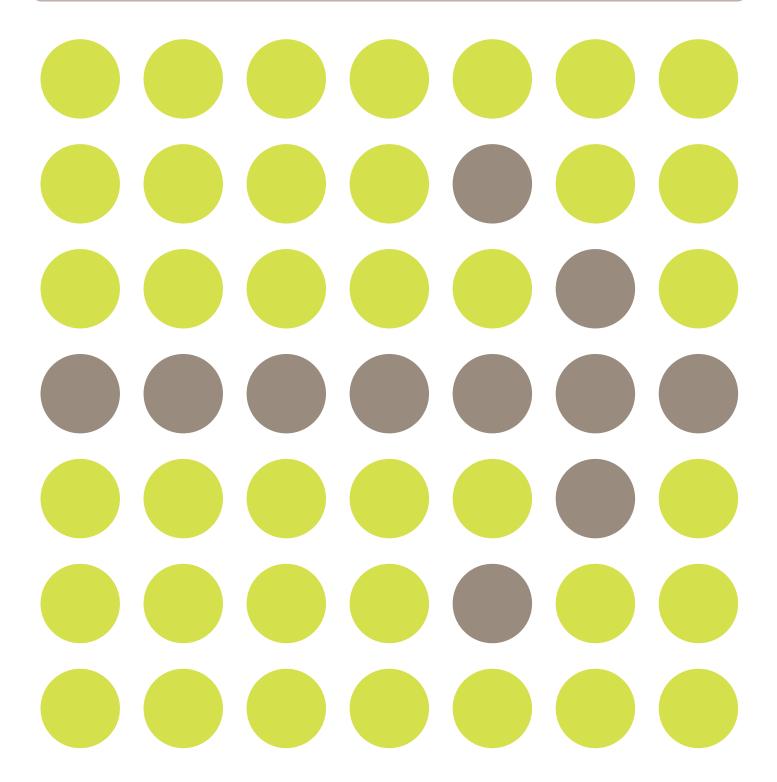


www.ncsl.org.uk



# Leading coaching in school networks





## Leading coaching in school networks

Some key messages for network and partnership leaders, school leaders and leaders of professional learning to support the development of coaching within a continuing professional development portfolio

Julie McGrane

Edited by Kirsten Hill and Tricia Sharpe

#### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following contributors from the Development and Enquiry project, of coaching case studies and material from the Leadership Network: Bedfordshire Excellence Learning Cluster/NLC, Colne Community School, Lark Rise Lower School, Millthorpe School, Newhall Green School, Ponteland School, Prendergast School, Walker Technology College and Waverley School. We also appreciated the additional research provided by Holly Mitchell of CUREE and suggestions from Jane Creasy, NCSL.

#### Introduction

Coaching is being used increasingly within professional and school development. A National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching<sup>1</sup> is now in place to support development. Evidence suggests that adult learners value the opportunity to collaborate with peers and access skilled support for a journey focused on professional growth. Coaching offers processes that helpfully extend and structure professional dialogue, observation and feedback.<sup>2</sup>

Schools are finding that, if the right conditions can be created and the confidence and skills developed, there are enormous benefits to be achieved through the building and sustaining of coaching relationships. There is a growing belief that it offers much for all learners in schools – students, adults and leaders.

The evidence presented here suggests that applying coaching approaches in a networked context brings added benefits. The possibilities for expert training and ongoing collaborative support for coaches, for example, are extended when schools work together, have a shared purpose, and pool resources.

The arguments for investing in coaching and the development of others have emerged from a number of strands of the National College for School Leadership's (NCSL) work. Research around how leaders influence teaching and learning, on the nature of distributed leadership, and on succession planning has clearly demonstrated the significance of leaders employing coaching approaches and developing a culture of 'learning conversations'.

#### **Coaching and leadership**

The NCSL publication, Leading Coaching in Schools<sup>3</sup> set out six propositions for school leaders:

- 1 Leaders have a moral responsibility to promote everyone's learning, both adults and pupils.
- 2 Leaders have a moral imperative to develop the next generation of school leaders.
- 3 High-quality coaching in schools supports professional development, leadership sustainability and school improvement.
- 4 Leaders therefore have a responsibility for providing the processes, structures and resources to support coaching.
- 5 Central to these propositions is the role of learning conversations, which make tacit knowledge explicit and engages staff in open and honest feedback.
- 6 Leaders should model the dialogue and personal approaches that create a culture of high-quality coaching interactions across the school.

This booklet illustrates how these propositions have been both demonstrated and supported through the application of coaching in a networked or school-to school context.

It booklet draws on the experience of two Networked Learning Communities (NLCs) involved in a Development and Enquiry project, Headteachers participating in the Leadership Network and case studies produced in association with Leading Coaching in Schools.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> DfES (2005) National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching, sponsored by the DfES and supported by national agencies, including TDA, GTCE, NCSL, and National Strategies. www.teachernet.gov.uk

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cordingley, P, Bell, M, Rundell, B, Evans, D (2003) The impact of collaborative CPD on classroom teaching and learning, London, EPPI Cordingley, P, Bell, M, Thomason, S, Firth, A, (2005) The impact of collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) on classroom teaching and learning. How do collaborative and sustained CPD and sustained but not collaborative CPD affect teaching and learning? London, EPPI

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Creasy, J and Paterson, F (2005) Leading Coaching in Schools, Nottingham, NCSL www.ncsl.org.uk/coaching.

#### How to use this booklet

#### The key issues

This booklet reflects on what networks and collaborative partnerships are learning about the benefits and development of coaching in and between schools.

It focuses on the following three themes:

- 1 Management and leadership issues associated with implementing and sustaining coaching.
- 2 The role coaching can play in addressing issues of professional learning, with particular reference to the potential for impact on underperformance and underachievement.
- 3 The added value of adopting a networked approach to coaching.

Development and enquiry activity has highlighted and illustrated practical ways of approaching the following seven key issues that provide the structure for this booklet:

#### The seven key issues

- 1 Conditions
- 2 Leadership
- 3 Purpose and focus
- 4 Tools and processes
- 5 Teacher beliefs and learning
- 6 Underperformance and underachievement
- 7 The networked contribution

Each issue has a dedicated page that:

- provides references from research to illuminate the value and practice of coaching;
- presents messages from the enquiry project, the Leadership Network or case studies;
- invites you to pause for thought and consider relevance to your own approach to professional development.

## Principles of coaching

The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching proposes 10 principles based on evidence from research and consultation, notably by CUREE. These are provided here for reference:

#### 1 A learning conversation

Structured professional dialogue, rooted in evidence from the professional learner's practice to enable reflection on them.

#### 2 A thoughtful relationship

Developing trust, attending respectfully and with sensitivity to the powerful emotions involved in deep learning.

#### 3 A learning agreement

Establishing confidence about the boundaries of the relationship by agreeing and upholding ground rules that address imbalances in power and accountability.

# 4 Combining support from fellow professional learners and specialists

Collaborating with colleagues to sustain commitment to learning and relate new approaches to everyday practice; seeking out specialist expertise to extend skills and knowledge and model good practice.

#### 5 Growing self direction

An evolving process in which the learner takes increasing responsibility for their professional development as skills, knowledge, and self awareness increase.

#### 6 Setting challenging and personal goals

Identifying goals that build on what learners know and can do already, but could not achieve alone, whilst attending to other school and individual priorities.

#### 7 Understanding why different approaches work

Developing understanding of the theory that underpins new practice so it can be interpreted and adapted for different contexts.

#### 8 Acknowledging the benefit to the mentors and coaches

Recognising and making use of the professional learning that mentors and coaches gain from the opportunity to mentor or coach.

#### 9 Experimenting and observing

Creating a learning environment that supports risktaking and innovation, and encourages professional learners to seek out direct evidence from practice.

#### 10 Using resources effectively

Making and using time and other resources creatively to protect and sustain leaning, action and reflection on a day to day basis.

## **Key issue 1: Conditions**

Creating an environment and culture in which coaching can thrive demands both leadership and management. Systematic planning is required if a culture conducive to a sustained commitment to professional learning is to be achieved.

Unsurprisingly, the conditions perceived to be essential are not inherently complex, but they can be challenging in schools where there are a number of pressures placed upon resources and on those with the responsibility to lead change.

# Messages from the Enquiry project

All participants thought that the most important factors in achieving sustainable approaches and involving a wide spread of colleagues included:

- Money, time, space to think and external expertise: all turned out to be important to teachers and school leadership.
- Space to think called for two things: triggers to encourage open-ended, probing and reflective learning such as learning journals; and an opportunity to discuss this, for example, via cross network working groups or steering groups.

Patterns of time allocation varied from 10 minutes to one and a half hours and from timetabled slots to snatched opportunities. The learning benefits were big enough to motivate people to give their own time, but for reach and long-term sustainability at least a proportion needed to be in timetabled time.

References from research

Messages from EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information) Centre reviews 2003-04:

· 10 minutes of carefully planned observation or video can lead to two hours of fruitful

Characteristics of collaborative CPD (of which coaching can be a good example) include:

- · The use of external expertise linked to school based activity.
- · Emphasis on peer support to create trust, generate commitment and space to take risks and
- Observation and feedback closely geared to learning (what isn't within reach on your own). Scope for participants to identify own CPD focus and starting points.
- Processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue and reflection.
- Processes for effective use of time and embedding practices in classrooms, such as on-course

Cordingley, P et al, (2003 and 2005), The impact of collaborative CPD, London, EPPI-Centre

David Clutterbook identifies a coaching climate as critical. These are its key indicators:

- . There is a good understanding about what effective coaches and learners do.
- . There are strong role models for good coaching practice.
- · People welcome and actively seek feedback (even the most senior leaders).
- . People are able to engage in constructive and positive confrontation.
- . Coaching is seen primarily as an opportunity rather than a remedial intervention.
- . There is mutual responsibility for coaching between leaders, coaches and learners.
- . People are recognised and rewarded for their activity in sharing knowledge.
- . There are effective mechanisms for identifying and addressing barriers to professional
- · Personal growth, team development and organisational learning are integrated and the links . People look first within the school for promotion. clearly understood.

Clutterbook, D, 2003, Creating a coaching climate, quoted in NCSL, 2005, Leading coaching in schools, Nottingham, NCSL



## Pause for thought...?

What is your diagnosis of the conditions in your own school in relation to time and space to think, skills and existing practice, and climate?

What investment would be necessary to develop the conditions for coaching across your school or network (commitment by staff, funding, time etc)? How might you generate this investment??



## Key issue 2: Leadership

Leadership is central to the creation of optimal conditions for learning, or 'getting the culture right'. As one headteacher put it, "As a leader, it is my responsibility to create the conditions for staff to succeed."

The challenge for school leaders is not only to set up and maintain systems and processes to support coaching, but also create a culture for coaching through their actions and words — not just what they do and say, but *how*. Developing the most fertile conditions for coaching requires school leaders to be increasingly attuned to and skilled in the arts of listening, questioning and 'learning conversations'.

Leaders also need to be aware of the influence of power relationships. One of the principles within the National Framework identifies the importance of 'agreeing and upholding ground rules that address imbalances in power and accountability'. *Leading coaching in schools* highlights the importance of being explicit about power differences and agreeing ground rules to minimise them. This can be particularly challenging when there is pressure for results and the leader/ coach feels they have the best solutions.

"A good coach communicates a belief in people's potentials and an expectation that they can do their best. The tacit message is, "I believe in you, I'm investing in you, and I expect your best efforts." As a result, people sense that the leader cares, so they feel motivated to uphold their standards of performance, and they feel accountable for how well they do." <sup>4</sup>

## Messages from the Enquiry project

When trying to involve a wider group of colleagues on a sustainable basis, all teachers saw that senior leadership commitment was vital. This commitment was often measured by their contribution to creating the right conditions or to creating a suitable culture in which coaching might thrive.

## Pause for thought...?

If you are a school leader how will you help to create a culture where coaching can flourish; what will be your role?

If you are leading coaching but not a senior manager, how will you ensure school leadership commitment and support for an appropriate learning culture?



Please use this space to record your thoughts

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Goleman et al, 2002, *The new leaders*, London, Little Brown.

## References from research

Linda Lambert identifies the significance of the 'learning conversation':

'The key notion is that leadership is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings. Such is the core of leadership.

Lambert, L, 1998, Building leadership capacity in schools, Nottingham, NCSL



## Messages from case studies

At the Colne Community School, it began with the headteacher's coaching sessions with different members of the leadership team. This raised their ability to make better judgements on complex issues and the feedback they gave was positive. They liked coaching because it was not merely a session in which they were given a list of tasks to do or answers to their problems. It was a mechanism that encouraged them to seek their own solutions to their own issues, using the head as a sounding board and critical friend.

"In my early days of headship I was looked on as a problem-solver. I then used coaching and found myself becoming a facilitator for other people as problem-solvers. I asked them questions and used a client-centred consultancy model to encourage them to look at different scenarios and different ways of solving the problem.

"The Leadership Team is now making sure that middle leaders use this approach within the performance management system in the school."

Terry Creissen, Headteacher

# Key issue 3: Purpose and focus

Having a well-articulated and compelling purpose or focus helps to build ownership of the coaching process, galvanize action and share learning. This applies to both in-school and school-to-school development. The focus might be pedagogic (AfL, thinking skills, diagnostic), or process (conditions, tools, leadership of) or skills-oriented (questioning, listening). Where coaching is used as a mechanism for collaborative adult learning then a shared purpose and focus appear to enable reach, depth and sustainability.

This example illustrates how the Together We're Better (TWB) Network in Minnesota, USA, used a References from research coaching approach with parents, focused on their involvement in decision-making.

'The network had a specific aim to foster district partnership through continuing professional development and parental involvement to create unified special education provision across the state. The network was successful in establishing a parental mentoring programme which involved parents in the school decision making process. Also personal and interpersonal skills were developed through the elements of communication, collaboration, teamwork and leadership in the

As a result of the network initiative the schools experienced more open and reflective engagement and interaction between staff and students outside the special education

"Staff were more relaxed with students with severe disabilities and that there was a more departments.

Thurlow, M (1999) District partnership approach to inclusion: a qualitative pervasive view that all students could learn. evaluation of impact, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota

Pause for thought...?

How will you construct and agree a shared purpose and focus for coaching across your school/network?



## Messages from the Enquiry project

A shared purpose has emerged as an important characteristic of effective networked learning. Evidence demonstrates that this is equally significant for coaching in a networked context.

Where coaching is centred around a shared pedagogic focus the evidence suggests that it has been easier to sustain and embed coaching. At Millthorpe School, coaching is closely aligned with their focus on AfL. Specialist coaches who were interviewed and had previously been involved in cross-network enquiry groups around aspects of in turn, improved their coaching skills.

"It was interesting the way that the AFL focus became the coaching focus in the network. We started off looking at generic coaching skills but quickly decided we needed a focus for coaching and we made the connection with how they can use AFL and coaching to empower pupils to see their own progression and at the same time they can coach each other"

Initially networks were preoccupied with which model of coaching to follow but eventually all participants agreed that having a clear, shared purpose was more important.

#### Messages from case studies

At Lark Rise Lower School (primary), the headteacher's vision has provided a clear sense of direction centred on teaching and learning, with CPD focused on creating effective conditions for learning.

Every member of staff has a performance management meeting annually with the headteacher to set objectives. The staff member is in the driving seat and clear action points with CPD implications are agreed. Support for achieving the action points is provided by the relevant line manager and is in the form of coaching conversations. The deputy headteacher also has informal coaching sessions with all staff related to their goals.

"There is a culture where everyone has become skilled at reflecting on their learning so that coaching takes place in peer situations as well as with formal structures."

Elizabeth Gilpin, Deputy Headteacher

## Key issue 4: Tools and processes

Creating spaces in which people learn is better not left to chance. A combination of formal and informal opportunities enable personalisation and choice and ensure that a rich variety of learning approaches exist among adult learners, including collaborative opportunities.



## Messages from the Enquiry project

Networks create more and different opportunities for developing coaching in relation to content (eg specialist knowledge) and process (eg expertise about pedagogic focus or coaching process).

A range of tools and processes were highlighted as having significant benefits. One of the most highly valued of these was video. Participants unanimously identified its use as one of the most powerful aspects of the process for enabling powerful professional development. In one network all professional learners cited at least one instance of new learning arising as a consequence of watching the video of their own lesson. It appears to have a number of different functions, but most participants acknowledged that if they were able to bring themselves to be videoed they were amazed by what it can reveal about their teaching and their classrooms.

Another tool of real value was coding sheets based on the National Framework for Coaching and Mentoring. This was used by the cross-network enquiry group to audit the type of skills and learning evident in the coaching conversations. The coding sheets included criteria such as:

- Professional learner articulates existing beliefs and reflects on them.
- . Evidence of learning that couldn't be achieved on one's own.
- Evidence that skills have increased as part of the coaching experience.
- · As a result of the coaching processes the professional learner has or plans to take a risk or innovate in their classroom.

These were applied to the videos of coaching conversations and proved invaluable as a formative and diagnostic tool.

#### Messages from case studies

Several case studies and the Enquiry project drew on the GROW model:

What do you want? G-Goal what is happening now? R - Reality what could you do? 0 - Options What will you do? w - Will

This and other approaches and tools can be found in Leading Coaching in Schools on www.ncsl.org.uk/coaching. Tools for mapping, auditing and developing coaching activity can be downloaded separately from the website.

R

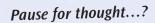
## References from research

From 2003-04, CUREE undertook three systematic reviews of research into the impact of CPD for teachers and their pupils as part of an EPPI project. One of these reviews indicated that collaborative CPD is more likely than individual CPD to result in learning gains for pupils.

Published in full on www.eppi.ioe.ac.uk and drawn upon in NCSL & CUREE, 2006, Leading continuing professional development in school networks: adding value, securing impact,

Previous research has exposed the ineffectiveness of 'one-shot workshops' and short-term CPD activities. The findings from recent research has identified the importance of sustained CPD where "teachers are learners, for whom the same principles apply for children's learning. Professional development plans should be based not on the simple 'notion of updating' but on continuous growth and change"

Cibulka, J., Coursey, S., Nakayama, M., Price, J. & Stewart, S. (2003) Schools as learning organisations: a review of literature, Nottingham, NCSL



Questioning skills appear critical. How will you help coaches to learn how to improve this aspect of their coaching practice?

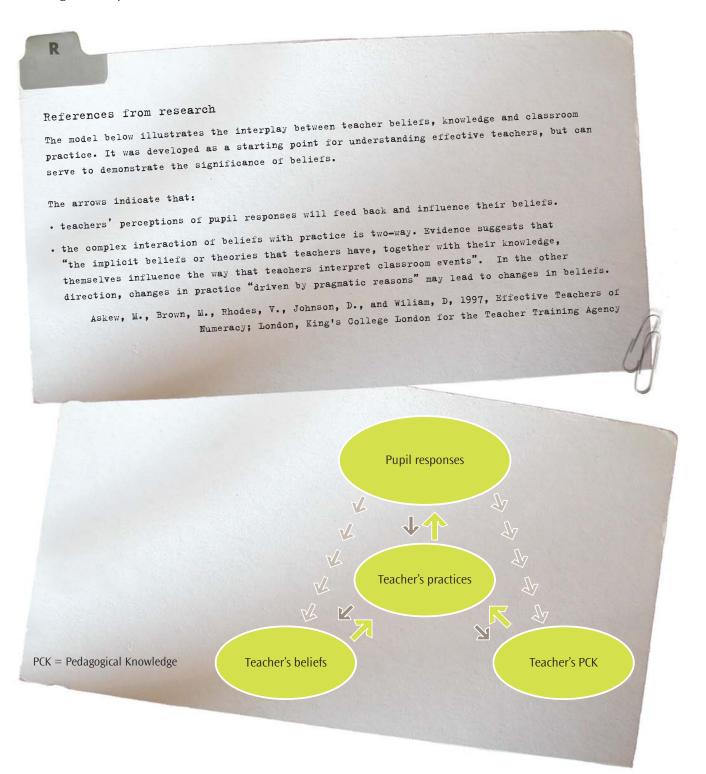
Creating a space to review the coaching process alongside colleagues helps quality control the process: a vital component of improving coaching skills. This is another demand on time. How could you manage this?

Reviewing videos of work seems to be a particularly powerful tool – but also a potentially intimidating one. What could you do to encourage colleagues to bite the bullet and review videos of their own lessons?



## Key issue 5: Teacher beliefs and learning

Teaching is a highly complex skill. Under each set of teacher behaviours lies a deeply rooted set of beliefs about subject content, teaching and learning. It is likely that if teachers are to change classroom behaviours or explain their practice in detail their beliefs need to be made explicit. Coaching creates an environment in which a combination of skilful questioning and skilled learning can help to elicit these beliefs and enable teachers to review them.



## Messages from the Enquiry project

In one network every teacher took an opportunity to express their beliefs and reflect upon them with their coach: "...It is a prerequisite of teaching...",

"... I think that's important. It's what I'm here for." "... it should be a two-way process..."

It was not until teachers had reflected on these beliefs that they were able to make plans to make adjustments in their next lesson.

Coaches too clearly learn from the coaching process but what they learn is not always evident through observation of the coaching conversation. Creating a specific space for the coach to reflect, make explicit and share their learning with peers and over time may be more important than was first realised.

## Pause for thought...?

Schools need to create opportunities for learning conversations which help make teacher beliefs explicit and foster confidence to make changes and take risks in the classroom. How will you create these opportunities?

Coaches, as well as the teachers being coached, take their practice forward as a result of coaching. How will you encourage your coaches to reflect on the impact of being a coach on their own beliefs and practice over time?



Please use this space to record your thoughts



# Key issue 6: Underperformance and underachievement

Coaching is a powerful tool for accelerating the development of knowledge, skills and understanding of staff at all levels. It is increasingly being employed within schools facing difficulties as a means to secure, support and embed learning.

Evidence collated by CUREE has shown that in general the benefits to the coach outweigh those of the professional learner. This has significant implications for those schools that see coaching as the means of improving underperforming teachers. Indeed it implies that enabling those teachers to become coaches themselves has greater likelihood of improving their performance.



# Messages from the Leadership Network

Erica and Lesley are leaders in girls' schools in close proximity to each other. Lesley was having a very tough time restructuring and building capacity to focus more effectively on teaching and learning in a school facing challenging circumstances. Erica, a head trained as a consultant leader, was suggested to her as a coach.

Erica was clear: "It was Lesley's agenda... I was able to challenge people at Waverley and ask some hard questions - so that they would 'buy in' to the new Leadership Team. There were tangible differences - people were smiling. " Lesley's observations: "Discourse is not like a conversation - not two way - I felt that I'd broken the convention of "We didn't feel confident that we knew what a 'good lesson was' - we'd done lots of touchy feely stuff - but

nothing hard. Teaching and learning became our next piece of work. We did a lot of joint observations against observations against movement between the schools. Together we planned successful pieces of work – in fact, we achieved impact in

Headteachers at Prendergast and Waverley Schools

# Messages from the Enquiry project

The learning journal of one coach gives insight into the continuous improvement process as it documents the learning which took place for her coaching triad between two coaching cycles. This extract gives a sense of her a lesson which ofsted might rate as excellent:

"I thought a great deal about the session afterwards and how we could move forward...I spoke to M (teacher)...about the session. I was very open and honest about my feelings of dissatisfaction... M...commented that he had also been very unhappy with the outcomes of the session. The meeting was very productive."

Through deep reflection about the sense of dissatisfaction and what she felt to be a superficial investigation into classroom processes, this coach believes they have learned much about how they can use coaching to enhance teaching and learning in a lesson. If excellent practitioners can appreciate that there is still much they more of a challenge.

R

#### References from research

"Coaching bridges the gap between aspiration and achievement since coaching is about change, it will support high performance through the process of change."

Tomlinson, H (2002) Leadership development models: learning from different contexts,

Netherlands, Kleuwer

From a comparison of a range of national and international third-wave school improvement programmes two things are clear:

- 1 "There has been the creation of an infrastructure to enable the knowledge base, both 'best practice' and research findings, to be utilised. This has involved an internal focus on collaborative patterns of staff development that enable teachers to enquire into practice, and external strategies for dissemination and networking.
- 2 There has been an increased concern to ensure that the improvement programmes relate to, and impact upon, practitioners and practices through using increasingly sophisticated training, coaching and development programmes."

Clarke P, Reynolds, D & Harris, A, Improving Schools in Difficulty, 2005, London, Continuum

# Pause for thought...?

If making beliefs explicit is important in changing behaviours, how can you use this knowledge to support underperforming teachers?

What's your view on the implications of the benefits of coaching for underperforming/underachieving teachers? Rather than being coached might they be offered an opportunity to learn to coach?



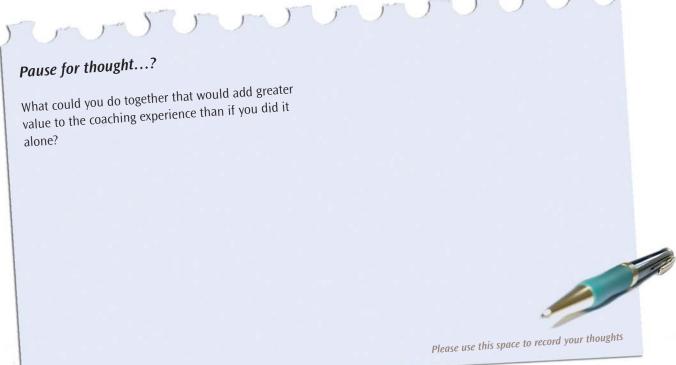
Please use this space to record your thoughts

## Key issue 7: the network contribution

Reflecting on their experiences of coaching in a networked context, Enquiry project participants believed a network provided:

- greater capacity to resource external expertise; a source of professional accountability beyond the school;
- a route for sharing learning;
- opportunities for tight modelling in one setting which could then be modelled and tested across the network;
- a community which can support those individuals/schools that are underperforming/underachieving;
- opportunities for cross-school coaching, such as for curriculum groups.

In the early stages of a networked approach it is likely that the emphasis will be on resourcing coaching, developing a focus and purpose, and developing knowledge about process.





## References from research

These references highlight the power of collaborative learning to transform school practice and the role of coaching as a contributor to and shaper of change.

"For a teacher, finding ways of doing the job better has always been natural but much of this creative innovation is locked in the heads of individual teachers: they do not know what they do is especially good practice; and even when it is known to be good, a practice spreads very slowly, if at all, within a school, let alone between schools The time is ripe for exploring new ways in which to increase teachers professional knowledge and skill Transformation of schools suggests that improvement should be faster and done in a way that allows innovation to flourish, to be shown to work and to spread through the profession." Hargreaves, D, 2003, Working laterally: How innovation networks make an education epidemic, London, DfES

"New professional practices are necessary for the development of learning communities that will lead to radical, transformative practices in schools. Rather than leave goal setting, peer observation and feedback to individual initiative and to chance, as research indicates it most often is, networked learning can be enhanced by establishing and supporting formal coaching Robertson, J M, 2006, International perspectives relationships between practitioners."

on networked learning, Nottingham, NCSL

## Messages from case studies

Newhall Green School sees its involvement in the Manchester Collaborative Coaching Schools Network as "[providing] a rich source of learning, training and support". The network offered the opportunity to engage and learn from colleagues about their methods and experiences of practice. The school consistently looks to the network for ongoing support, stimulation and celebration. It sees the network as the place where transfer of knowledge between schools occurs. Lead coach, Newhall Green School

The Bedford Excellence Cluster (formerly the EAZ) has been using coaching since 2003, beginning with an informal approach with individual teachers seen as at risk of underperformance. Over the first two years activity was focused on two schools at risk of going into special measures. A cross-school team was trained in a coaching approach based on a teacher-generated 12-competence model. This was underpinned by a counselling model developed by John Heron, and drew on the work of Donald Schon on the reflective practitioner.

Success has prompted a decision to systematically develop a 'coaching culture' across the network with a particular focus on instructional leadership and management, and school leadership and management. This will be part of a three-year strategic plan with funding from a number of initiatives.

M G Berrill, Principal, Biddenham Upper School

To order a copy of this publication please email **nlc@ncsl.org.uk** quoting the reference NLC627, or download directly from **http://networkedlearning.ncsl.org.uk** 

National College for School Leadership Triumph Road Nottingham NG8 1DH

T: 0870 001 1155 F: 0115 872 2001 E: nlc@ncsl.org.uk W: www.ncsl.org.uk