Peer Mentoring and Coaching

Intervention Overview

Often as educators we struggle to translate our best intentions into action. We may learn about wellbeing interventions at a conference, workshop, training, or in a resource like this book. We see the great potential an intervention has to bless individuals within our stewardship, and we resolve to do something. Unfortunately, when we return to our classroom or school, often our best intentions get swallowed up in the whirlwind of daily demands. At such times, we could all benefit from the consistent encouragement, support, and follow up of peer mentors or coaches. Lynn Barnes observes: "Quick fixes never last and teachers resent them; they resent going to inservices where someone is going to tell them what to do but not help them follow up. Teachers want someone that's going to be there, that's going to help them for the duration, not a fly-by-night program that's here today gone tomorrow" (as cited in Jim Knight, 2007, p. 1).

"Good coaching gets results—and it gets them fairly quickly." Fortunately, because of its vast potential to support improvement, coaching has become increasingly common in most schools and districts. Unfortunately, "'good coaching' is not the reality for many coaches who operate in systems that are not organized to create, develop, and sustain the conditions for instructional improvement" (Fullan & Knight, 2011, p. 50). Everyone in a school should be on the same page about the purposes, processes, and procedures of coaching. The table below provides some helpful distinctions about how schools should view coaching (adapted from Sweeney & Mausbach, 2018, p. 19).

Coaching Should Be	Coaching Shouldn't Be
A two-way partnership based on equality	A one sided relationship based on power & position
Focused on student & adult learning	Focused on making teachers do things
Driven by teacher and team goals	Driven by administrator or coach goals
Flexible and responsive	Fixed and inflexible

Fun, interesting, helpful, motivating	Irrelevant, boring, scary, demotivating

The coach's roles should be collaboratively defined by the administrative team, coach, and instructional leadership team, answering questions like:

- *What is the purpose of the coach?*
- *How should coaches spend their time?*
- *What activities are of the highest priority?*
- *Are there some activities that coaches should avoid?*

Intervention Guide

Materials:	Boren (2022) created a few simple tools for teams seeking to prioritize and plan their coaching efforts. Adjust these forms as needed for your context.
Duration:	30-60 Minutes
Implementation:	1. Give each person a copy of the "Coaching Priorities" form (hard copy or electronic copy) and have them fill it out individually. This can be done before the meeting or in the meeting itself. 2. Collect the filled out forms and summarize the results. 3. Talk about the results and come to some agreement. This is the most important step in the process. The goal of this collaborative conversation is to gain some collective clarity about the coach's roles and priorities in supporting the wellbeing work at your school. 4. Collaboratively complete the "Coaching Plan" form together. 5. Determine how the priorities and plan will be communicated with the entire faculty. 6. Revisit as needed.

Does it work?

Coaching and mentoring done well are absolute gifts. "Coaching facilitates learning that sticks" and helps translate learning from larger-scale PD days, conferences, and book studies into daily classroom practices that last" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2018, p. 3; Killion & Harrison, 2006). Coaches are NOT program enforcers, people fixers, evaluators, or therapists. Coaches should be perceived as partners, peers and "critical friends, simultaneously providing support and empowering teachers to see areas where they can improve" and making it as "easy as possible for teachers to implement new practice" (Knight, 2007, p. 26, 32). Coaching and mentoring have often been limited to early career stages but can also be instrumental for experienced teachers and school leaders (Campbell et al., 2017 & Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Experienced teachers who no longer have the formal supports through induction can benefit from peer coaching and informal mentoring. School principals and leaders, likewise, value professional and institutional structures and supports in the form of mentoring and coaching aimed at leadership development (Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Searby and Armstrong, 2016). Many schools find that coaches better facilitate individual capacity by also building the capacity of the system by coaching teachers and leadership teams. This allows the coach to work with more teachers, and sets up the systems of support teachers need for sustained improvement (Many et al., 2018; Fullan & Knight, 2011). Indeed, "proponents of team coaching argue that coaching an individual without attempting to influence the immediate human systems in which they operate reduces the impact of the coaching intervention" (Clutterbuck, 2018, p. 280). Because coaches have traditionally focused on improving instruction for academic achievement, schools that decide to have the coach support wellbeing work must get crystal clear on the coach's purpose and roles and communicate those to the entire faculty.

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