

Coaching: a strategic pillar in schools

King George V School : Hong Kong
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“Coaching”

There is a significant on-going debate about the extent to which educators’ and schools’ role is to impart knowledge, and the skills and discipline required to pass tests; or to develop people with intellectual, emotional, social and physiological resilience and the desire to keep developing these on a lifelong basis through a wide range of learning strategies.

“Coaching”

- The former pedagogy is how many would define “teaching” and is undoubtedly important while the latter can, for the purposes of this report, be simplified into the term “coaching” where we use whatever strategies we can find to empower students in these ways. These are not mutually exclusive.
- This report does not attempt to prescribe the perfect balance between the two pedagogies but does aim to assist the school to identify ways that it can continue to build coaching into the DNA of its practice should it choose to do so.

Background:

- King George V (KGV) has a very long and proud tradition in Hong Kong. Since 1979 it has been a member of the English Schools Foundation.
- In 2016/17 it has focused on 4 “Strategic Pillars” in its development plan:

Pillar 1: Everyone a collaborative curriculum creator

Pillar 2: Everyone a coach and coachee

Pillar 3: Everyone a teacher and tutor of all students

Pillar 4: Everyone a learner & authentically connected to the learning community.

Background:

- Of these, Pillar 2 is the one least likely to be instinctively understood. The term ‘coaching’ is in general usage subject to many interpretations, and how it fits with ‘teaching’ could cause confusion among educators, parents and students alike.
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- The model of coaching that has primarily been used as the basis for development in the school is ‘performance coaching’ as put forward by Carol Wilson in her book of that title.
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Purpose

- The school's leadership invited an external consultant with long standing international expertise in coaching to research the current state of play in the development and practice of coaching in the school, and to make recommendations for future strategic consideration.
- In brief, how is the school doing with regard to Pillar 2? How could it do better?

Method

- We created online complementary surveys for staff, for students, and for parents & guardians.
- For staff we asked questions about the extent to which the coaching principles had successfully been communicated and applied in practice; the frequency of application in various school contexts; suggestions for extending coaching practice and quality; and reports of any beneficial impacts.
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- We explored the experience of coaching as perceived by students, and the extent to which parents & guardians use coaching in their own approach to supporting students in their development. We invited suggestions for improvement, and stories about benefits. With both sets of consumers we also wanted to assess their views on the importance of coaching in the future.

Headlines



- The survey had 137 respondents: 88 staff, 21 students and 28 parents/guardians.
- 100% of parent/guardian respondents see coaching as important in the school's future practice, of whom 46% regard it as essential
- By contrast no students regarded it as essential, with just 62% seeing it as important
- Many staff still perceive coaching as an “initiative” rather than as a fundamental pedagogy

Headlines

- There is on the other hand a strong core of nearly a third of staff who strongly embrace coaching principles in both hearts and minds
- Parents/guardians appear to be the most effective and consistent coaches in student development at present, both as self reported and as confirmed in student responses.
- There is emerging evidence of practical research within the school, in comparing the effectiveness of coaching and more traditional teaching approaches in classroom situations which should be shared more widely.

Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

Are coaching principles clearly communicated to all members of the KGV community? To what extent do they inform practice?

- Clearly there is a lot more to be done here, with more than half of respondents not agreeing that the principles had been clearly communicated [10% strongly *disagree*, 43% only *to some extent*] and that they effectively inform practice [9% *disagree*, 49% only *to some extent*].

Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

- However when the ‘performance coaching’ principles were broken down into specific practices staff were more positive about their application, with most perceiving that they are being applied *often* or *consistently throughout*.
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- The highest self ratings were “I take responsibility for my actions and development, and encourage others to do the same” [W/A 81%] and “I help others to focus positively on finding solutions” [W/A 78%]. All nine were generally reportedly used often, with the lowest weighted average being 70%.
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Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

To what extent are coaching principles embedded as a value or mindset in staff?

We wanted to evaluate the extent to which hearts and minds are already embedded in staff attitudes and beliefs about coaching. These questions had a more emotional tone, using language such as empower, challenge, inspire, prefer, and like.

Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

- Significantly, 26% tended to respond ‘that’s exactly what I’m like’ and 53% ‘I strive to be like that’. However this leaves around one in five staff who do not really buy into principles like “I empower others to find their own unique solutions instead of just ‘telling them how’” [W/A 65%].
- The strongest positive was for “I love asking questions that really make people think” [W/A 72%]. Along with empowering others as above, “I am comfortable in situations where I don’t have all the answers” [also W/A 65%] were the lowest rated responses.

Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

How often is coaching applied in different school contexts?

- School leadership identified 9 potential situations in which coaching could be used as an appropriate pedagogy.
- On average 11% report 'never' and 21% 'rarely' use the coaching principles in situations like student led conferences, performance management, or tutor/tutee individual conversations. While the majority do report 'often' or 'every time', this finding indicates a significant level of inconsistency in staff practice and consequently in the student experience.

Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

How often is coaching applied in different school contexts?

Overall the highest rated context was in performance management/PRD [W/A 65%] while the lowest was in discussion with parents [W/A 46%]. The latter is ironic as parents are well ahead of staff in their attitudes and in applying coaching practice, as will be seen in a later section of this report.

Key Findings

Staff Survey [88 respondents]

Reported Benefits: Staff

- Many staff report wider benefits to learning coaching skills than might be anticipated, citing better relationships with family and friends, and personal and professional growth for themselves. Examples:
 - *“... I feel as though I am able to better understand my friends and family, and use effective questioning to help them to move towards their own solutions”. “...it helps me to know myself better with the help of my coach and also challenges me to become a better me than I was before”. “Having this constant reflection – the mirroring of being a coach, as well as a coachee – certainly contributes to my personal growth and it filters down into the improved way I communicate in other areas of my life”.*

Strategies Suggested by Staff Respondents



- **Time.** Many staff identify time as a major issue, not just in making time for coaching conversations but also space for preparation, reflection and for embedding changes.
- **Training.** There are many calls for more training of various kinds – CPD, attending courses, having focus days where everyone in the building focuses on one particular skill such as listening actively, mentoring, more training on limiting beliefs ... “I do not feel that the practice is a natural one from those involved yet”.