

COLLABORATIVE TEACHER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MENTORING, COACHING AND SUPERVISION

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Abstract: Collaboration is an essential part of teacher learning and development as it empowers teachers to explore and generate knowledge together, while at the same time promoting collegiality and sense of belonging. There are different theories regarding the nature of collaborative learning, starting with Vygotsky's views on the social nature of learning, to the more recent theories, which see cognition as distributed across people, situated in contexts, and spanning across various communities of practice. Modern theories take into account interaction in online environments, knowledge building in small groups and cognition supported or mediated by peers, mentors, coaches or supervisors. Therefore, the outcomes of collaborative learning should not be measured by assessing individuals outside of their collaborative settings.

The encouragement of collaboration and support has long been part of teachers' professional development. Mentoring, coaching and peer-network mechanisms in schools are a means to enhance professional development, embed changed practice and encourage the transmission of teacher learning to pupil learning within classrooms (Rhodes and Beneicke 2002). Mentors are seen as models of teaching in a context; facilitators of integration into a specific culture and community; sponsors of their mentees in terms of ensuring the mentee's acceptance into the professional community and providing optimal conditions for learning; and educators – in the sense of scaffolding mentee learning.

Recently, coaching has established itself as a powerful tool for enhancing self-development and self-actualization in a variety of contexts, including management, leadership and teaching. There are different types of coaching depending on its purposes and contexts of application, such as performance, skills, career, life and business coaching. The key to any effective coaching relationship is the idea of improving coachees' performance and developing their personal potential and skills. This can be achieved through identifying the relevant areas where coaching can help, and devising tasks and activities leading to the implementation of the outlined development plan. In the context of language education, Wallace (1991: 107) defines a supervisor as anyone who has "as a substantial element in her or his professional remit the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in a given educational situation". At present, the focus of supervision is moving towards collaboration which promotes reflection on one's own teaching and beliefs, where the role of the supervisor is seen in creating an environment that cultivates reflection, exploration, and change.

Keywords: collaboration, teacher development, mentoring, coaching, supervision.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past, language teaching, just like teaching in general was practiced largely in isolation, and even novice teachers had to rely exclusively on their own expertise and resources to cope with the complexities inherent in the teaching profession. One of the aims of collaborative teacher development is to overcome this isolation and to encourage cooperation at all levels and varieties of teaching contexts. According to Edge & Attia (2014: 65), "the tendency to expand as a teacher may be encouraged by working with one or more colleagues over a designated period". This approach conceptualizes teacher development as necessarily social and advocates investing in collegial relationships to enhance teachers' capacity building.

Johnson (2009: 242) describes collaboration in the context of teacher development as "any sustained and systematic investigation into teaching and learning in which a teacher voluntarily collaborates with others involved in the teaching process, and in which professional development is a prime purpose". The definition emphasises two main aspects of collaboration - it is voluntary, i.e. initiated and controlled by the teacher, and it is undertaken for the purposes of professional development. Collaboration can involve different parties:

- teachers with fellow teachers
- experienced teachers /mentors and novice teachers
- teachers and university researchers
- teachers with their students
- teachers and others concerned with teaching: administrators, supervisors, parents, materials developers.

- language teachers and subject teachers.

The relationships among the participants of different types of collaboration vary depending on participants' status, responsibilities, interests and aims. Thus, for example, the need to collaborate in integrating content and language in CLIL or CBI has recently increased due to the efforts to incorporate migrant children whose target language proficiency is not sufficient for study.

2. MENTORING

Malderez (2009: 260) defines mentoring as the process of "one-to-one, workplace-based, contingent and personally appropriate support for the person during their professional acclimatization (or integration), learning, growth, and development". The nature of mentoring seems to be easier to explain by differentiating it from other similar processes in teacher education. Thus, Malderez and Bodoczky (1999) describe their choice of the term *mentor* by differentiating it from other similar roles, such as supervisor (suggesting hierarchy and directiveness), trainer or co-trainer, describing the expertise of the mentor through the roles he or she can adopt, namely: model, acculturator, sponsor, support and educator. Mentors are seen as models of teaching in a context; facilitators of integration into a specific culture and community; sponsors of their mentees in terms of ensuring the mentee's acceptance into the professional community and providing optimal conditions for learning; and educators – in the sense of scaffolding mentee learning. Scaffolding learning involves helping trainees review and assess their work; apply theory to practice; use different types of knowledge - received knowledge from lectures and books, and experiential knowledge from observing others and reflecting on their own experience.

Mentors receive information about their mentees' needs by observing them teach and by listening to their accounts and comments on teaching. They might use this information to help the mentee recall what happened by offering additional descriptive observations to complete the picture and help the trainee reflect on it. Scaffolding takes place through these descriptive, rather than evaluative observations which prompt trainees to think and look for their own interpretations and solutions. Mentors can also help trainees become more observant and sensitive to students' reactions and feedback. In this way they offer an alternative perspective on the teaching process and help trainees make sense of it. Another way of developing trainees' noticing is to get them to observe other trainees and experienced teachers or mentor, and discuss their teaching by comparing the mentor's and trainee's perceptions and insights.

The essence of mentor's roles suggest that the mentor is a person who supports the transformation or development of the mentee and their acceptance into a professional community. This role differs from that of the supervisor, whose main concern is the maintenance of standards within an organization or the education system through assessment of its quality. In mentoring assessment is used to support mentor's thinking, decision-making and planning of ways to help the mentee.

Traditionally the mentors are experienced teachers who work in a school and are responsible for a certain number of university trainees who do their teaching practice in the school. Usually, their duties as mentors have to be combined with their everyday teaching tasks. In order to be effective in their role, mentors need to be recognised and supported within their schools and the education system. They need to have sufficient time for learning and developing as mentors, and for working with their mentees. Their status should be linked to adequate remuneration and career advancement, and supported by the positive attitude of school authorities and school staff towards mentors, mentees and the mentoring process.

When the responsibilities of the two parties involved in the preparation of the mentee, namely the school and the university, are not clear, the support for the mentees will be less effective (Bullough and Draper 2004).

Among the other factors which can negatively affect the success of mentoring process are the contradiction of mentor's and mentee's knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as the language used in the mentorship, especially in the cases where the mentee's language proficiency is not high enough.

In order to overcome mentors' potential vulnerability and ensure the success of their work, they need to be given opportunities for training and development. Effective mentoring policies can provide sustainability in teaching and reduce the high turnover of teachers, by lowering trainees' and novice teachers' initial stress through guidance and support right from the beginning of their career.

3. COACHING

Coaching as a form of professional development in companies has been found to facilitate the development of openness, partnership and trust between individuals (Skiffington & Zeus 2000). Its relation to mentoring and other forms of counseling has been interpreted in different ways in research. According to Clutterbuck (1991) mentoring includes coaching, facilitating, counselling and networking. Similarly, Landsberg (1996) thinks that it is part of the mentoring role, but also includes broader types of counselling and support, such as career counselling.

Definitions of coaching vary depending on their focus. Whitmore (1995) claims that coaching unlocks a person's potential to maximize their own performance, and helps them to learn rather than teaching them. Downey (2001) calls it the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.

Recently, coaching has established itself as a powerful tool for enhancing self-development and self-actualization in a variety of contexts, including management, leadership and teaching. There are different types of coaching depending on its purposes and contexts of application, such as performance, skills, career, life and business coaching. The key to any effective coaching relationship is the idea of improving coachees' performance and developing their personal potential and skills. This can be achieved through identifying the relevant areas where coaching can help and devising tasks and activities leading to the implementation of the outlined development plan.

Recently, extensive research has been done on using coaching skills and techniques in adult education (Cavanagh 2013, Clancy and Blinkert 2010; Forde 2011). Coaching views the interaction between learners and educators as "focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate" (Nieuwerburgh 2012: 17).

Peer coaching is a form of teacher collaboration in which one teacher coaches a peer and thus facilitates his or her development. It is a confidential process "through which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practices, expand, refine, and build new skills, share ideas; teach one another; conduct classroom research; or solve problems in the workplace" (Robbins 1991:1). During this process of exploring different aspects of teaching, the coach provides nonjudgmental feedback and suggestions to the other teacher. Although the coach might give suggestions, the decisions are made by the teacher, who has the responsibility for his or her teaching and remains in control in the classroom at all times. If the teacher is less experienced he or she might ask the coach for more input and advice on different aspects of teaching. The coaching process is realised through a range of activities, among which are informal conversations, discussions of observed lessons, assisted planning, preparation and evaluation of teaching materials. In these activities the coach acts as a critical friend, who can provide another perspective on teaching without being negative or feeling superior to the coachee. Coaching procedures can be used to help a novice teacher implement a new curriculum, introduce a new approach, or adapt to a new teaching context. The coach can help the novice teacher get to know the other teachers in the school and become a part of the school community. In helping another teacher the coach can gain valuable insights about his or her own teaching and acquire new knowledge and skills. Another benefit of coaching is an increased sense of collegiality and belonging to a community with shared values.

4. SUPERVISION

The term supervision emphasizes the power-based relationships even more than mentoring and coaching, as it involves organisational responsibility, assessment and refinement of current practices (Goldsberry 1988). In the context of language education, Wallace (1991) emphasizes the supervisor's duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching. People who might perform these functions are ministry of education inspectors, teacher trainers, educators, advisors, counselors, heads of departments, or head-teachers.

Depending on the power distribution between participants in the process, Freeman (1982) outlines a *directive approach*, in which the supervisor prescribes teacher's action, *non-directive approach*, in which the supervisor acts as a listener, rather than a judge; and an *alternative approach*, where the supervisor suggests alternative action. Later, Gebhard (1984) adds two more approaches - *collaborative* and *creative*. In the first one, the supervisor establishes a sharing relationship and participates in decision making, and in the latter, the supervisor uses combinations of the above styles, depending on the teacher's needs.

The choice of supervisory style depends on many factors, among which are the teacher's experience, supervisor's personal style and preferences; and the specifics and needs of the particular school or class. Whereas less experienced teachers might benefit from a more prescriptive style, collaborative supervision gives teachers more freedom in decision making, experimentation and autonomy.

In the context of teacher professional development the focus of supervision is moving towards collaboration which promotes reflection on one's own teaching and beliefs. As Chamberlin (2000) points out, the role of the supervisor is now seen in creating an environment that cultivates reflection, exploration, and change. Recent trends in supervision research are driven by the same interest in the sources and mechanisms of development. Bailey (2009) outlines three main trends: the use of discourse analysis in post-observation discussion, socio-cultural theory in studying teacher learning, and technology in collecting classroom data.

One way of achieving successful cooperation in post-lesson observation is to reduce the elements of direct criticism and advice by using appropriate discourse strategies. Wajnryb (1994), who studied supervisors' ways of mitigating their speech when delivering face-threatening acts, has identified *syntactic*, *semantic*, and *indirect mitigation*

strategies. Syntactic mitigation devices included tense shift, aspect shift, person shift, particular clause structures, use of negation, modal verbs, and interrogatives to soften the critical message. Semantic mitigation devices included hesitations, false starts, asides, lexical hedges, and hedging modifiers. Indirect mitigation can be: 1. conventionally indirect, with criticism built into the surface level meaning of the utterance; 2. implicitly indirect, with supervisor's meaning being inferred by an interaction between what is said and the context in which it is said, and 3. pragmatic ambivalence, where the illocutionary force of the utterance is unclear, causing difficulty in interpretation.

Within the socio-cultural theory, the role of supervision was measured through the impact of supervisor's input on the teacher-learners' zone of proximal development (ZDP). Technological developments in supervision affect the way teachers and supervisors collect data and communicate with each other. Examples of such developments involve: keeping journals via e-mail and using handheld digital devices for making notes during observations; communicating through e-mail discussion groups and Web sites; using videoconferencing to observe teachers from a distance and enabling interactions between supervisors and teacher-learners.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum up, all of the above ways of cooperation are currently gaining momentum as tools for teacher development and support. Collaborative learning through mentoring, coaching and supervision are based on the principles of scaffolding, reflection and communication, which lead to increased opportunities for professional development. Cooperation with others is beneficial to all parties involved in the process, as it helps them understand better their own and the others' experiences and beliefs.

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