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**Continuous Staff Development is Our Goal
Professional Coaching is Our Solution**

***Professional Coaching:
An Overview of the Process***

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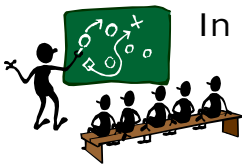
Professional Coaching:
An Overview of the Process
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What is Professional Educational Coaching?

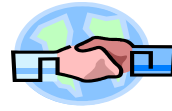


Usually when we think about coaching, our minds automatically turn to sports. We think about the football or the basketball coaches that we have known and the types of things that they have done to increase the ability of the players on their teams. However, this analogy fails to capture the true nature of professional educational coaching.



In athletics, the coach is in charge. The coach dictates what each individual player on the team can and should do. Most of the players' self-reflection centers on studying their own performances at the coach's request so that they can better fulfill the coach's desires. The coach is in charge of the whole

process. This is not true in professional educational coaching.



The International Coach Federation says that "Professional Coaching is a professional partnership between a qualified coach and an individual or team that supports the achievement of extraordinary results, based on goals set by the individual or team" (ICF website). Thus "the individual or team chooses the focus of the conversation, while the coach listens and contributes observations and questions as well as concepts and principles which can assist in generating possibilities and identifying (needed) actions" ([ICF website](#)).

[Cognitive CoachingSM](#) further explains the professional coaching process by saying, "a coach helps another person take action toward his or her goals

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while simultaneously helping the person to develop expertise in planning, reflecting, and problem solving...(that) are the invisible skills of being a (self-directed) professional” (Casta & Garmston 2002). By doing these things, professional coaching becomes a highly-effective form of job-embedded professional development that focuses upon developing a coachee’s problem solving capabilities.

However if the coachee feels he or she needs more support, the process allows the coach to change roles to best meet the coachee’s needs. When wanted and needed, the Cognitive CoachSM can draw upon various support functions which include consulting, collaboration, and even evaluation, when it services the coachee’s requirements (Casta & Garmston 2002). This versatility

makes coaching a dynamic tool for ongoing staff development.



“A coach helps another person take action toward his or her goals while simultaneously helping the person to develop expertise in planning, reflecting, and problem solving...”(Casta & Garmston 2002).

Benefits of Coaching

Coaching is an essential part of any successful staff development program. This especially true in education where the current pressure on producing ever-increasing student achievement results is moving educators in new research-based directions that require “professional development on a large scale and a new way of delivering it...(To do this) districts have adopted coaching as a model for the professional development of teachers and principals. The

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goal is to engage educators in collaborative work designed to contribute to the development of intellectual capacity in schools” (Neufeld & Dana Roper 2003) and thus to increase student achievement.

It has been found that “coaching provides a model of respectful collegial reflection about instructional decisions...and the benefits are seen in student learning gains, increased teacher efficacy, and increased satisfaction with one’s work and in an increase in the collaborative culture found in the school” (Harwell-Kee 1999) making professional coaching one of our most powerful staff development tools.

Coaching for Staff

“Research emphasizes that coaching is a prerequisite for the implementation of new skills or strategies” (Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987 in DuFour &

Berkey 1995). Thus “providing teachers with ongoing support after the initial training is critical to the success of any innovation” (DuFour & Berkey 1995). This is especially true with the formation of *Professional Learning Communities* or the implementation of other staff development initiatives that ask teachers to change long-standing instructional practices, so “leaders need to assist teachers in improving their classroom performance...” (Hord 1997 b) by providing coaching to support the instructional changes they are asking their staffs to make if they want the initiatives to succeed.

Coaching for Principals



As we all know, the principal’s role is shifting from manager to instructional leader. However, the role of instructional leader is new to

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most principals. This is especially true for new or novice principals, so “the national principals’ organizations...have called for induction programs for novice principals that include processes like mentoring and coaching”...(and this kind of support should not be limited to novice principals.) It is clear that experienced principals also need ongoing support and professional development, and that a coach or mentor can be a key element of this process” (ERS, 2000 qdt. in Bloom, Castagna & Warren 2003).

Some districts have recognized this fact and have used in-house mentors for years—which may lead you to wonder about the relationship between mentoring and coaching. “Mentoring is one form of coaching, but not all coaching is mentoring. In general, mentoring is when an experienced teacher or administrator provides information to a newcomer,

sharing experience and knowledge and expertise with someone who has less of these things. Coaching, on the other hand, is a continuous growth process for people of all experience levels” (Harwell-Kee, Kathryn Summer 1999).



Both processes are important and have their place in education, but there are some inherent difficulties involved in the mentoring process, especially for administrators who are mentored by colleagues in the same district. For one thing, “it may be difficult for them to share confidences” (Bloom, Castagna & Warren 2003) with their colleagues. Secondly, their “mentors are usually tied to their own demanding jobs” and “may not have the time to focus on their protégés’ needs (even) though they may have the best of intentions” (Bloom, Castagna & Warren 2003) to do so. Nor do “these relationships

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generally...provide a coherent mentoring process that is focused upon instructional leadership” (Bloom, Castagna & Warren 2003) because in many cases that role is new to the mentor as well as to the novice principal. Therefore, as Bloom, Castagna, and Warren point out, perhaps all principals “need an external coach as a source of confidential and expert support around the wide-ranging, problematic, and often deeply personal issues that they must deal with from their first days on the job” (Bloom, Castagna & Warren 2003) and continue to deal with throughout their careers as they develop their own effective instructional leadership styles that help motivate their schools to become highly productive learning-centered communities where everyone is focused on student achievement.

Consequently, at all levels of the school community and for all people involved in it, coaching is a powerful and an essential ingredient in the successful implementation of a school or district’s student achievement goals. Therefore, we need to treat coaching as a crucial priority when we are developing our school improvement plans and allocating resources for professional development because educational coaching has a proven track record of success.

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