Wave movement that encourages intermingling, diversity, complexity, change, coherence, and distinction (Oudolf & Kingsbury, 2013). Emerging from the pandemic, collaboration is needed to fuse creativity, diversity and complexity with structure, knowledge, and experience. Now is the moment to *cultivate, germinate* and *propagate* to support a sustainable whole school ecosystem.

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# 15 years on: My reflections of the influence of a master's module, 'Coaching for Change', on leading research on child and adult adversities

## A think piece working paper by Sarah Martin-Denham

This is a reflection on the influence of a Masters 'coaching and mentoring' module I took in 2006 years ago at Newcastle University. At the time, I was a college lecturer, coaching a new colleague who was having difficulties with grading work, lesson planning and teaching a class of students. As recommended by Crisfield (2003), and as part of the coaching cycle, we team-taught her class, capturing it on video to use as a coaching tool to analyse our perceptions of the effectiveness of the lesson.

As part of my 2006 study, I explored the use of open-ended questions in pre and post-coaching sessions to support my colleague to reflect on why the students were not engaging with her teaching. Costa (1994, p. 111) suggested that **'what/if kinds of questions cause the brain to dream, visualize, evaluate, speculate and imagine. Those two little words carry great power.'** Being new to supporting staff development and coaching, this quote shaped our interactions. We explored questions such as 'what do you think the reason could have been for them disengaging?' and 'if you could teach the lesson again, is there anything you would change?' These questions allowed her to reflect on underlying factors, such as lack of knowledge of the pupils' diverse needs and a reluctance of senior leaders to provide a robust induction that included evidence-based approaches to learner engagement. Fifteen years on and the use of what/if questions remains important to my research question design.

In my current role as a senior lecturer, I have been commissioned to lead several qualitative research projects on aspects of child and adult adversity, including school exclusion, domestic

abuse, and experiences of children's social care. This research uses interpretative phenomenology as a theoretical framework, which aims to understand experiences as they are lived (Vagle, 2018; Peoples, 2021) by gaining insights to bring us into direct contact with the real world (van Manen, 2016).

The phenomenological question at the heart of my research is 'what is the nature of this lived experience' (van Manen, 2016). In a recent commission, I interviewed men who were abusive towards their partners, often in the presence of children. In responding to 'what' questions, the context is provided for their stories, for example: what led you to access domestic abuse support services?' Similarly, 'if' questions allow reflections on what could have been, such as 'if it wasn't for domestic abuse support services, what impact would there be on your life?' Both of these types of question allow participants to think, and provide reflective and seemingly authentic responses. My reflection is that this alone is insufficient for robust research; there also needs to be an emphasis on 'how, do and has'

questions to probe further into their reflections and experiences, such as 'How did you feel about seeking support?' and 'do you know the causes of your behaviours?' There is great value in asking participants directly to reflect and recall, providing extended responses to a 'what' based question.

A further aspect of the module that continues to have influence is the importance of building trusted relationships into interactions (Showers, 1985; Preston, 2005). I believe I have this skill naturally, but it has evolved and re-shaped over the years. Preston (2005) talked about the four basic skills needed to be an effective communicator: being a good listener; having something positive to say; being able to express yourself; and being able to appeal to listeners' emotions. These communication skills have shaped the basis of my approach to interviewing children and adults about some of the most traumatic experiences of their lives, such as being excluded from school, drug taking, exposure to violent relationships, or having children removed into the care of the state. When interviewing caregivers of

children permanently excluded from school, they were in an elevated emotional state. Beginning the interview with an open-ended question, 'can you tell me about you and your family?' gave them control to share their story; they owned it. I was there to be an attentive listener, to be empathetic to their experiences and to provide emotional support.

For me, the principles and practices of effective coaching transfer to ethical research. Care, empathy, positive relationships and trust complement and span the disciplines of coaching and ethical research.

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# Using Hargreaves and O'Connor's 10 Tenets of Collaborative Professionalism as an audit tool for school improvement

## *A practice insight working paper by Paula Ayliffe*

As a school leader, I have been wrestling with the idea of developing a professional learning framework that offers flexibility for the individuals involved as well as building upon collaborative practices that have emerged in my school over time. A paragraph sticks out from Andy Hargreaves and Michael T O'Connor's 2018 seminar entitled 'Leading collaborative professionalism' from the Centre of Strategic Education, as perhaps as being the ultimate goal for such a framework. *"Collaborative professionalism is the golden cell of professional collaboration, where teachers have strong relationships, trust each other and feel free to take risks and make mistakes. There are also tools, structures and protocols of meeting, coaching, feedback, planning and review that support practical action and continuous improvement of the work undertaken together."* (Andy Hargreaves and Michael T O'Connor, Seminar 274, page 8, 2018) [1]

Collaboration within an effective school is a given, teachers should collaborate. But Hargreaves and O'Connor in their book, 'Collaborative Professionalism – when teaching together means learning for all' (2018), talk about something more, something they call collaborative professionalism. They argue that if collaboration is going to be truly effective then collaboration needs to be "creating stronger and better professional practice together...where members of their profession labour... together" (p.4). The authors provide a much fuller definition in the book. I have included the aspects that particularly struck me as I seek to improve professional learning opportunities within my school.

"Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators

transform teaching and learning together...It is organised in an evidence-informed, but not data driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, and continuous inquiry...(it) is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators actively care and have solidarity with each other as fellow professionals..." (p 4 and 5).

Hargreaves and O'Connor make the case for collaborative professionalism through portrayals of, as they describe, "...deliberately designed professional collaboration in five different parts of the world." (p. 5). The analysis of these case studies points to "10 tenets of collaborative professionalism" that distinguish it from earlier versions of professional collaboration. Hargreaves and O'Connor describe these 10 tenets as "four contextual and cultural factors that are indispensable when attempting to initiate and implement these collaborative designs in schools or systems elsewhere" (p. 6).

So, with this in mind, I decided to use these 10 tenets as an audit tool to measure our progress toward Collaborative Professionalism.

**The 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism**   (p. 110 fig 8.1)

Ten Tenets evaluation and the 'what next' for Mayfield

| Already in place | The Ten Tenets | What next? |
|---|---|---|
| • A new model of Co-headship from Sep 2018 – both full-time working towards model outlined below* <br> • A model for a version of 'peer coaching' in year groups pairs/PPA pairs/inclusion team grouping introduced Sep 2019 | 1. Collective Autonomy: educators have more independence from top-down authority, but less independence from each other. | • Extend an equitable approach across leadership, with the continued expectation that we are all leaders that work together; e.g. SDP groups not just led by SLT. |
| • 'Tea and Chat' discussion group has brought staff together to talk through issues, look at relevant research, listen to others. Results have included a growing confidence amongst staff (teachers and TAs), an better understanding that all have something important to offer the whole. <br> • Groups of teachers have independently undertaken 'lesson chats' and co-coaching models, sharing knowledge, skills and practice. | 2. Collective Efficacy: the belief that together we can make a difference to the students we teach. | • Continue practice that has developed but increase the opportunities to a wider audience; i.e. TAs, admin staff, site staff etc. Look an increased ways of listening to each other's voice. |
| • 'Spirals of Inquiry' model used initially from Sep 2018 to have a better understanding of the children in our classes now extended to each of the aims of the school SDP and personal spirals carried out by individual teachers as part of their performance management/appraisal process. <br> • Teachers and TAs increasingly talking naturally about how they identify an issue and talk about how they are trying to solve/find alterratives, as well as seeking advice or discussion about it. | 3. Collaborative Inquiry: teachers routinely explore problems, issues or difference to improve practice, embedded in their everyday work. | • Some performance management (needs a better name) targets will be carried over into 20/21 as Covid-19 has caused some targets to be suspended. However we mustn't use the pandemic as an excuse to stop thinking about our own PD but instead look at the things we have/are learning from it. |
| • Teachers have reflected on their experiences during Lockdown <br> • These experiences and reflections taken forward for consideration and into future planning | | |
| • A noticible change of language with most teachers, but not all. Element of some placing too much responsibility on themselves, and others not enough. Some TAs talk about 'their kids' – moving away from 1 to 1 TAs, have physically removed the label, but not the mindset yet…for some. Again 'SEND – everyone's concern' is the phrase often said but still not embedded enough in the minds of some teachers. | 4. Collective Responsibility: a mutual obligation to help each other to serve 'our students', not 'my students'. | • Covid has seen the vast majority of our staff come together working to do the very best job we can in the circumstances. But there are isolated examples of this not happening. Sarah and I need to think through why this is the case; is it an individual that has/is causing the issue? Is it the systems we've generated or inherited that are not quite working in the way they were intended? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • A definite feeling of a movement toward this. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas and are listened to. Some may argue that this isn't happening yet, but there is plenty of evidence that it is (SDP running records/teacher survey June 2020). Need to work with some individuals to show them that their idea sometimes works against whole school aims and ethos, and identifies a deep lack of understanding on their part. | 5. Collective Initiative: fewer 'initiatives', more initiative from teachers who step forward and are supported by the system. | • We have four new teachers joining our school. Opportunity to think about induction and sharing our ethos, as well as establishing something more concrete and sustainable for early career teachers<br>• Meetings to take place over two weeks and to include group for ECTs and PPA/part-time teachers<br>• Schedule over two weeks/member of fewer SDP groups has provided more space for thinking and reflecting. |
| • 'Tea and Chat' discussion format now more prevalent in general staff meetings.<br>• 'Tea and Chat' continuing in lockdown via Zoom – model for moving forward | 6. Mutual Dialogue: conversations are actively instigated including dialogue about valued differences of opinion, curriculum, behaviour, honest feedback. Protocols include listening and clarification. | • Wider use of coaching skills for all staff, including appropriate training<br>• Desire from 70% of teachers who completed the survey in June for more dialogue, talking through issues and opportunities to really listen to each other |
| • Lesson Chats well developed resulting in a range of methods used including team teaching<br>• Structure in place to facilitate LC – SL on a rota spend Fridays out of class. HLTAs employed to cover their class and the classes of those they are working with.<br>• DH from local secondary school seconded to us on a Friday morning to work with our subject leaders and understand for himself how our primary school works (mutual CPD) | 7. Joint Work: e.g. team teaching, collaborative planning and peer reviews facilitated by structures, tools and protocols. | • We need to look further into our leadership structure which we largely inherited.<br>• Does the structure match the ethos/priorities of school?<br>• Is there a better way? How might that look?<br>• Whilst bubbles are in operation Friday Leadership day cannot take place – opportunity to once again look at the timetable of meetings, taking on board our current phrase of choice 'less is more' |
| • School ethos and aims to reflect this<br>• Our banner reads: Everyone is welcome · Our diversity enriches us all · We all do our best for ourselves and for each other<br>• School core values in action for the past 5 years: respect, resilience, empathy and kindness, independence, creativity, aspiration | 8. Common Meanings and Purpose: greater than academic achievement alone, engaging with goals of education that enable your people to flourish for themselves and for society. | • We started this process in September 2018 by looking at the 'Mayfield Child'. How has that changed since then? What effect has/will Covid have had on this? INSET day 3/9/20 will revisit this.<br>• During lockdown, when we had 150 children back to school, we saw that the children took a couple of weeks to regain their positivity. We have decided to have 'positivity' as a new seventh core value for this academic year as we welcome all of our children and staff back to school. |
| • Children have recently written a 'manifesto'^ through our work with Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination (CCI) | 9. Collaborating with Students: teachers and students construct change together. | • Checking with the children that we are listening, hearing and supporting them via manifesto and through their spirals conversations with their teachers.<br>• Extra Spiral conversation for Autumn 1 as we welcome all children back to school. |
| • During our interview for Co-headship, Sarah and I gave a presentation of our vision for Mayfield (Jan 2018) | 10. Big-Picture Thinking for All: everyone gets the big picture, they see it, live it and create it together." | • Much thinking outside the box will be needed as we strive to do our best to bring Mayfield back together again. |
| • Vision shared with staff and parents (Sep 2018)<br>• Vision reviewed with staff and parents (July 2019)<br>• The aims of both SDPs so far reflect this vision (Sep 2018 onwards)<br>• Teachers surveyed in response to the CPD offer provided 2019-20 (see separate document) | | • CPD/meetings format reviewed and updated for 2020-21 (see reflective commentary). |

In the CollectivEd working paper, 'Changing our schools from the inside out; Is this what we mean by 'Collaborative Professionalism?' [3,] a CollectivED Symposium summary by Rachel Lofthouse, Rachel asked: *"…what can we learn from each other and from the concept of Collaborative Professionalism to help all members of school communities to thrive?"*

Rachel went onto say: *"(the ten tenets) is a useful framework through which to reflect…If you are developing projects with colleagues which involve new ways of working together it might be useful to consider whether it offers a way to*

*refine your plans and build more capacity to change schools from the inside out."*

By using the 10 tenets as a "framework through which to reflect", I believe they were indeed a useful "way to refine our plans and build more capacity to change (our) school from the inside out". In addition, if we go back to the fuller definition of Collaborative Professionalism that Hargreaves and O'Connor provide on pages 4 and 5 of their book[2], I would further suggest that using these tenets as a lens has enabled our actions, both past and future, to be laid alongside this definition as a check towards demonstrating collaborative professionalism.

| Hargreaves and O'Connor's definition[2] of collaborative professionalism | Examples from practice |
|---|---|
| …teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together | Lesson Chats[6] have deepened the experience of subject leaders not only in terms of their own knowledge, but also as they mentor others and encourage change in practice often through a 'have a go' then 'discuss together' approach. |
| It is organised in an evidence-informed, but not data driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, and continuous inquiry… | Via Lesson Chats, Tea and Chat discussions, on-going personal 'Spirals of Inquiry'[4] discussions in appraisal. |
| …(it) is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators actively care and have solidarity with each other as fellow professionals… | Peer coaching scenarios now happening independently, especially during the pandemic, with teaching staff evidencing many professional learning opportunities undertaken with others without prompting or instruction from SLT. |

Can I therefore conclude that we are demonstrating Collaborative Professionalism in our practice? Well, we are certainly on the way but there is much more to do, especially if this is to be sustained over time.

Hargreaves and O'Connor use the final chapters of their book to i) look at the markers of "moving from professional collaboration to collaborative professionalism" (p. 125) and ii) to focus on "what we should do to strengthen collaborative professionalism" (p.129 onwards).

A further analysis of our professional learning offer for 2019-20 compared to the offer for 2020-21, and subsequently our 2021-22 offer, shows a definite movement from left to right in the manner outlined by the following diagram:

| From | | To |
|---|---|---|
| Talk or Action | → | Talk and Action |
| Narrow Achievement Goals | → | Learning with Meaning & Purpose |
| Episodic Meetings | → | Embedded Cultures |
| Administratively Imposed | → | Teacher Led |
| Comfortable or Contrived | → | Genuine & Respectful |
| Conversation | → | Dialogue |
| For Students | → | With Students |

fig 9.2 page 125.

| 2019-20 CPD offer | Meetings |
|---|---|
| | Mondays - Tea and Chat (3.30 - 4.15) optional; |
| | Tuesdays* - Staff meeting 3.45 - 4.45 |
| | Wednesdays - Team meetings for FS/Yr 1, Yrs 2/3, Yrs 4/5/6 |
| | Thursdays - Leadership Team at 3.45 |
| | *Reflective Peer Coaching: 4 sessions per term |
| | SDP groups: 3 in autumn; 4 in spring and summer |
| | SEND, Maths and English 'updates' – 2 per term |

| 2020-21 PL offer | | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Week 1 | Tea and Chat | Leadership Team | Team Meetings | Staff Meeting^ | |
| | Week 2 | Early Career Teachers | Leadership Team | PPA/Part - time teachers | Staff Meeting^ | |

| 2021-22 PL offer | | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Tea and Chat | Staff Meeting^ | | Leadership Team/Team meeting – alternate weeks | |

A rolling programme of SDP teams (staff in one team out of five (2020-21) or seven (2021-22), each one focusing on one SDP aim, rather than attendance in two or three teams as last year), SEND/English/Maths updates. In 2021-22 the teams are led by different members of staff from across the school and not necessarily by those in middle or senior leadership.

The changes, although look subtle, are as a result of talking to staff rather than

just second-guessing their apparent needs. For example…

When asked about areas of their practice teachers would like to develop, they included:

- "How to be a good subject leader – keep developing knowledge of (my) subject across all year groups and better understand how it is taught" → SDP aims 1 and 2
- "Developing continuous provision from FS to year 1" → SDP aim 3
- "Better understanding of SEN" → half-termly updates.

When asked about 'next steps', teachers made the following comments:

- "I would like to talk to other teachers in all year groups about how they teach the subject and observe teaching not to judge, just to gain understanding" → SDP aims 1 and 2.
- "Talk me through possible ways", "give me feedback more regularly", "continue the support that's already there", "give me time" → individual coaching conversations by SLT offered throughout the pandemic, teachers involved in fewer SDP groups, meetings spread out over

two weeks rather than one, and in 2021-22 cutting down the number of meeting still further.

- "most of this was offered on days that I don't work" → catch-up meetings for part-time staff scheduled so they didn't miss out.

When asked to comment on the specific aspects of CPD offered:

- Peer coaching – "absolutely invaluable…it links in very well with all the other things we are doing"; "(this has) encouraged me to reflect on my practice in a productive way and (has) helped my partner teacher and I build a strong working relationship and understanding of one another's teaching style" → teachers are now seeking opportunities for this independently.

As we move forward, we also need to pay close attention to the questions Hargreaves and O'Connor pose in the final chapter of their book[2], using the lists they provide as checks and/or warnings for us (p 130 – 138).

- "What should we stop doing?"

- "What should we continue doing?"
- "What should start doing?"

The following points are a summary of the aspects Hargreaves and O'Connor refer to when answering these questions.

What should we stop doing?

- Data teams should not dominate what teachers do or even what they think and worry about.
- Lesson study should not forget "the culture in which they are evolved".
- Avoid high turnover of staff.

What should we continue doing?

- "...moves to establish stronger collaboration might start out simply through having some social gatherings or through creating teams that work on particular tasks..." →our examples of 'Tea and Chat' and our SDP teams.

- Share findings regularly with all staff and parents enabling all to have a better understanding of the larger vision → SDP feedback documents and parent forums.
- Provide 'constructive and critical feedback in multiple forms from a range of colleagues' → 'Lesson Chats', personal 'Spirals of Inquiry'[4]

What should we start doing?

- Involve students in the process – include our children's voices in the SDP aims.

As a school we will continue to use the 10 tenets as a way of checking our progress towards collaborative professionalism. We also aim to widen our working networks by 'labouring' hard with others, by having 'deep and demanding dialogue with them and giving and receiving candid and constructive feedback'. This process certainly formed the basis of the conversations that we had with our coach as we successfully worked toward the CollectivEd Award[5] and as we continue to share our experiences and learning with others both locally and nationally.

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# Conscious Coaching: Bringing a Beginner's Mind to Coaching

## A Practice Insight Working Paper by Suzanne Culshaw

### Introduction

This paper explores the notion of conscious coaching, which evolved from a series of coaching sessions with an Early Career Teacher (ECT) and my ongoing thinking about the concept of intentionality. The reflective insights I share here are from my portfolio for the *PGCert in Coaching and Mentoring for Education Practitioners* at Leeds Beckett University.

The coaching approach I took with the ECT was rooted in the principles of the Thinking Environment (Kline, 1999) which meant that I wanted to engage in deep listening, listening to understand and appreciate. I promised not to interrupt and I waited to be invited to offer advice or suggestions. I intended to adopt a developmental rather than a directive stance, although I acknowledge now that it is possible to blend those approaches.

When searching the literature, you can find models of coaching which could be referred to as 'intentional coaching.' (e.g. Boyatzis, 2019; Zugelder, 2019) The focus of that intentionality tends to be on the coachee intending to change in some way. I am using intentionality here as a framework for the *coach*; it is the coach who adopts a conscious – an intentional – approach when engaging with a coachee. Despite years of working with teachers and educators as a mentor or quasi-coach, in many ways I came to see myself as an absolute beginner. My thinking has been disrupted, I have felt uncomfortable when faced with certain 'truths' about my coaching practice and I am grateful for the opportunity to start afresh.

My reflections have allowed me to learn from how I had 'always done things' and how I might do things differently (by which I actually mean better). I was bringing the notion of a beginner's mind

to the process of coaching, which meant having an attitude of openness, eagerness and freedom from preconceptions (Suzuki, 2020). Trialling a new approach required a degree of self-awareness which meant that I became actually more deliberate in my practice. I noticed this in the 'internal conversations' (Archer, 2012) in my head throughout the first coaching session with an ECT and in the tensions in my body. This felt different because it *was* different. I was unsettling my ways of thinking and acting, and I could sense the disruption.

## Becoming a Conscious Coach

Conscious coaching requires the coach to acknowledge their positionality and, as far as possible, to put it to one side; it's better overall to resist any temptation to jump in with ideas and solutions. Conscious coaching also requires a deep sense of intentionality in terms of building a trusting relationship with the coachee. Both parties need to create and engage in and with the semantic, physical and social spaces in a spirit of dialogic

reflexivity (Kemmis & Grootenboer 2008; Archer, 2012).

I present here reflections from having worked with two educators – Sandra and Natalie (pseudonyms) - in a coaching and mentoring capacity. I reflect on how my practice evolved and changed, in light of becoming a more conscious coach.

My coaching relationship with Sandra was informal, in fact you could say that it wasn't even a coaching relationship at all. I did not prepare for conversations with her and when we met, I tended to offer suggestions and advice rooted in my expertise and experience. In one meeting, Sandra shared with me something I'd previously said. Apparently – because I actually had no recollection of having said this – I had told her: "you need to do this." The thing is, she didn't actually *want* "to do this." In her feedback to me she mentioned how this had changed the nature of our conversation, from being exploratory to "feeling different." This hit me hard; I realised I had crossed a line into directive mentoring territory (e.g. Hobson, 2017), with no thought for what might be right for Sandra, let alone

asking her whether my suggestion would be welcomed. I was reminded of the importance of asking for permission (Kline, 1999 & 2020) and being prepared to receive a "no" in response. Clearly, I had overpowered the conversation and imposed a personal view. I certainly hadn't been in conscious coach mode. I was simply doing what came naturally to me. The thing is, I hadn't even noticed; it had all felt comfortably familiar. Until it was brought to my attention. Ouch!

An 'external impulse' had clearly startled me out of my current habits (Mason, 2002; p61). Whilst this 'disturbance' could trigger the act of noticing, it doesn't necessarily precipitate action. It was the PGCert process which encouraged me to start making that effort to notice and look at ways to turn that into intentional activity. Several years ago, I wrote about how this all sounds pretty simple (Culshaw, 2016). I was only now realising that it is in fact complex and requires both 'intentionality and effort' (Culshaw, 2016).

## The Conscious Turn

With Natalie, I made the conscious decision to take a different approach, one which was rooted in the principles of the Thinking Environment (Kline, 1999). It was a deliberate choice to trial an approach to coaching conversations which was very different from my usual modus operandi. The approach I took included a range of techniques, including framing, questioning, seeking clarification, summarising, reflecting back. The discomfort I felt when in sessions with Natalie came from an unfamiliarity with the approach I was taking; it was not second nature, it was not (yet) embedded in my practice.

What I've realised is that I was actually more *present* with Natalie. I was engaging with her in a far more conscious and mindful manner. I was listening to *hear* rather than listening to *respond*. I was operating in a completely different mode, that of intentionality. The notion of intentionality in coaching can be found in the literature (e.g. Zugelder, 2019) and tends to be associated with change within the coachee (e.g. Boyatzis, 2019) rather than the coach. My conscious turn towards

being a coach involved me adopting an intentional stance, adopting intentional behaviours and attitudes in order to engage with Natalie in a way which would allow her to surface and language her concerns and issues. It was my turn to notice, to act, to change.

I seemed to be able to offer Natalie not only a *semantic space* (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) but also an *emotional* space. Research by Spencer et al. (2018) identified that whilst mentoring clearly addresses ECTs' pedagogical needs, emotional needs are less well met; emotional support is key, especially when working with ECTs. Natalie shared with me that she was surprised at how emotional and anxious she had felt about and during our coaching conversations:

*While I retrospectively see the benefits of these meetings ... usually immediately before I feel a sense of anxiousness. I suspect this is because I know that I'll end up opening up more than I realise, and this can be emotional.*

A key aspect of coaching Natalie was a sense of relational trust (Hobson, 2017) which we had built up together, a

relationship which acknowledged the affective dimension (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). The conscious coaching approach I was taking seemed to enable Natalie to experience non-judgmental support, which perhaps helped her feel more secure in revealing her concerns and challenges (Daresh, 2001, cited in Kutsyuruba et al., 2019).

## Beginner's mind

A key aspect of this conscious turn towards a different way of coaching was to acknowledge that I was a beginner. I have long been familiar with the notion of the 'beginner's mind' and was reminded recently of the words of the Zen teacher, Suzuki: "in the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" (2020; p2). Suzuki explains that when we start to learn something our mind is not yet solid with concepts, opinions and certainties. My conscious turn towards a different way of coaching took me out of a space in which I might normally – and perhaps a tad arrogantly - have viewed myself as an expert, and placed me squarely back in novice territory. What I slowly started to realise was that by bringing a beginner's mind to my

relationship with Natalie, I wasn't bogged down by preconceptions of coaching. Instead, I was eager, curious and open (Suzuki, 2020) to a new, more conscious way of "doing" coaching.

The critical incident with Sandra had forced me to stop and reflect, to engage reflexively in my role as a coach and to become more critically aware of my own positionality and the 'baggage' I was bringing to the relationship. Natalie and I were both able to interact more reflexively to 'relive, rehearse, clarify and recognise' (Willis et al., 2017, p.18) whatever was brought to the coaching table. I was starting to feel unencumbered – refreshed and energised, even - when coaching Natalie. I had noticed an opportunity to act differently (Mason, 2002) and I *wanted* to act differently. As Mason states, 'What we fail to notice is unlikely to have much influence upon our actions' (2002; p29) and Sandra's feedback was the nudge I needed. So, I will always be grateful to Sandra for shining a light on my (unskilful) coaching practice and for the reminder that whilst 'I cannot change others... I *can* work at

changing myself' (Mason, 2002, p. xvi; my emphasis).

### Closing Reflections

I was intrigued to re-discover my blog about intentionality (Culshaw, 2016) and to be reminded that 'Deliberate noticing is much harder than it seems it *ought* to be' (Mason, 2002; p37). Noticing requires us to be present and sensitive *in the moment* and to have a *reason* to act differently (Mason, 2002; my emphasis). Perhaps this mindful and sensitive noticing is the beginning from which acting differently – in this case coaching consciously and with intentionality - can emerge.

It can be refreshing to adopt the position of a beginner, to try out new ways of being. It can feel risky adopting the stance of a beginner; it can make you feel vulnerable. But when you bring a conscious intention into the room and engage in coaching conversations which are not about personal gain and proving what you know, but about listening to understand and to appreciate, then there is in fact so much to be gained. I'm glad I gave it a go. Perhaps you will, too.

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# Corvinus, Coronavirus and Cerebral Cortices

## *A think piece working paper by Daniel Duke*

The term 'Coaching' is commonly recognised in modern society as a way to broadly describe some sort of developmental practice. Somewhat predictably, many people squint when I attempt to explain my role within Further Education (FE) as they struggle to grasp what might constitute coaching and mentoring in any educational environment. Maybe this is because coaching often evokes traditional connections to sport or business.

The concepts embedded within coaching (and mentoring) have been on the peripheral consciousness of educational professionals for many years. This is mainly due to the potential of coaching. Where institutions value this type of practice (or at least value it enough for it not to be swept aside by the performative nature of the environment and particularly where time is precious), within a culture of support and trust, coaching can form a successful mode of professional development for teachers, to positively affect student outcomes (Joyce and Showers, 1988).

The advantages of Coaching and Mentoring within education are steadily becoming more appreciated and relatively recently this has led to an increase of practice that is taking place across the educational milieu. This might signify the fundamental significance of coaching within the modern educational environment and emphasise the importance of coaching as a stimulus for professional learning and career development (Brockbank & McGill, 2006; Pask & Barrie, 2007; Hobson, et al., 2009; Burley & Pomphrey, 2011). Therefore, it could be easy to assume that within all educational establishments, coaching would be well established as a ubiquitous form of progressive development (Veenman and Denessen, 2001). Unfortunately, this is currently not the case as it frequently appears

that where institutions try to implement coaching and mentoring structures, they are almost always undervalued against priorities that are perceived to be more important (Lofthouse, 2015).

Cox (2013) describes coaching as a "facilitated, dialogic, reflective process" (p.1), but the more experienced I become, the more I appreciate that coaching can be dynamically complex and therefore is often difficult to define, where most instances are intricate, interpersonal and multidimensional. This means that coachees require a dynamic continuum of carefully considered approaches (Hawkins and Smith, 2013, Obolensky 2017). Maybe this is another reason why education, as a sector, labours to fully embrace coaching and coaches.

What appears to be commonly agreed is that coaching has the physiognomy of a humanistic performance enhancing art form, which has the power to unlock potential and facilitate a change in learning, skills, behaviours or cognition of another (Gilbert & Whittleworth, 2009; Downey, 2003; van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). However, some people within education still struggle to appreciate the often-intangible concepts that are inherent within coaching as a practice, along with the subtleties and skilfulness of an experienced coach.

Possibly then a reflection of where the term 'Coaching' is derived could assist those who are sceptical.

Matthias Corvinus was king of Hungary and Croatia, ruling between 1458 and 1490. He introduced the mass production of the four-wheeled horse drawn, light carriages, which were made in the village of Kocs (they are called "kocsi" meaning "from Kocs" in Hungarian) to improve the transportation and postal services of the kingdom. This is where the term 'coach' originates (from the Hungarian word kocsi), used traditionally to collectively describe the driver and the four-wheeled carriage (English et.al, 2018). Gradually, over time, this term evolved to have an indicative meaning of transporting people from one place to another. I personally cherish the prospect of assisting people by the means of transporting them from a place where they often feel frustrated, unsupported or have plateaued, to a better place.

The possibility of attentively supporting some of my colleagues was intensified, as we all experienced the extraordinary times, due to multiple periods of national lockdowns, as a result of the safeguarding measures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The type of guidance they required shifted significantly towards instructional coaching, as many of them attempted a multitude of new approaches to ensure they supported their own cohorts of learners. I used this period of time to reflect upon my practice as a coach and mentor and this led to an evaluation and captivating deliberation of the interconnected elemental components of coaching as a practice. Kemmis et al. (2008) convincingly argue that to understand our practice, we should acknowledge that it is always entangled amongst intersubjective milieus. Consequently, the dialectical affiliation between 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' influence and are influenced by the lived experiences of the participants who are involved with any practice. This is an important factor as a safe and trusting environment is a critical element for me as a coach. Moreover, trust is difficult to build and requires time as "people are naturally cautious and need proof of reliability, integrity and competence" (Lofthouse, 2018, p. 42).

Furthermore, we live and work within a performative culture that regularly dictates that people need to prove their worth and demonstrate their merit before they are accepted. Trust should offer solidarity between a coach and coachee which permits them to see beyond their personal experiences or initial trepidations (Lofthouse 2019). Additionally, it should allow the coachee to be open and honest about their practice and create a positive, safe space where they are encouraged to be courageous enough to take risks and where vulnerability is embraced in a self-reinforcing system of growth (Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl & Whitworth, 2018). These factors have the potential to mitigate an environment which is excessively fixated on data or qualification achievement to measure levels of success. Frustratingly, this regularly results in pedagogical reduction and leads to learners experiencing a narrowed curriculum, or simply being prepared to meet assessment criteria, rather than a

holistic and engaging approach to learning by the continual improvement of pedagogy (Torrance, 2007). Like Ecclestone (2007), I agree that learners in FE are undeniably 'achieving' and also pause to deliberate what exactly are they 'learning'? Worryingly, this might be an inherent concern for all sectors of education in the UK, as learners progress through a system which arguably concentrates on exam preparation techniques rather than a holistic erudite journey (Illsley & Waller, 2017).

My freshest thinking contemplates the treacherous road towards mastery. This is relative to my own journey as I continually explore my own practice as a coach and mentor but also the individual and very distinct journeys that my coachees are undertaking. The crux of my own coaching centres around practice (applied interchangeably as a verb and a noun), this forms what I describe as my idée fixe. I am fascinated by the physical, conditional and neurological processes that are involved to develop the abilities of others as they progress from being novices to becoming skilful, in the events best described by Coyle (2010) as the Holy Shit Effect (HSE). This refers to the events where an onlooker is astonished by the apparent talent of the performer, while the performer is often blasé about their abilities.

The HSE occurs all of the time, but most often we do not notice it. My daughter received the big girl bike, with pedals, a basket, handlebar tassels and a baby carrier (but no stabilisers) that she had resolutely requested for her 5th birthday. I revelled in the amount of people who stop to stand and watch in admiration as this very small, blonde haired Exocet, whips past them at knee height, then somewhat predictably they stop to ask, "how old is she"? Their facial expression often questions my integrity when I explain that her older brother could ride his pedal bike, stabiliser free from the age of three. This is because what they have not seen, is quite literally the blood, sweat and tears from the hours of endeavour they both spent learning to manoeuvre their balance bikes from an even younger age. Importantly, what these onlookers failed to consider was the amount of time, effort and determination required in

order for the children to physically condition their bodies and program their neural pathways to make new connections in their schema. They have quite literally increased the number of connections in their brains, and this allows them to perform complex activities to ride their bikes with apparent ease.

My inquisitiveness and curiosity lead me to ponder how my own coaching might support the conditions and processes required to allow my coachees to practise for long enough and with the appropriate amount of focus and levels of challenge to allow them to develop their skilfulness. This is important for me as a coach and mentor, as ultimately our good intentions are often judged based upon some sort of measure, or it is our actions and behaviours that are evaluated. The paradox here is that we are not always best placed to evaluate our own activity and progress, therefore, we are regularly unable to see our own potential. Similar to a traditional wireless radio, frequently we are all slightly off the dial, in a place that is almost perfect but has some slight annoying static. Over a period of time, we can get used to this static and it becomes less noticeable to us, often it takes another person, who can see or hear this better than ourselves to bring it to our attention. Coaching and mentoring can offer the continual fine tuning of the dial or to view it another way, a lighthouse, as beacon of light which provides a secure focal point of direction (Sullivan, 2013, Bronowicz, 2014). These considerations fuel my current investigations as I explore and contemplate praxis, practice and practice architectures within FE to further understand just what might be required to create the ripe conditions for mastery. Watch this space……..

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# "The space to do this never happens." Enabling thinking room to grow teacher confidence in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A practice insight paper.

## *A think piece working paper by Cathy Gunning*

### Introduction: interwovenness as a way of being

This paper describes how strands of coaching and mentoring practice interwove into my practice to support primary teachers new to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in schools in England.
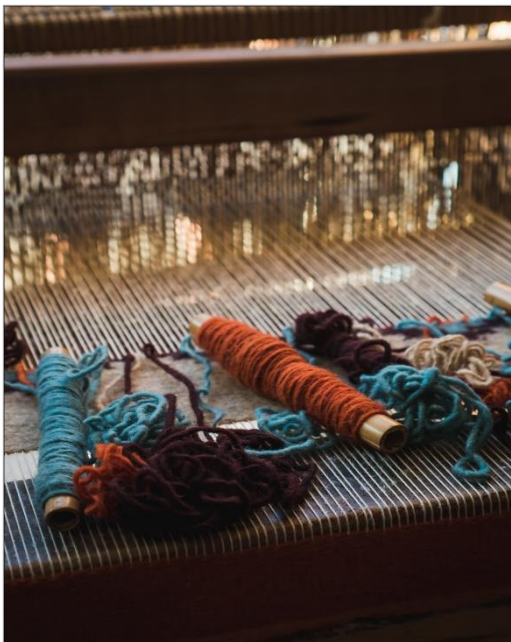


This interwovenness began in 2019 on the Post Graduate Coaching and Mentoring journey. It enabled my specialist leadership role in education to intertwine with coaching and mentoring. Threads of my teaching, care and leadership work wrapped around personal memories of mentoring and teacher training. Twines from reflecting on political waves that impacted on my lifetime's education connected with my reading and lived experiences.

Opportunities to develop professional learning came throughout the process. Conversations and collaborations with CollectivED colleagues and researchers wove ribbons of creativity and empowerment as layers of connections generated growth and confidence. From this grew a metaphoric weave that merged coaching and mentoring threads of being, and a desire to energise this in others.

## Teachers 'thrown in' to the EYFS

Being a passionate advocate for young children's play and learning, I had developed a programme to support teachers in the EYFS. It was a well-attended programme, and I was surprised when teachers shared that they had been 'thrown in' to teaching the EYFS, without professional development in this area prior to entering the nursery or reception class. They were new to teaching EYFS and were not confident. They had little or no prior knowledge of what best provision and practice could look like.
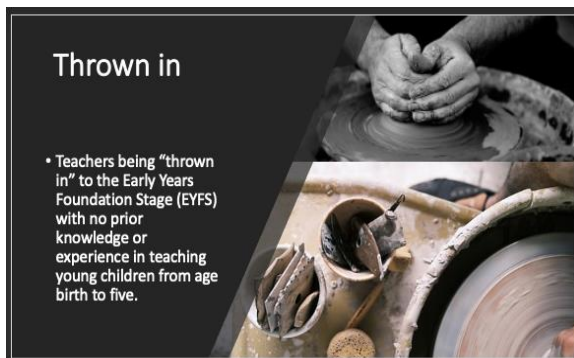


I realised there was a gap in the professional development, support, and training of these teachers. I felt very strongly about this and wanted to enable change. The teachers were not new to teaching (so not early career teachers), nor new to primary but were new to teaching in what is a very distinct and specialist Early Years Foundation Stage. This hit me hard and confronted my leadership role, fuelling my developing thinking around coaching and mentoring to develop and grow confidence in teachers.

## Having time to think

In her book, 'Time to Think' Nancy Kline (1999) describes the power of a 'Thinking Environment', which enables us to find answers within ourselves. Thinking time and space, Kline argues, is transformative. It enabled me to ask these questions:

- Is there a lack of experience and depth in teachers' early years pedagogy and practice?
- Is there a lack of knowledge and understanding about early years pedagogy for some teachers in schools, particularly if they are 'thrown in' to EYFS?
- Do school leaders know about early childhood and what impacts the quality and experience of teaching in the early years?

- Is there a lack of investment in early years from some schools and leaders?

Culminating in this critical question:

- Can my work impact pedagogy and practice in the EYFS and grow teacher confidence in such a vital phase?
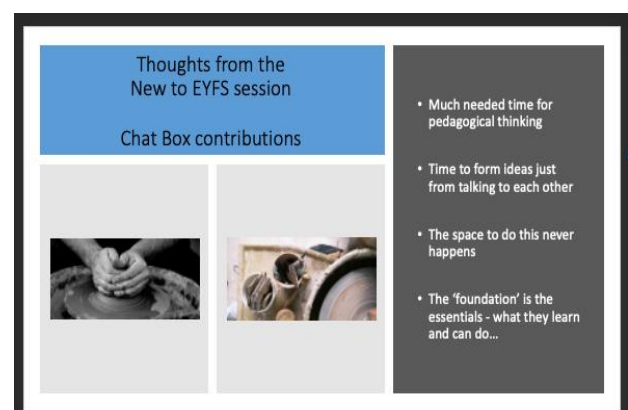
### 'The space to do this never happens'

As we entered lockdown in 2020, I had to rethink my training approach, so the New to EYFS programme regenerated into a 'Thinking Room' online that I hosted on the 'Zoom' remote platform. I blended roles of host, mentor, and coach adapting my approaches throughout the remote sessions. This way of being drew on those interwoven professional tools gained from lived experience and study. I listened to the needs of the group and we co-constructed the content using a responsive balance of coaching and mentoring, pedagogical input, reading, dialogue and thinking room. We emerged richer and better, because of the collaboration.

Online thinking room facilitated discussion and reflection to explore what Kline calls our 'freshest thinking'. We valued feeling included, respected, listened to and appreciated and I found that being present online was both accessible and effective. The Thinking Environment we developed became transformative. Through it, our pedagogical thinking was enhanced by having time and space in which to think and grow.

### Quality thinking to grow teacher confidence

Feedback from teachers in the group expressed how they appreciated and valued the time and space of thinking room, as if it was something extra-ordinary, and unusual in their day-to-day work and practice. Considering Kline's view that 'everything we do depends for its quality on the thinking



Thoughts from the New to EYFS session

Chat Box contributions

- Much needed time for pedagogical thinking
- Time to form ideas just from talking to each other
- The space to do this never happens
- The 'foundation' is the essentials - what they learn and can do...

we do first' then teachers who have time for this quality thinking - in a safe enabled space - will be enabled to be better, increasing the quality and effectiveness of their teaching.

At the end of the online programme, teachers had:

- *Gained confidence in the EYFS.*
- *Gained confidence in supporting and enabling all children to make progress.*
- *Developed trust, collaboration, and confidence through sharing knowledge and experience.*
- *Felt more confident to try out new teaching and learning.*
- *Felt more confident to adjust and adapt their environments in response to what they noticed and learnt.*

The teachers' comments showed how they had valued the approach, the thinking room, space and time:

- *Insightful conversations*
- *Attending over a long period of time has been so valuable*
- *Really great platform for sharing and inspiring*
- *Greater understanding*

- *Brilliant host*
- *A safe space to share and comment*

Thinking Room coaching and mentoring space enabled reflection, discussion and appreciation which developed teacher confidence, and deepened their understanding of early childhood pedagogy. They also shared:

- *Great to be reminded how important our role is as EYFS teachers and educators.*
- *We are the people who help form the main building blocks that will help see these children through their education.*

In Summer 2021, I invited teachers from the past three cohorts of the programme to connect in a one-off Early Years Thinking Room to share their 'freshest thinking' (Kline, 2019). Crucially, I asked them to reflect about how gaining confidence makes a difference to their teaching, and the children they teach. Their words described empowerment, knowledge, self-belief and confidence including:

- *Confidence makes a huge difference*

- *Confidence breeds more confidence: it's what we teach the children*

- *I have to believe in myself - we're all good at what we do*

- *Going in feeling that I can actually do this*

- *Training and talking has been so valuable*

- *You have to walk the walk and talk the talk*

- *I need a boost when it is tough and challenging*

- *The headteacher observed I sounded so much more confident*

- *Really helpful and beneficial to have knowledge behind me*

They thought about such invaluable and necessary qualities and attributes for teaching young children in the EYFS.

## Coaching and mentoring threads of being

I was surprised that teachers had been thrown in to the EYFS with no previous experience or training. Many were not supervised, coached, or mentored by appropriately experienced professionals. Yet Tymms' research (2018) advises schools and leaders to

put their best teachers in reception. Given that mentoring and coaching grow empowerment and wellbeing (Bell et al, 2019) such a formative and important phase must taught by teachers who have confidence and pedagogical understanding of early education.

I have long debated the distinction and clean divide between coaching and mentoring. Hollweck (2019) uses the term 'mentor coaching' in her practice, describing how the same person can do both. Her work demonstrates the huge capacity for agency through mentor coaching. She shows how both mentoring and coaching are driven by relationship, and that trust, empathic listening, safety, mutual respect curiosity and confidence generate personal and professional growth.

'Coaching as a way of being' (Lofthouse, 2020) combines and intertwines what I know about mentoring and coaching. Common to both, as Lofthouse explains, is the core of relationships, which 'allows us to become more eclectic and use a repertoire of different skills as

appropriate'. It is an expert approach, she writes, that blends 'knowledge, skills and disciplines into our own unique approach and presence'. Therefore, personalised and responsive (bespoke) coaching and mentoring approach embodies the weave metaphor: my threads of being and lived experience are interwoven in a unique way. The post graduate study process alongside peer coaching and thinking environments formed and enmeshed my leadership work into a new way of blended, bespoke practice. I recognised a symbiosis in this growth process for myself and those I supported. Ball (2003) describes the negative impact on the teacher soul in times of performativity and pressure. As symbiosis occurred, I noticed how my teacher leader soul also became heartened and encouraged.

## Reform and re-forming

This generative and responsive way of being as a coach and mentor, supported collaborative practice, developed confidence and pedagogical understanding through trust, dialogue and freshest thinking. Teachers entering

the EYFS for the first time in their teaching career benefited from this approach because, quoting from the freshest thinking above, 'Confidence makes a huge difference.'.



It is important in these times to consider a re-forming of professional development. We need confident and knowledgeable teachers with young children. As we become better working in the early years, we find the best ways to meet children's needs, valuing and celebrating their childhood, play, interactions, uniqueness, ways of being and ways to nourish. In the current 2021 Statutory Framework for the EYFS, supervision (including coaching) is a must for all staff in contact with children and families, stating, 'Effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children.... and should provide opportunities for staff to 'receive coaching to improve

their personal effectiveness' (DfE, 2021 page 26).

Current EYFS reform is an opportunity to re-form thinking and practice, preventing teachers being thrown in to the EYFS. Inviting freshest thinking within safe spaces can enable teachers to reflect on current issues and dilemmas, developing confidence to best the needs of all the children they support. Interweaving this with responsive coaching and mentoring expertise can have transformative impact. Indeed, as Kline states, "Schools, run as Thinking Environments could become an antidote to this sagging segment of our nearly-adult society." (2019, p216). I hope that many school leaders will see the great value of

mentoring and coaching for the best for their Nursery and Reception teams and the children they teach.

**The weave as metaphor**

Yarns of this rich experience and growth continue to entwine. Threads merge into a way of being that offers coaching, mentoring and thinking room. The weave is unfinished. Interwovenness continues.

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# Contributing a CollectivED working paper

## Introduction

CollectivED publish working papers written by researchers, practitioners and students on the themes of coaching, mentoring, professional learning and development in education.  We publish these at
https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/collectived/working-paper-series/

Contributors to the working paper series are given Carnegie School of Education Professional Associate status making them eligible to use the Leeds Beckett University library facility (in person or online).  They can also apply to become CollectivED Fellows.

## Purpose and audience

The CollectivEd working papers are intended as an opportunity to connect educational practice, policy and research focusing on coaching, mentoring and related forms of professional development.  They are written with a diverse audience in mind: teachers, governors and school leaders, academics and students, members of grassroots organisations, advocates, influencers and policy makers at all levels. We intend that the content and audience is national and international.  The working papers will enable a diverse range of informed voices in education to co-exist in each publication, in order to encourage scholarship and debate.

## Invitation to contribute and article types

We invite academic staff, research students, teachers, school leaders, and members of the wider education professional practitioner communities to contribute papers. This is chance to share practice, research and insights. All papers submitted should demonstrate criticality, going beyond descriptive accounts, problematizing professional development and learning practices and policy where appropriate and recognising tensions that exist in the realities of educational settings and decision making. The following types of contribution are welcome, and some flexibility will be built in around these:

- *Research working papers:* These might be in the form of summaries of empirical research, case studies, action research or research vignettes.  These will normally be about 2000-2500 words in length, and will be fully referenced using Harvard Referencing.  Please limit the amount of references to those which are absolute necessary to the understanding of the article, and use the most recent references possible. Research papers should include a consideration of the

implications for practice and/or policy at an appropriate scale. Research papers should be accompanied by an abstract (max 250 words).
Abstracts should outline the research undertaken, methodology and conclusions drawn.

- *Practice insight working papers:* These will be focused on aspects of relevant professional learning and development practice, and should communicate its particular features, its context and the decision making that shapes it. These will normally be 1200-1800 words in length and should reference policies or research that influence the practice.
- *Think-piece working papers:* These offer opportunities for writers to share opinions, reflections or critiques of relevant professional learning and development practice, research and/or policy. These will normally be 750-1250 words in length. They may include responses to previously published working papers.

- *Book or conference reviews:* Reviews are published of events or books which relate to the themes of coaching, mentoring or professional learning in education settings. These often include personal reflections from the author as well as elements of reportage. These will normally be 750-1250 words in length.

## Writing style and guidance

In order for the working paper series to be inclusive and become a platform for a range of voices we would expect a range of writing styles. However, we do need to maintain the following writing conventions.

- Papers will be written in English, which should be accessible and clear to a range of readers. Text can be broken up with subheadings, bullet points, diagrams and other visuals.
- Papers cannot be submitted anonymously. The names of author(s) should be clearly stated, and where appropriate their educational context should be made clear (secondary teacher, PhD student, education consultant, ITE tutor etc).
- Names of schools, universities and other organisations can be included, and we require authors to confirm that they have consent to do so.
- Children and young people may not be identified by name and every effort should be made to ensure that their identities remain confidential.
- Adults (such as colleagues, and professional or research partners) may only be named with their consent, and where appropriate we encourage joint authorship.

- A limited number of images may be submitted with the papers, but please note that we will use discretion when including them according to formatting limitations. Please be clear if the inclusion of an image (such as a diagram or table) is critical to the working paper.
- No submitted photographs of children will be published, although the Carnegie School of Education may select appropriate images from stock photograph libraries.
- While will not publish papers written as a sales pitch we are happy for papers to be written which engage critically and professionally with resources, programmes, courses or consultancy, and weblinks can be included.
- Each paper should state a corresponding author and include an email address, and / or twitter handle.

## Submission and review

Papers for consideration for CollectivED working papers should be submitted via email to
R.M.Lofthouse@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

They should be submitted as word documents, Arial 11 font, 1.5 line spacing, with subheadings included as appropriate.  Each word document should include the title, names of authors, context and affiliations of the authors.  Essential images should be embedded in the word document, and discretionary images should be sent as attachments.

Each submission will be reviewed by the working paper series editorial team. Decisions will be made in a timely fashion and any guidance for resubmission will be communicated to the authors. Once an issue of CollectivED is collated authors will be asked to undertake final proof-reading prior to publication.

# CollectivED Working Papers; route to publication

The CollectivED Working Papers form an invaluable open access resource. Their focus is practice, policy and research on coaching, mentoring and professional development. The content and audience are national and international. Working papers give a voice to practitioners, researchers, and members of professional and grass-roots organisations. They enable scholarship and provoke debate.

**Submitting a paper**
- You are welcome to submit a paper for consideration
- You may first want to share an idea with Rachel Lofthouse to get feedback
- You may be asked if you would like to develop a paper from existing work (eg. a blog post or assignment or even a twitter thread)
- The paper will be reviewed prior to acceptance to ensure relevance and quality

**Finalising the paper**
- Accepted papers will be added to the next issue of working papers (unless they are related to a themed special issue)
- Your will be asked to confirm authorship, role and contact details (provided at your discretion)
- You will be asked to review your paper and personal information for final proof-reading and edits prior to publication

**Publication**
- Your paper will be part of an open-access web-based publication added to the CollectivED webpage
- You are welcome to link to it on your own social media and / or add it to organisational webpages (schools, university etc)
- The contribution forms part of the CollectivED knowledge base and allows you to apply for CollectivED Fellowship

https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/collectived/working-paper-series/
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