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THE IMPACT OF USING COACHING AS A PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND REFLECTION TOOL

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Introduction

This study considers the impact of using coaching as a professional development and reflection tool amongst educators. Using Deira International School as a case study, it assesses the benefits of coaching for middle leaders and teachers and the impact it has on the quality of teaching and learning.

Often professional development offered within education can be generic and dictated for all teachers leaving little room for personalisation and ownership. This generalised approach to professional development is supported by Knight (2019) who recognises that professionals are rarely motivated when they have little autonomy. A one-size-fits-all model of change rarely provides helpful solutions. Recognising this, Deira International School had begun to establish a coaching culture and looked at the opportunity to integrate coaching within their professional growth and reflection cycle to further enhance bespoke professional development for leaders and teachers, aiming to create a more personalised approach where teachers take ownership of their development.

This study explores the impact of a facilitative coaching method on professional growth and the quality of teaching and learning, aligning with Knight's (2019) advocacy for autonomy and tailored solutions in professional development.

Literature Review

Deira International School has adopted a facilitative coaching approach, which van Nieuwerburgh (2012) characterises as 'one to one conversation that focuses on enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate.' This method empowers teachers to lead their professional conversations, engage in critical reflection of their practices and create their own path forward. The value of this approach is supported by Devine et al. (2013), who suggest that coaching is a powerful tool for personal change and learning. Central to this coaching approach is the facilitation of learning, which hinges on active listening, inquiry and provision of both challenge and support, skills that are pivotal for the successful implementation of the new approach to professional development at Deira International School.

Coaching is recognised for providing educators with time for reflection, focusing on individual priorities, offering a safe space for exploration, and delivering a personalised approach to leadership development (van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2020). Furthermore Sardar and Galdames (2017) believe that school leaders who receive coaching support report a perceived improvement in their performance. Knight (2019) reinforces this viewpoint, suggesting that the personalised nature of coaching is crucial for its success.

Therefore, the literature suggests that coaching, as a personalised, reflective practice, is instrumental in fostering professional growth and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

Methodology

Initially, all coaches received a two-day training course to equip them with necessary skills to facilitate quality and effective coaching conversations. To support the coaching process, coaching wheels were developed as a visual

tool to aid reflection and discussion. These wheels incorporated elements related to high-quality teaching and learning and key attributes of effective teachers which aligned directly to the school's priorities. All teachers were allocated a personal coach for the academic year. A professional growth cycle was created where coaches met their coachees for formal meetings at least three times throughout the year. These meetings were spaced out to allow for reflection and application of new strategies. Prior to each meeting, coachees would reflect on the coaching wheels, identifying both strengths and areas in which they could further develop. Additionally, coachees updated their Professional Development Padlet, a digital portfolio capturing their research, reflections, training and progress against their areas of development. Coaching conversations were conducted; focused on the reflection from the coaching wheels. These conversations were instrumental in pinpointing an area of focus for the next cycle, thereby fostering a continuous loop of reflection, dialogue and professional growth.

This study used a mixed method approach to gather data, with a questionnaire that was distributed to 56 staff members and analysis of quality assurance data based on 76 members of staff. The questionnaire utilised a scaled score to measure the impact of coaching on reflection and the development of teaching practice or leadership. The quality assurance analysis measured the percentage of improvement within teaching and learning across an academic year.

Results

Positive feedback was received from teachers regarding their coaching experience. They identified that the coaching conversations help them to reflect critically on their current practice and enables them to move their practice forward. The quality assurance shows a positive trend in teaching and learning data.

The quality assurance analysis indicated a 14% increase over a year in highly effective strategies for teaching and learning being embedded into lessons and an average rating of 4.11/5 from teachers regarding coaching's role in enabling critical reflection and improvement in teaching practice.

Figure 1
Quality Assurance Data Analysis for the Academic Year 2022–2023 and 2023–2024

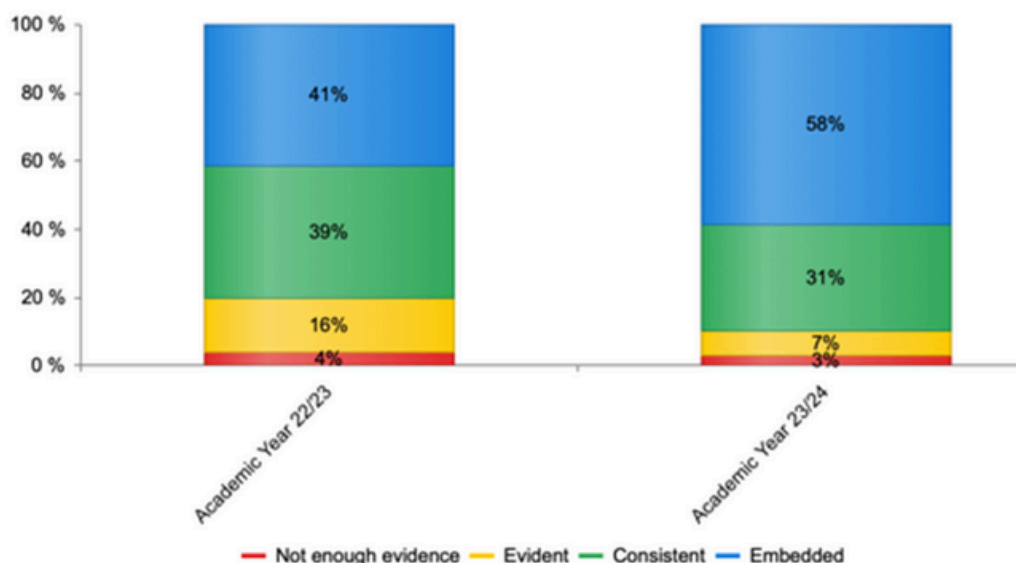


Figure 2
Scaled Score Analysis of Teacher’s Responses Regarding the Effectiveness of Coaching as a Reflection Tool

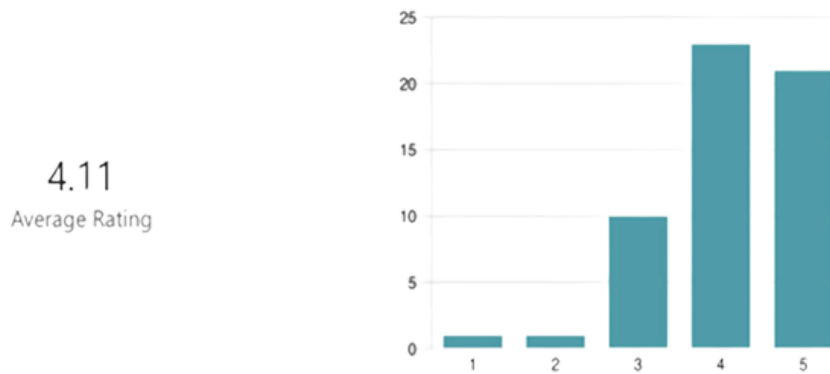
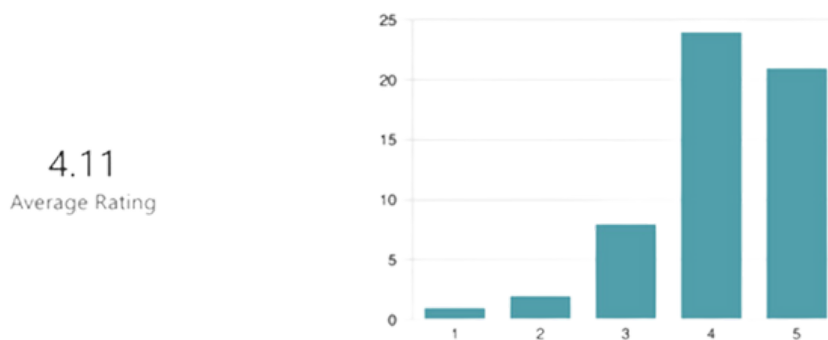


Figure 3
Scaled Score Analysis of Teacher’s Responses Regarding the Effectiveness of Coaching in Further Developing their Practice



Conclusion

The outcomes of the study confirm the value of coaching in educational settings, promoting a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement. Limitations include the influence of various factors on teaching and learning data, the study’s focus on a single school with an existing coaching culture, and the variability in coaching consistency due to different coaching styles.

Implementing a coaching program for professional growth has allowed for a more personalised approach, positively impacting teaching and learning for individual teachers. The study suggests that coaching is an effective tool for professional enhancement and reflective practice in education. Which is supported by the findings of Devine et al. (2013), van Nieuwerburgh et al. (2020) and Sardar and Galdames (2017).

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