Coaching Educational Leadership

Building Leadership Capacity through Partnership

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Contents

Preface

This book is about coaching leadership, and it has been written for anyone who is interested and involved in improving educational leadership and learning—their own and others. Although my focus is the field of education, the principles and practices outlined can be, and have been, used effectively in other contexts, such as learning organisations in the corporate world.

Coaching Educational Leadership will assist individual leaders[1] wanting to reflect on their own leadership, the adviser working with educational leaders in the field, educational leaders in an institution who are responsible for leading others and for developing teaching and learning, and classroom teachers wanting to reflect more effectively on the way they facilitate learning. It can help boards of trustee members and other leaders conduct appraisal more effectively, and challenge those involved in the professional development of educational leaders to critique their programmes and the way they work. Most importantly, it will assist those leaders who are interested in establishing coaching relationships for leadership development.

Although there are many "how to" coaching books on the market, this book highlights, and builds on, 15 years of research and development in the field of leadership coaching. I first took up academic research when I was in a principalship. The work I did was on effective schools. It whetted my appetite and led me to ask why I had not previously been acquainted with all this theory and research. During my career I have held many leadership roles in education—senior teacher, principal, assistant dean, head of department, director—and within each there was little specific leadership development, formal professional feedback or critique of my practice available. These experiences and roles taught me much about leadership and allowed me to work with leaders of incredible talent, but I became concerned, and particularly so at the time of my principalship, at the lack of specific job-related professional opportunities for leadership development. The dearth

1. The use of the word "leaders", rather than designated positions such as teacher, principal, head of department, lecturer, or CEO, in this book is deliberate. This book is about coaching leadership development and so focuses on the leadership responsibilities that all those in education should take up, whatever their position in the institution may be.

of professional dialogue, particularly within the rural principals' group, alarmed me even more. Sports' days, busing issues and other organisational and managerial issues always took precedence over any discussion and debate on leading learning in the school and community. When I moved into the higher education environment in 1989, my study of and research about leadership development began in earnest.

Developing ideas

At this time, both nationally and internationally, there was little national policy relating to, or interest about, educational leadership and its development. With New Zealand's educational institutions moving into self-management as a result of changes in educational policy at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the impetus for management development increased. The government provided one year of professional development support to school principals and their boards, but after the first year of the reforms, individual institutions were generally left to look for leadership support and development from other sources. Much of the rhetoric at the time was managerial and isolated principals from their teaching profession, but, paradoxically, what they needed to *be* self-managing was a greater focus on educational leadership and the ability to build social and intellectual capacity in their institutions.

This paradox created dilemmas for those in education management positions (Robertson, 1991a). Many failed to adapt to the new roles, responsibilities, and tensions, and left the profession. Some struggled and found ways of working within the new political context. Others were ready to try new ways of working that took up the intellectual independence offered through self-management, while finding ways to resist, contest or hijack the managerialist ideology that abounded (Strachan, 1999). It was evident that a new type of professional development was necessary for leaders in the new self-managing institutions.

The work of Hallinger and Murphy (1985, 1991) on principalship at this time, along with later work on problem-based learning (Hallinger & Bridges, 1997), influenced my belief in the importance of developing an authentic model of leadership development, especially for use in university-based programmes. This belief led to the establishment of the first Educational *Leadership* Centre in New Zealand in 1990 at the University of Waikato, when elsewhere the focus was on establishing and maintaining centres for

Reflective activity 17

Now take a look at your coaching styles, and then reflect on your answers to these questions:

- How would you describe the coaching style?
- What works best for you?
- What is least helpful?
- What is the most important coaching role?
- What new learning has there been?
- How have you changed?

Reflective activity 18

In regard to the coaching relationship:

- How do you feel the coaching is going?
- Is it professionally fulfilling?
- What problems have you experienced?
- In what ways could you improve the relationship?
- Any other comments?

Reflect on your answers to these questions.

Reflective activity 19

Now think about and reflect on your answers to these questions:

- Do you carry out a "formal" reflective interview each time?
- Why? Why not?
- What causes the most reflection on practice?
- What is the most beneficial part of time spent together?
- How useful is the reflective interview?
- How would you describe your experience of the reflective interview?

Reflective activity 20

It is important that those of you in coaching roles keep a reflective journal to support your own development as a leadership coach. The guidelines in the first point below are adapted from those that Zeus and Skiffington (2002, p. 87) outline for their "coach's notebook". The ideas in the second point on the next page are those which leaders who have been utilising the "Leaders Coaching Leaders" model in their work and graduate study for a Master of Educational Leadership qualification have found useful.

1. Record the following in relation to each goal set and write reflection notes in relation to these items.
   Goal: What does the leader want to achieve?
   Time-frame: When does s/he want to achieve it by?
   Steps: What steps should be taken? How can I assist?
   Results: What happened? What progress is being made?
   Issues: What new learning has there been for me?
   Reflection: Where to from here? What links can I make to anything I have read? What else could I do to assist? What sort of feedback can I get from the leader about the coaching process?

2. Include in your journal:
   – Ideas from readings (e.g., "The relationship takes time to develop", Robertson, 1997).
   – Exploration of concepts (e.g., praxis, reciprocity).
   – Chronology of contacts/correspondence with leader/s.
   – Reflections on your role as coach/facilitator.
   – Reflections on your new learning.
   – Quotes or communication with leader/s (e.g., an email or comment made that seems significant).
   – Evaluation of the coaching sessions.
   – Skills development (e.g., ability to get closure in sessions; use of GROW model).
   – Session ideas for working with your partner.
   – Anything else you think is relevant.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Many factors, whether personal and professional, and internal or external to the institution, can adversely affect the development of an effective coaching relationship.
- Awareness of these factors is the first step in countering them effectively.
- Monitoring and reflecting on the coaching process is the second important step in countering difficulties and strengthening the coaching relationship.
- Coaching *is* a relationship—and focusing on the process of developing that relationship must be given prominence throughout the coaching process.

Three case studies

The first case study (Case Study 1) presents the story of an assistant principal who worked with two experienced women leaders in her school. She was genuinely surprised at how little she knew of these women and their work. She was also pleasantly surprised at how committed they were to the development of their leadership and how much they valued her own expertise and interest in them. Case Study 2 focuses on a principal who worked with two principals in his local principals' association group, while Case Study 3, conducted in a tertiary institution, tells of a head of department who invited three colleagues in similar positions to practise and use coaching in their leadership development.

Taken together, the studies highlight that experience of coaching gives leaders confidence to work with others to develop their skills of coaching and their own skills of facilitation. More importantly, facilitating coaching allows leaders to reflect on the change process and enhances their ability to use an action research process to guide their coaching. (Facilitation of coaching was dealt with fully in the previous chapter.) The leaders tell their own stories here.

CASE STUDY 1: Assistant principal facilitating coaching in her own institution

I facilitated the development of educational leadership with two of my work colleagues based on a peer coaching model by Robertson (1997). I was working as an assistant principal in a large intermediate school, with approximately 1,200 students. The two colleagues I chose to work with were mature women, experienced teachers, in some ways lacking in self-confidence yet seeking to extend their leadership capacity.

The aim of the facilitation of a coaching partnership was to give the two participants the skills, attitudes, and behaviours to become more reflective about their practice and, in doing so, to develop their leadership skills and add to the focus on quality of what was happening in our school. I also wanted to help provide these two women with a sense of personal importance, significance, and work meaningfulness, and motivation as described by Sergiovanni (2001).

The basis for trust and respect between us was established through having worked together for the previous seven years. However, the basis