Module 2 – Nuts and Bolts of Peer Coaching

In Module 1 we looked at Peer Coaching theory. This provided the necessary background for this module. Great coaches need expertise in coaching and pedagogy. In Module 2 we explore the specific coaching skills, models and knowledge that allow us to be effective in our role.

In the following module we will build on this by looking at the 21st Century learning pedagogy that is the other area for expertise for coaches.

Coaching First Steps

“It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do—continually, collaboratively, and on the job—to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work.”
Former North Carolina Governor James Hunt (Darling-Hammond, 2009, p. 2)

Let’s begin taking our first steps as coaches by looking at an extract from work by Dr Les Foltos. Les reminds us that Peer Coaching training focuses on three pillars:

- Utilizing the **communication and collaboration skills** needed to build trust and effective collaboration. Peer Coaching activities that develop communication and collaboration skills draw on the work of other successful programs like Cognitive Coaching, Atlas Communities, and the National School Reform Faculty.

- Strengthening coaches’ **lesson design skills** to help colleagues to improve learning activities so they reflect 21st Century learning. For many teachers around the world, successful integration of technology means learning to use active, engaging instructional strategies. Peer Coaching’s focus on lesson design relies on the work of Bransford, et al, How People Learn, and the instructional strategies used in constructivism or Project-Based Learning.

- An understanding of **best practices in technology integration** so coaches can assist teachers use technology to enrich and enhance student learning. The partnership with Microsoft brings participants in Peer Coaching a variety of incredible examples of technology integration from the thousands of participants in Microsoft’s Innovative Educator Forums which are held annually in more than 70 countries around the world.
Coaches Roles and Relationships

Well prepared coaches undergo significant, ongoing professional learning to develop a range of coaching skills essential for successful coaching, and they continue to collaborate with other coaches to reflect on their coaching practice and further develop their skills as peer coaches. As a result of this training and experience, coaches have a different knowledge base than many teachers, and their knowledge helps them facilitate and structure collaboration aimed at improving student learning. Coaches learn and use communications skills that play a critical role in building trust and promoting collaboration. They can teach their colleagues how to use these skills when collaborating with other educators. Coaches might also encourage educators to teach these skills to their students so they can use these same communications skills in discussing learning in the classroom. Coaches learn to create and utilize group norms and can assist other educators to adopt norms which improve collaboration among teachers. And coaches learn how to use protocols that provide a safe, structured environment for discussing classroom learning activities. (Les Foltos 2010)

Let’s begin by exploring group norms.

Activity 1 – Setting Group Norms Protocol

Creating norms for a group establishes a set of ground rules to help teams work together more efficiently. When establishing norms, consider the following key categories:

- Time
- Decision making
- Listening
- Participation
- Confidentiality
- Expectations

(Delehant and von Frank, 2007)

- Begin and end on time
- Silence all cell phones
- Attend all meetings
- Respect questions
- Monitor your own airtime
- Stay on agenda
- Do assignments prior to meetings
- Hold yourself personally accountable
- Respect the group
- Listen attentively
- Attend to goals and objectives
- Listen respectfully
- Discuss issues, not people
- Limit distractions
- Reach decisions by consensus
- Probe ideas, do not criticize people
- Show respect for views of others
- Avoid side conversations
- Assume positive intentions
- Observe basic conversational courtesies
- Honour confidentiality
**Task 1** - Think of a situation where you might enter a coaching relationship as a coachee. Consider and fill in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What attributes would you want your coach to use in their work with you.</th>
<th>How would you want your coach to treat you? What would be the qualities you would like to experience? E.g Understand that I am a busy person</th>
<th>What is the rule they would need to follow in order to treat you this way?. E.g. Arrive on time.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>
Task 2 - Now let's create our own Norms list for our group. Contribute to a group brainstorm that lists potential norms. Address this question: How might we work most effectively as a team?

1. Brainstorm a list of norms you think your group should adopt
2. Look for patterns in the brainstormed list. Combine or restate the norms that are similar.
3. As a group, decide on the five or six norms that will guide the behaviour of your Peer Coaching community.
4. If your group has not included it already, it may want to add this norm: "Accept ownership for your own learning."

Some points to note:

1. The goal of this norm is to encourage all participants to play a positive role in making sure the Peer Coaching Program meets everyone’s needs.
2. If activities are not clear, or if they are not meeting needs, participants may want to raise the issues and work toward resolution.
3. Now that we have our norms, it is important to remember this is a starting point. The list may grow or shrink as we work as a group. To make sure our norms work for our community we will revisit them in each session.

Task 3 - Consider how the norm-setting process might be applied in your school setting and in your future coaching work.

Activity 2 – Coaching Cue Card Protocol Exercise

Introduction
A skilful coach uses communication skills to encourage a collaborating teacher to think more deeply about a topic or to help the teacher reflect during a planning conference. The goal of this exercise is to help the group gain expertise in using these important coaching skills.

Protocols are guidelines for conversations and we use them in the coaching program to keep discussions focused. We also use protocols because they provide a structure for collaborative work and help build trust. As coaches become knowledgeable about the use of protocols they may use them with groups of collaborating teachers.

The first of these protocols we will use is the ‘Coaching Communication Cue Card’. This protocol becomes the scaffold for coaching conversations. It is your quintessential tool for coaching work.

This cue card protocol is based on the following scaffold:

1. Actively Listen
2. Paraphrase the problem or issue
3. Clarify with factual questions
4. Probe with questions that help the coachee create a solution themselves

We use the ‘Communication Cue Card’ best when our coachee comes to a conversation with a concern or problem they need to work through. A problem they are not sure how to solve. This type of scaffolded collaborative conversation helps them to understand and take responsibility for their problem, solving it with their own initiatives, rather than just accepting a solution from a colleague.
Preparing to hold a coaching conversation

When holding a coaching conversation with a partner or coachee, it is best to remove yourself from a noisy or busy place. Find somewhere that you can give your coachee full attention. They have a problem to solve, and it is our role as coaches to help them to do this.

Take notepad and pen with you, switch off or leave behind distractions and devices. This time is for your coachee, you can catch up with other communications after the session. Write notes as you listen. Make them the record and prompt for reflection. Once your conversation is complete, hand these notes to the coachee. This helps to develop a trusting relationship and solid base for reflection by the coachee at a later date. Coachees feel confident that you are not going to share their private discussion with others.

Set aside a substantive amount of time. A good guide is 30 minutes. These conversations take time to get to the real problem and solution, and rushing them will not help the coachee to come to a realisation of the actions needed to solve their dilemma.

Begin the session by focussing on the problem at hand. A coaching conversation is not to discuss daily matters, but to focus on an issue or problem that the coachee is finding a struggle to solve, or move forward and solve.

Some ideas for starting the conversation might be:

1. What would you like us to talk about? What would you like us to achieve? What would you like this to look like? What have you brought to work on today? What if we started here?

The ‘main rule’ of a coaching conversation is to not tell the coachee how to solve their problem. You must ask them questions in a manner that helps them to come to this realisation themselves. You might know exactly what they need to do, or where they need to go with a problem, but you have to ask them questions that make them realise this themselves. Ownership of the problem and solution are very empowering. Some master coaches say that “Helping people to see the solution is 85% of the way to solving it”. Coaching conversations about softly massaging and supporting them to open their eyes to their own problems.

Sometimes coaching conversations make people feel uncomfortable. This is ok as long as it is not traumatic. Coaching conversations push people out of their daily comfort zone. They make them search for solutions that have not come to them easily. In order to do this, they have to think differently and solve their problems in a different way than they do by default. Coaching conversations are not a comforting chat. They are a scaffolded discussion to solve a complex issue or problem. If the conversation gets too emotional, suggest time out. Support them to feel good about the direction they are taking to solve their problem and revisit it as soon as they feel comfortable. This time away may help them to digest and come to a solution on their own.

Once you have set your problem and focus for the conversation, move onto using the coaching cue card.

What are Probing Questions?

After listening and paraphrasing back the problem or issue to the coachee, it’s time to ask clarifying and probing questions to help the coachee solve their dilemma. The distinction between clarifying questions and probing questions is very difficult for most people working with protocols. So is the distinction between probing questions and recommendations for action.
The basic distinctions between clarifying and probing questions are:

**Clarifying Questions** are simple questions of fact. They clarify the dilemma and provide the nuts and bolts so that the participants can ask good probing questions and provide useful feedback later in the protocol. Clarifying questions are for the participants, and should not go beyond the boundaries of the presenter’s dilemma. They have brief, factual answers, and don’t provide any new “food for thought” for the presenter. The litmus test for a clarifying question is: Does the presenter have to think before s/he answers? If so, it’s almost certainly a probing question.

Some examples of clarifying questions:

2. How much time does the project take?
3. How were the students grouped?
4. What resources did the students have available for this project?

**Probing Questions** are intended to help the presenter think more deeply about the issue at hand. If a probing question doesn’t have that effect, it is either a clarifying question or a recommendation with an upward inflection at the end. If you find yourself saying “Don’t you think you should …?” you’ve gone beyond probing questions. The presenter often doesn’t have a ready answer to a genuine probing question. Since probing questions are the hardest to create productively, we offer the following suggestions:

- Check to see if you have a “right” answer in mind. If so, delete the judgment from the question, or don’t ask it.
- Refer to the presenter’s original question/focus point. What did s/he ask for your help with? Check your probing questions for relevance.
- Check to see if you are asserting your own agenda. If so, return to the presenter’s agenda.
- Sometimes a simple “why…?” asked as an advocate for the presenter’s success can be very effective, as can several why questions asked in a row.
- Think about the concentric circles of comfort, risk and danger. Use these as a barometer. Don’t avoid risk, but don’t push the presenter into the “danger zone.”
- Think of probing questions as being on a continuum, from recommendation to most effective probing question. For example [on next page— from an actual Consultancy session in which a teacher was trying to figure out why the strongest math students in the class weren’t buying in and doing their best work on what seemed to be interesting math “problems of the week”.

**In summary, good probing questions:**

- are general and widely useful
- don’t place blame on anyone
- allow for multiple responses
- help create a paradigm shift
- empower the person with the dilemma to solve his or her own problem (rather than deferring to someone with greater or different expertise)
- avoid yes/no responses
- are usually brief
- elicit a slow response
- move thinking from reaction to reflection
encourage taking another party's perspective

Some final hints for crafting probing questions. Try the following questions and/or question stems. Some of them come from Charlotte Danielson's Pathwise work, in which she refers to them as “mediational questions.”

- Why do you think this is the case?
- What would have to change in order for...?
- What do you feel is right in your heart?
- What do you wish...?
- What's another way you might...?
- What would it look like if...?
- What do you think would happen if...?
- How was...different from...?
- What sort of an impact do you think...?
- What criteria did you use to...?
- When have you done/experienced something like this before?
- What might you see happening in your classroom if...?
- How did you decide/determine/conclude...?
- What is your hunch about ....?
- What was your intention when ....?
- What do you assume to be true about ....?
- What is the connection between...and...?
- What if the opposite were true? Then what?
- How might your assumptions about...have influenced how you are thinking about...?
- Why is this such a dilemma for you?

Some Examples of Probing Questions:

- Why is a “stand-and-deliver” format the best way to introduce this concept?
- How do you think your own comfort with the material has influenced your choice of instructional strategies?
- What do the students think is quality work?
- You have observed that this student's work lacks focus – what makes you say that?
- What would the students involved say about this issue?
- How have your perspectives on current events influenced how you have structured this activity?
- Why aren't the science teachers involved in planning this unit?
- Why do you think the team hasn't moved to interdisciplinary curriculum planning?
- What would understanding of this mathematical concept look like? How would you know students have "gotten it"?
- Why did allowing students to create their own study questions cause a problem for you?
- What was your intention when you assigned students to oversee the group activity in this assignment?
- What evidence do you have from this student's work that her ability to reach substantiated conclusions has improved?
- How might your assumptions about the reasons why parents aren't involved have influenced what
you have tried so far?

- How do you think your expectations for students might have influenced their work on this project?
- What do you think would happen if you restated your professional goals as questions?
## The Coaching Cue Card Protocol

### Problem or Topic for conversation:

| Step 1 - Active Listening | 1. Ask the coachee to describe their problem in detail.  
|                          | 2. Follow the tips as directed.  
|                          | 3. Take lots of notes.  
|                          | 4. It’s all about giving your full attention and letting them explain their problem in depth. |

- Focus on the speaker and supporting their learning
- Block out all competing thoughts
- Lean forward and nodding
- Take notes
- Use body language that shows empathy.

### Step 2 - Paraphrasing

- Is restating what was stated
- Is used to check for understanding
- Clarifies what was heard by summarizing
- Indicates acceptance and encouragement
- Establishes a relationship between the speakers

*So what I hear you saying is ... So what you are wondering is...Let me see if I have understood you... So what you are thinking...*

- Repeat back what they have told you, in your own words.
- Ask the coachee to wait until the end to add anything they have missed.
- This step is crucial, as many people realise just how their problem sounds to others and they often solve it.
- Be sympathetic in your language
- Keep to facts – this gives an objective lens to the problem and the coachee moves out of being too subjective.
- Give the coachee time to add to their problem, or change once you have completed paraphrasing.

### Step 3 - Clarifying Questions

- Lead to a clear picture or understanding of a topic or idea
- Are factual
- Are answered quickly
- Are used to gather information

*How did you... What...?*

- Use this time to ask factual questions that you need to further help you develop probing questions.
- Sometimes you won’t need these if you feel the coachee has explained their issue or problem in depth.
- Keep these questions short
- Yes / No questions work well in this area.

### Step 4 - Probing Questions

- Are thought provoking
- Encourage deeper thinking
- Are often open-ended, not yes/no questions
- Are solution focused

*Where is your student/class now? Where do you want them to be as a result of this? What will they know and be able to do? What could you do? What else is possible? Could I make some suggestions? What do you need to know and be able to do to achieve that? Are there other strategies that you could use to ...? What might the next step be? What did you learn from that?*

- These questions should not be simple yes/no questions
- Probing questions should gently guide a coachee to their solution
- May help them to think outside their regular patterns and activities
- May be difficult to answer, rephrase them into a few different questions if needed
- See the next page for more information and examples

**Practicing using ‘The Coaching Cue Card’**

The best way to learn how to lead a coaching conversation using the Coaching Cue Card is to practice. You will now split into pairs and begin coaching each other.

**Sample topics**

Below are some topics to help you begin your coaching conversation. Choose one and when asked by your ‘coach’ lead off with this problem.

- How are you preparing your students for their future study and work?
- What would you see and hear if you visited a 21st century classroom?
- What are your favourite web 2 tools? How do you use them to create engaging lessons for your students?

You will need to do this twice in your pair. Once turn each as coach and coachee completing the Coaching Cue Card.

**Debrief the Coaching Cue Card**

Debrief the Coaching Cue Card Protocol in pairs or in your group using the following questions:

- What was helpful about the protocol process?
- What was difficult?
- How could you use the protocol in other settings?
- How do you think communication skills build trust?
Activity 3 – Using Protocols

In the course of Peer Coaching you will add many more protocols to your toolkit. We will visit these later, but it is important to know about them at this stage in your training. Examples of Protocols that can be found in the Protocols for Peer Coaching Resource Booklet are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol Name</th>
<th>Possible uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chalk talk Protocol</td>
<td>Working as a group to brainstorm a topic ensuring all members have equal opportunity to think deeply and participate equally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms Protocol *</td>
<td>Forming a new relationship with a coach, a group or a committee, or when forming a new class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Cue Card *</td>
<td>Coaching Conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wows and Wonders *</td>
<td>Reviewing peer programs, ideas or concepts, or reviewing student work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Model</td>
<td>Use in all general feedback situations. Great for students to learn positive feedback methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Road Block</td>
<td>Personal reflection to get through a roadblock that is stopping progression on a particular issue or project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probing Questions *</td>
<td>Use with Coaching Cue Card.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuning Protocol</td>
<td>To review student work samples, programming and peer work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Final Word</td>
<td>The purpose of this discussion format is to give each person in the group an opportunity to have their ideas, understandings, and perspective enhanced by hearing from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zones of Comfort</td>
<td>To describe the need to move outside their comfort zones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Read some of the points to consider below when using Protocols in your Peer Coaching and leadership roles.

**What they are not...**
- They are NOT an orthodoxy. They are NOT the only way to have conversations about student or peer work.
- They are NOT to be imposed on people EVERY time for EVERYTHING.
- They are NOT an extra to be ADDED to teachers’ workload.

**Rather they are...**
- Intended to be useful ways to help groups of teachers talk about their work. They provide a SAFER way of doing difficult work. They require DEPTH of thinking and analysis, include both WARM and COOL feedback, and involve EVERYBODY. Getting feedback on your pedagogy is neither common in schools nor easy to give or receive. The protocols provide a way to do this.
• To be offered to a group as a process for doing this work.
• To be used in a meeting that you have to have anyway, for example, a staff meeting, a team meeting, a learning area meeting, a subject meeting etc AND about some work that the group has to do anyway. There are already times during the year where staff groups plan together, review together...use the protocols to help you do this work.
• Intended to put student work at the centre of such planning and reviewing. That might be new.

When using them...

1. Don’t be so strict re the rules that they stop you saying things because you are not sure if it is in the right ‘section’. They are meant to be liberating not suffocating!

   Remember everyone in the group is helping facilitate so if you are not sure about where you are up to in the process then just ask – ‘I am a bit lost at the moment where are we up to?’ or ‘I am not sure if this is a clarifying question but I want to ask it. We can hold it for later if you want...’.

   It may well be that a team develops into such a mature work group that it can have unstructured conversations where the norms are known and adhered to and the work gets done and done well. However a group will NOT stay like that forever. In fact, groups probably only ever have moments where this is true. So as you feel that a group is having more debate than dialogue, more opinion giving than information seeking, individuals are having too much to say and others not anything then it might be good to reintroduce a protocol to help the group refocus.

2. Be inventive. We hope that groups (you) will start to adapt the protocols and to make up new protocols. This could be to ensure they are pertinent to your particular purpose and your unique settings (for example involving your local community).

   Ensure that, as best you can, have a range and depth of expertise at the table with regard to the work in question. For example if the work is school science then we have found that people from outside the learning area provide new and interesting insights into the work that might not exist within the school science culture. On the other hand having people with a knowledge of science is also important. Otherwise the group may not go deep enough into the content of the work.

Facilitation Tips

1. Take some time to clarify terminology. For example, what is a clarifying question? How is it different from a probing question (both in terms of structure and purpose)?

   Clarifying questions are for the person asking them, they ask the presenter "who, what, where, when, and how." These are NOT "why" questions. They can be answered quickly and succinctly, often with a phrase or two.

   Probing questions are for the person answering them. They ask the presenter "why" (among other things), and are open-ended. They take longer to answer, and often require deep thought on the part of the presenter before she speaks. The person asking the probing question doesn't know (or even assume) an answer to the question being asked, and doesn't have an investment in how the question is answered.
2. Alert people to the likely places/points in the protocol which will feel awkward like when the group gives warm and cool feedback and speaks as if the presenters aren’t in the room. This protocol requires the group to talk about the presenters in the third person, almost as if they are not there. As awkward as this may feel at first, it often opens up a rich conversation. Remind the group that it is their job to give feedback, and to offer an analysis of the issue or questions presented. It is not necessary to solve a problem or to offer a definitive answer.

3. Suggest that the presenters physically sit back from the group so as not to have any eye contact when the group gives their warm and cool feedback. Remind the presenters to listen in a non-defensive manner. They might listen for: new ideas, perspectives, and approaches; the group’s analysis of their question and related issues; and/or the assumptions implicit in the conversation. Remind the presenters that this is not supposed to be about the presenters themselves, but about a question they have raised.

4. Remind the group that the point of the last step is for the presenters to talk about what were, for them, the most significant feedback, comments, ideas and questions they heard. It is NOT for the presenters to give a "blow by blow" response to the group's conversation, nor is it to defend or further explain themselves. They can also share any new thoughts or questions they had while listening to the group.

5. Remind people that they can never know everything, but that they can know enough to be helpful. There will be much that the group says that won't be useful because they don't know enough about the context, but that there will be things they say and questions they raise that ONLY outsiders who don't know every nuance of the context can say or ask.

6. Be explicit about your role as a facilitator. Will you ever join in on the conversation? etc.

7. Remember to debrief each feedback session as a whole group. Debriefing the process is key. Don't short-change this step.

Choose a Protocol

After reading through the protocols list and discussing other protocols you may already use, find a protocol that you think might suit a situation that you will have to work through in the coming months and answer the questions. Write answers to these questions in your journal then discuss in pairs. You will find all the protocol in their full format in the 'Peer Coaching Handbook'.

- Which protocol will you use?
- Why will it help to develop a professional dialogue around this issue or project?
- When will you use it?
- How will you prepare for the use of it?
**Activity 4 - Planning your coaching**

The last activity for this module asks you to begin planning your role as Peer Coach in your school. Use this storyboard to brainstorm ideas which can help you to begin a program at your school.

As you brainstorm, it may help you to keep in mind your current thinking about what students and teachers need to know and be able to do. This thinking may help guide your Peer Coaching program and how you describe it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will you explain coaching to others?</th>
<th>What are some major roles and responsibilities you will play as a coach?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will be involved in coaching? Will you work primarily with one teacher or with a team of teachers?</td>
<td>When will the coach meet with the collaborating teacher? <em>(How will you find time to meet, observe, and reflect?)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the focus of your coaching program? How will it align with your school goals?</td>
<td>What are some examples of things you could do with a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can other teachers get involved with coaching? If yes, how?</td>
<td>How will teachers benefit from participating in this program?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>