



LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY  
CARNEGIE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

# CollectivED Quick Guide to Teacher Coaching Developing teachers and teaching



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# An invitation

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Coaching offers a unique opportunity for teachers to have personalised and formative conversations about their own work.

Coaching can help educators to create supportive professional relationships based on trust and curiosity. Coaching can re-connect teachers with each other, with a sense of purpose and perspective and with their potential. Coaching can create a time and space to focus the mind in the busy lives of teachers. If you want to know a little more, this CollectivED Quick Guide to Teacher Coaching might help.

Whilst coaching can be used in a myriad of ways, in this publication we focus on coaching as a tool for enhancing professional practice since it is in classrooms where children and young people and teachers spend most of their time. Coaching can play a significant role in helping teachers make sense of how to create the conditions which enable children and young people to flourish.



# Introduction

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Coaching is an emerging field in education which has gathered momentum in recent years. The implications of this are that many models have developed, some of which are linked to programmes or initiatives whilst others are stand alone.

The lack of accreditation for coaching can make it challenging for schools to assess the value of a particular approach. Some of the most popular coaching models have rapidly gained credibility in practical terms but they may not necessarily have been validated through research.

The purpose of this publication is to connect, extend and even challenge your existing knowledge about and experience of coaching so you can improve coaching practice in your professional contexts. This guide to coaching is distinct from and complementary to instructional coaching. It is aimed at any educator with an interest in understanding how coaching can support teachers' learning and practice. This guide to coaching therefore is not a definitive guide, but instead aims to offer you an insight into the field.

This publication is a collection of ideas about coaching to support teachers to develop teaching. To keep the 'quick' format, the guide is written without citations but draws broadly on the work of practitioners and researchers associated with CollectivED. A list of thematic references is provided for further reading.



## Who is this publication for?

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**Coaches** – Are you responsible for supporting colleagues to develop their practice? This guide may be helpful both if you are new to coaching or are an experienced coach looking for different approaches to coaching.

**Coachees** – Are you keen to develop your practice through engaging in coaching? This guide may help you learn more about the principles of coaching and develop your understanding of what the experience of coaching ideally might look like.

**Coaching co-ordinators** – Are you responsible for supporting and managing a team of coaches and the quality of coaching? You may be new to this role or more experienced. This guide can help you to develop your understanding of establishing coaching as a practice across an organisation.

**School leaders, trustees and governors** – Are you looking to build a school culture in which colleagues know they are valued and supported to grow and develop their practice so students can flourish? You may wish to further your understanding of how an investment in coaching can contribute meaningfully to creating safe spaces for practice development and student learning.

## What do we mean by the term teacher coaching?

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Coaching is a term with a range of meanings, which have validity in different contexts. It is therefore important to clarify what we mean by 'teacher coaching' to avoid misrepresentation.

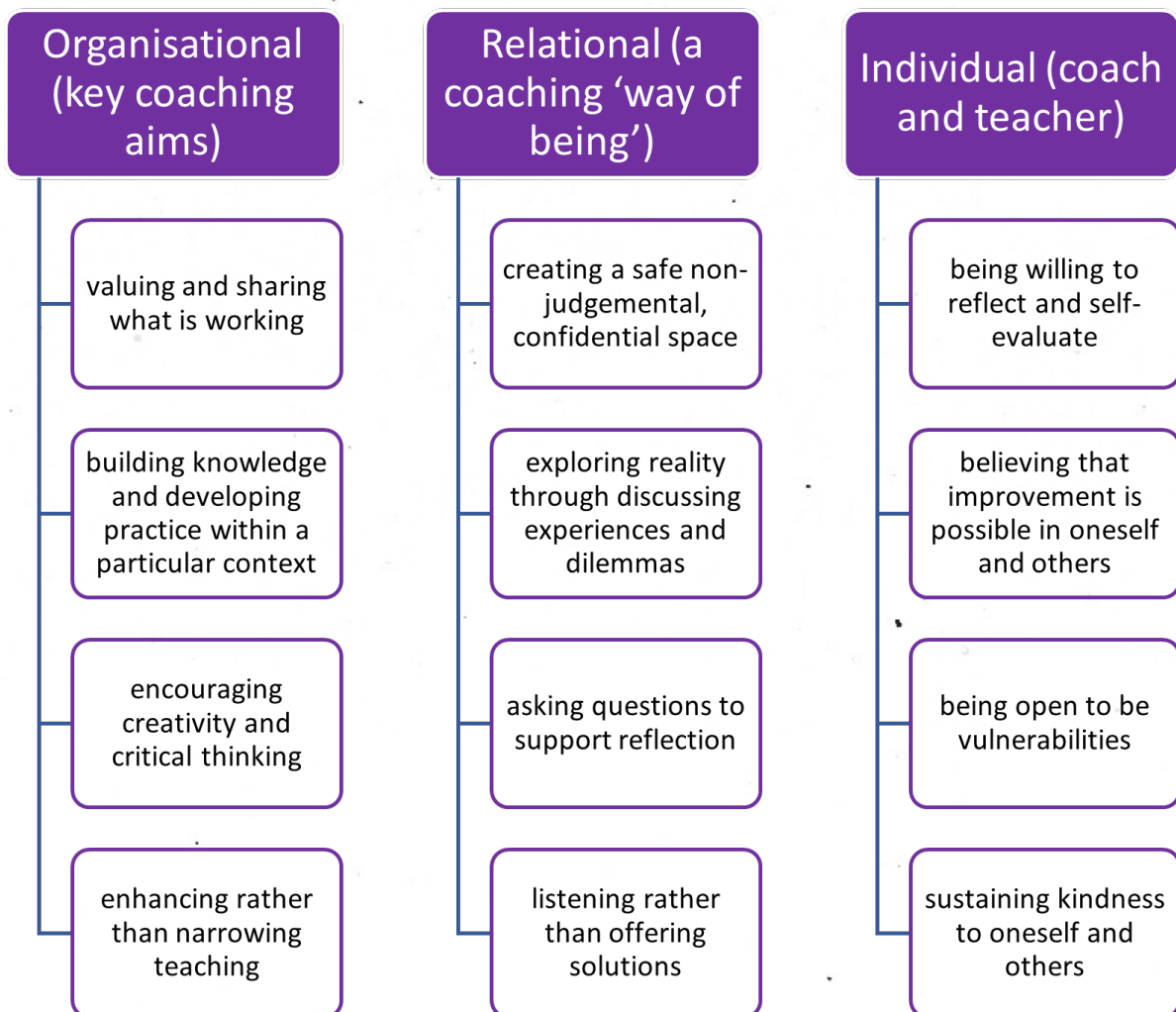
At CollectivED we define teacher coaching as a process of sustained and focused professional dialogue in which the coached teacher (coachee) is given an opportunity to develop their teaching practice. Coaching is an inside-out process, led by the coachee and scaffolded by the coach.

Coaching is a learning process for both coach and coachee; providing both participants with opportunities for reflection and responsive decision-making. Through engaging with coaching, teachers can gain greater insights and be supported to develop specific skills to enhance their teaching repertoire. Coaching can also create a safe space to foster opportunities for experimentation with new classroom strategies. Coaching can lead to teachers gaining enhanced self-awareness and a better understanding of the teaching context.

# What are the principles of teacher coaching?

In thinking about the principles of coaching, it is helpful to consider them through the lenses of the organisational context, the coaching relationship and the individual. Coaching is a relational practice and will therefore be more successful for individuals if the conditions for coaching exist at the organisational level.

This summary diagram may act as a useful aide memoire when reviewing or designing teacher coaching.



## Who can be a coach?

There are no hard and fast rules about who can coach teachers. The relationship between coach and the teacher engaged in coaching (the coachee) is non-hierarchical and so usually coaches do not have line management responsibilities towards the coachee.

To become a coach does require a commitment to engaging in developing as a coach. This means building coaching skills – which extend the skills we use as teachers and / or school leaders. Teachers can be supported by coaches who have similar roles to them, or people who bring additional insights and different perspectives to the conversation. Therefore, a teacher coach could be external to the organisation or a colleague.

Given the complexity of teachers' roles it is useful to consider which other experts can act as coaches, to help develop teachers' awareness and critical and creative thinking. This might include artist educators, speech and language therapists and child psychologists as well as teachers and leaders.

When considering who can be a teacher coach, it is vital that they are credible and can work authentically in the context and with emotional intelligence. This requires that they are sufficiently knowledgeable about the context of teaching and learning, the needs of learners and how teachers are themselves enabled to learn. They need to embody the individual and relational characteristics already identified.

You should also want to consider the diversity of the staff and student population and to what extent coaches reflect that diversity.

## How to approach teacher coaching

There are several valid approaches to coaching teachers; but underpinning all of them is a respect for what the teacher brings in terms of knowledge and experience. Some coaches observe teaching, some use video clips of lessons, some undertake co-planning with the teacher, some even co-teach or model teaching. Whatever coaching approaches are used they should feel collaborative and low stakes. Feedback and advice might be sought, but the coaching conversation should allow for co-construction of knowledge and insight and co-creation of thinking to inform future plans.

Many coaching models include goal setting. Goals can help create focus and purpose. However, it is important to think carefully about how goals are set. They should be related to reality and context (not plucked from an 'ideal') and they should be identified and owned by the coachee. Goals for teaching should relate to the desired

impact on learners and learning. Working towards a goal should be motivational for the teacher, not punishing or performative. Goals can be reasonably adjusted within coaching cycles as more insights are gained and the classroom realities change.

Coaching is typically not a one-off event, but neither should it become an additional workload burden for the teacher. Indeed, if it is working well coaching should help the teacher gain confidence and fluency in their work, helping to ease out anxieties and unnecessary or unhelpful practices. Coaching should be a transformative space in which the coach supports the coachee to do their best thinking in the context of the decisions that they are making as a professional.

## Questions in coaching

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Most coaching approaches highlight the significance of asking good questions. In teacher coaching the role of questions is to generate opportunities to recall experience, reflect on decisions made prior to and during teaching and refine thinking for future practice. It is helpful to remember that the questions serve the purpose of coaching rather than become the purpose! Questions are problematic if the coachee perceives the questions as a trap or a test, or if they do not feel that their responses are being listened to. Having questions as a scaffold to support coaching fluency is essential. One of the best things a coach can do is pay attention to how their questions land with the teacher, which ones generate deepest thinking, which ones create commitment and energy which can ripple out from the coaching conversation.

## Coaching, consent and performance management

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A coachee can be invited and enabled to participate in coaching but should have the discretion to decline, withdraw or ask for adaptations to the coaching model. This matters in education cultures which have a tendency towards micro-management and it also helps to distinguish coaching from mentoring. Mentoring may be mandatory at certain career stages or in organisational people management structures. Coaching is thus a voluntary arrangement based on consent. Contracting is an important part of most coaching practices. This is a stage where expectations and boundaries are set.

Some teacher coaching is aligned with specific teaching and learning initiatives, pedagogical research projects or forms of CPD. In such cases coaching may be part of the underpinning design. Teachers engaged in such projects should have the opportunity to shape the nature of coaching over time, and their ongoing engagement in coaching should be through agentic participation not obligation.

When under pressure to meet targets, it might be tempting to turn to coaching as a means by which to secure those outcomes. However, where coaching is adopted as a means of bringing about quick fixes in school improvement, it can be subverted to monitoring and surveillance. Coaching should always feel collaborative and never controlling. It should create and protect teachers in a safe space to examine, explore, learn and develop as a way of enhancing their understanding, confidence and teaching repertoire.

## A note about 'instructional coaching'

Instructional coaching is a model of coaching that has gained popularity in recent years along with evidence-based practice. Instructional coaching has its roots in the USA where the practice of teaching is referred to as instruction. There are several established instructional coaching models. In instructional coaching the role of the coach is sometimes perceived as 'expert' in particular areas of teaching. However, they use this expertise in a range of ways according to the model of coaching. A current focus for new providers of instructional coaching training is the use of digitised platforms and guided 'walk throughs' of teaching routines. When adopting these it is useful to consider the extent to which teacher consent and coachee-led practices might be compromised. It could be argued that the boundaries between mentoring, training and coaching are being blurred.

### Building hope through coaching

Coaching can become a space in which we build a sense of hope and achievement. As teachers experience positive, fulfilling and impactful change in their own work they can feel more optimistic about their own capacities and the value that they bring to the lives of their learners.



# Additional Sources and Reading

The following CollectivED papers and blogposts may be of value when developing insights into teacher coaching. They are written by practitioners and researchers and may help you develop your professional contextualised judgement in relation to coaching teachers.

Ashley, K. (2018) Working together: Coaching as the compass in the journey of implementation A Practice Insight Working Paper, CollectivED [5], pages 11-17 Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University.

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Atwal, K. (2019) The Thinking School – The value of Coaching A research working paper, CollectivED [8], pages 14-16 Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University.

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Campbell, J. and Van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2018) Coaching in education: Getting better results for students, educators and parents. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Crome, S. (2020) Book review of The Coaching Habit, by Michael Bungay Stanier. CollectivED [14], pages 61-64 Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University.

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Lofthouse, R. (2023) Re-imagining a positive direction for education through narratives and co-coaching blogpost: <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/carnegie-education/2023/01/re-imagining-a-positive-direction-for-education-through-narratives-and-cocoaching/>

Lofthouse, R. & Hollweck, T. (2022) Putting context into coaching; creating an understanding of the value of contextual coaching in education A research summary working paper, CollectivED [14], pages 46-52 Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University. <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/research/CollectivED/CollectivED-issue-14.pdf>

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Proffitt, K. (2020) Coaching to Empower a Culture of Autonomy, CollectivED [11], pages 63-67 Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University. <https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/research/CollectivED/CollectivED-issue-11-final3.pdf>

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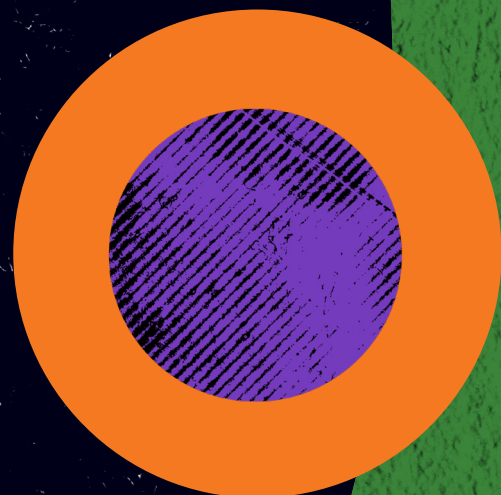
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