



Quick Guide to Coaching

Teachers are learners

Coaching offers a unique opportunity for teachers to have powerful conversations about their own work. Coaching can help educators to create supportive professional relationships based on trust and curiosity. Coaching can reconnect teachers with each other, with a sense of purpose and perspective and with their potential. Coaching can create a time and space to focus the mind, which is essential in the busy lives of teachers.

Coaching can play a significant role in helping teachers make sense of how to create the conditions which enable children and young people to flourish. In doing so coaches help teachers remain in learning mode. Teachers can become

- more open to new ideas
- more able to connect knowledge and experience
- more confident to face challenges
- more curious about others

Coaching is an emerging field in education which has gathered momentum in recent years. The implications of this are that many models have developed, some of which are linked to programmes or initiatives whilst others are stand alone.

In the Proud To Teach All project coaching has been used to create supportive and exploratory conversations about inclusion. Often the coach has worked as a facilitator with small groups of teachers.

ProuD To Teach All:
**professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment**



Sharing our understanding of coaching

The purpose of this guide is to connect, extend and even challenge your existing knowledge about and experience of coaching so you can improve coaching in your professional contexts. This publication is a collection of ideas about coaching to support teachers to develop teaching. You might find it helpful to share this guide with others.

This guide is based on work undertaken in the Proud To Teach All project and also by CollectivED, which is based at Leeds Beckett University in the UK and is one of the project partners. At CollectivED the authors are Sheila Ball and Rachel Lofthouse.

- The original guide provides useful information relevant to many coaching approaches. This is written in standard font.
- *Additional guidance is given to make connections with the Proud to Teach All Project. This is written in italics and draws on the work of the international project team.*

What do we mean by the term teacher coaching?

Coaching is a term with a range of meanings, which have validity in different contexts. It is therefore important to clarify what we mean by 'teacher coaching' to avoid misrepresentation.

At CollectivED we define teacher coaching as a process of sustained and focused professional dialogue in which the coached teacher (coachee) is given an opportunity to develop their teaching practice. Coaching is an inside-out process, led by the coachee and scaffolded by the coach.

Coaching is most frequently a one-to-one activity, but it is also possible to use coaching approaches when working with a group of teachers together. In that case it is important to maintain a coaching stance by adopting the principles of teacher coaching so that the sessions do not slip into training or management mode. In the Proud To Teach All project coaches have often supported Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Coaching is a learning process for both coach and coachee; providing both participants with opportunities for reflection and responsive decision-making. Through engaging with coaching, teachers can gain greater insights and be supported to develop specific skills to enhance their teaching repertoire. Coaching can also create a safe space to foster opportunities for experimentation with new classroom strategies. Coaching can lead to teachers gaining enhanced self-awareness and a better understanding of the teaching context.

ProuD To Teach All:
**professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment**



What are the principles of teacher coaching?

Coaching is a relational practice and will therefore be more successful for individuals if the conditions for coaching exist at the organisational level.

Coaching in schools can be understood through three lenses;

- Organisational lens – understand and advocate for the aims of coaching
 - valuing and sharing what is working
 - building knowledge and developing practice within a particular context
 - encouraging creativity and critical thinking
 - enhancing rather than narrowing teaching
- Relational lens - a coaching 'way of being'
 - creating a safe non-judgemental, confidential space
 - exploring reality through discussing experiences and dilemmas
 - asking questions to support reflection
 - listening rather than offering solutions
- Individual lens – gaining the most from coaching as both coach and teacher
 - being willing to reflect and self-evaluate
 - believing that improvement is possible in oneself and others
 - being open to be vulnerabilities
 - sustaining kindness to oneself and others

ProuD To Teach All:
professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment



Developing as a coach

Coaching starts with valuing and connecting with others. It should create an inclusive learning space in which people feel safe. In the Proud To Teach All project we draw on Clement's seven coaching skills (2017);

- *explore*
- *appreciate and reinforce*
- *confront and stay connected*
- *challenge*
- *inspire*
- *allow and give space*
- *relax and generate humour*

The relationship between coach and the teacher engaged in coaching is non-hierarchical and so usually coaches do not have line management responsibilities towards the people they are coaching. Teachers can be supported by coaches who have similar roles to them, or people who bring additional insights and different perspectives to the conversation. Therefore, a teacher coach could be external to the organisation or a colleague.

When considering who can be a teacher coach, it is vital that they are credible and can work authentically in the context and with emotional intelligence. This requires that they are sufficiently knowledgeable about the context of teaching and learning, the needs of learners and how teachers are themselves enabled to learn. Coaching skills extend and enhance the skills that teachers and school leaders use every day.

Given the complexity of teachers' roles it is useful to consider which other experts can act as coaches, to help develop teachers' awareness and critical and creative thinking. This might include teacher educators, speech and language therapists and child psychologists as well as teachers and leaders.

ProuD To Teach All:
**professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment**



How to approach teacher coaching

There are several valid approaches to coaching teachers; but underpinning all of them is a respect for what the teacher brings in terms of knowledge and experience.

In the Proud To Teach All project we recognise that coaching has the following components, all of which are crucial in coaching for inclusion in education;

- *Evoking: stimulating teachers to set a step in uncertainty.*
- *Supporting: supporting teachers in finding out what they can do to succeed.*
- *Learning: enabling teachers to continue to gain insights and skills, and to engage in relational and emotional learning.*

In practical terms some coaches observe teaching, some use video clips of lessons, some undertake co-planning with the teacher, some even co-teach or model teaching. Whatever coaching approaches are used they should feel collaborative and low stakes. Feedback and advice might be sought, but the coaching conversation should allow for co-construction of knowledge and insight and co-creation of thinking to inform the teacher's future work.

Many coaching models include goal setting. Goals can help create focus and purpose. However, it is important to think carefully about how goals are set. They should be related to reality and context (not plucked from an 'ideal') and they should be identified and owned by the coachee. Goals for teaching should relate to the desired impact on learners and learning. Working towards a goal should be motivational for the teacher, not punishing or performative. Goals can be reasonably adjusted within coaching cycles as more insights are gained and the classroom realities change.

Coaching is typically not a one-off event, but neither should it become an additional workload burden for the teacher. Indeed, if it is working well coaching should help the teacher gain confidence and fluency in their work, helping to ease out anxieties and unnecessary or unhelpful practices. Coaching should be a transformative space in which the coach supports the coachee to do their best thinking in the context of the decisions that they are making as a professional.

ProuD To Teach All:
**professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment**



Questions in coaching

Most coaching approaches highlight the significance of asking good questions. In teacher coaching the role of questions is to generate opportunities to recall experience, reflect on decisions made prior to and during teaching and refine thinking for future practice.

It is helpful to remember that the questions serve the purpose of coaching rather than become the purpose! Questions are problematic if the coachee perceives the questions as a trap or a test, or if they do not feel that their responses are being listened to.

Having questions as a scaffold to support coaching fluency is essential. One of the best things a coach can do is pay attention to how their questions land with the teacher, which ones generate deepest thinking, which ones create commitment and energy which can ripple out from the coaching conversation.

Coaching, consent and performance management

Coaching should always feel collaborative and never controlling. It should create and protect teachers in a safe space to examine, explore, learn and develop as a way of enhancing their understanding, confidence and teaching repertoire. A coachee can be invited and enabled to participate in coaching but should have the discretion to decline, withdraw or ask for adaptations to the coaching model.

Some teacher coaching is aligned with specific teaching and learning initiatives, pedagogical research projects or forms of continuous professional development (CPD). In such cases coaching may be part of the underpinning design. Teachers engaged in such projects should have the opportunity to shape the nature of coaching over time, and their ongoing engagement in coaching should be through agentic participation not obligation.

Building hope through coaching

Coaching can become a space in which we build a sense of hope and achievement. As teachers experience positive, fulfilling and impactful change in their own work they can feel more optimistic about their own capacities and the value that they bring to the lives of their learners.

ProuD To Teach All:
**professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment**



For more information

You can explore the Proud To Teach All project and additional guidance for PLCs and coaching here www.proudtoteachall.eu. The website has English, Dutch, Latvian and Portuguese versions and contains a guide for coaches.

You can access the original CollectivED guide to teacher coaching through the CollectivED website here <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/collectived/> which will also provide links to many additional resources.

ProuD To Teach All:
**professional development strengthening competencies to teach all learners
in an inclusive learning environment**

