

Quality Teaching and Learning

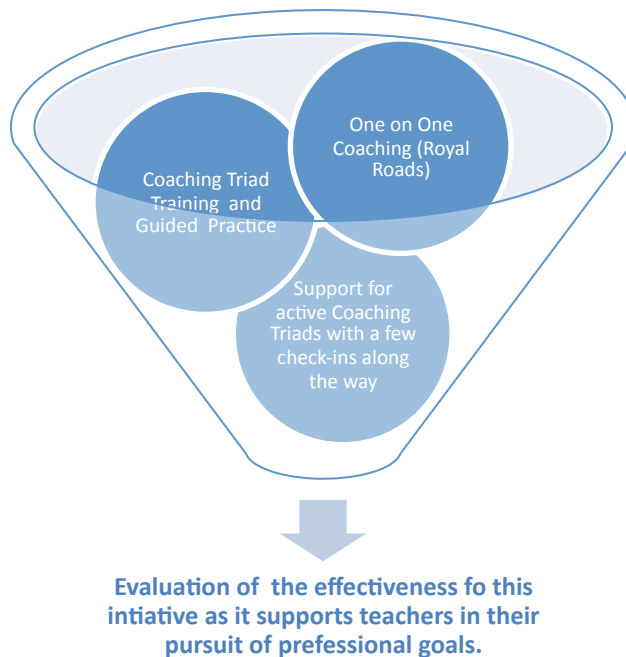
School District No. 64 (Gulf Islands)

March 1, 2013

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE

Our Quality Teaching and Learning project was designed to support a cohort of teachers in their professional practice – particularly how they manage change and growth within that practice – and to measure the effectiveness of our support intervention. That intervention was comprised on three parts:

1. One-on-one professional coaching for each teacher.
2. Training and guided practice in using coaching triads.
3. Support for actual coaching triads in which the teachers participated.



The professional goals towards which the teachers in this cohort were working were their own goals and were set by them. The school district did not ask what those goals were, nor did the district ask for any details about what teachers discussed in their triad or one-on-one coaching sessions. Teacher were free to share their goals with other teachers, but were under no obligation to do so. This was based on the hypothesis that teachers would set professional goals that are important to them, and that by doing so, with coaching support and some learning on the “coach approach,” they would be able to work effectively toward the achievement of those goals.

Evaluation of this initiative took place both informally and formally throughout the process, with a formal survey at the end, allowing us to do an analysis of the effectiveness of the initiative, as measured largely by satisfaction of the participants. At the time this report was submitted, many participants were still engaged in their one-on-one coaching.

TIMELINES FOR INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Whole Cohort Session #1 (an introduction to “the coach approach” and to coaching triads) – **Thursday, November 1 at 1:30 to 4:00** on Salt Spring Island at the Salt Spring Elementary School library
- Whole Cohort Session #2 (coaching triads continued and checking in) – **Thursday, November 22 at 1:30 to 4:00** on Salt Spring Island at the Salt Spring Elementary School library
- Whole Cohort Session #3 (coaching triads continued and wrapping up) – **Thursday, January 17 at 1:30 to 4:00** on Salt Spring Island at the Salt Spring Elementary School library
- One-on-one coaching: This started as early as early October for some participants, with duration and frequency of sessions up to each participant in consultation with her/his coach. It was not required that participants complete one-on-one coaching before starting with their coaching triads. The one-on-one experience served to add new insight to what coaching can look like beyond what participants learned in cohort training sessions or triad sessions. Royal Roads University Executive Coaching Program offered their coaching practicum students, allowing us to offer one-on-one in a *pro bono* context.
- Guided practice in coaching triads: Debbie Magnusson of Eagle Ridge Coaching met with triad groups on site at their workplaces and at times that worked for each triad. Guided triad sessions were interspersed with the cohort training sessions, offering two levels of support throughout.

SUMMARY OF COACHING AWARENESS AND TRIAD TRAINING FOR PARTICIPANTS

Format: Three training sessions (10 hour skills training + additional triad practice)

Each session included:

- Coaching skills & concepts
- Triad practice & observations
- Full group debriefs & written evaluation

Permanent triads were set at the end of Day 1:

- Each triad met separately with training coach (Debbie) at least one additional time.
- Some groups met twice.
- Most triad practice sessions were face-to-face. For one group, phone sessions were held for triad practice as participants lived on a different island from the training coach.
- Practices lasted between 1 and 1 ½ hrs each.

Skills, Concepts and Theories:

Day 1:

- A coach approach – becoming coach-like
 - Client responsibility model
- Communication
 - Behaviour observations
 - Listening skills
 - Questioning strategies
- Feedback theory
- Behaviour observations
- Triad theory & Practice
- Verbal & written evaluation

Day 2:

- Written reflection
- Review key concepts
- New skills
 - Listening skills expanded
 - “Naming” – experience, perception, intention
 - Assumptions & reframing
 - Helping bring a client to an action or a plan
 - Waterline Model for organizational diagnosis
 - Making a “Powerful Request”
 - A-A-A Guides for Coaching (Aware, Accept, Adjust)
- Triad Practice – full round, lightening round
 - When to use a “Coach Approach”
- Written evaluation

Day 3:

- Reflection and review concepts requested by participants
- Separating Thinking and Feeling
- Awareness Wheel Model
- Carkhoff’s Conditions of the Helping Relationship
- Triad Practice – more time allocated for each round
- Full group debrief of skills observed in triads

Participants were asked to complete surveys helping us to understand their levels of satisfaction, the degree to which this initiative met their expectations, and their recommendations to us if we decide to continue this initiative in the future. The questions from the survey and their answers are below:

1. *How did you hear about the coaching for teacher leaders training?*

- Other teachers discussing it in the hallway
- From an Administrator
- school email
- from the principal of my school
- Principals and VPs
- Through my vice principal.
- Administrator at the school
- From Shannon Shields my vice principal.

2. *Please list your reasons for participating in the training.*

- Thought it would be a growth experience and help me to move forward in my career.
- To gain support for my teaching practice, to spend time with other teachers
- heard good things about admin coaching program want more pro d opportunities
- I've always had an interest in coaching. It was convenient (I don't work Thursday afternoons).
- yearning to expand myself as a professional - seek a sounding board for professional development - receive some quality feedback from a coach
- Wanted to improve on self and start a dialogue about my goals and how to get there. Get better at teaching
- To learn new communication skills that will help me out as a teacher, administrator, and in everyday life
- To build connections with other colleagues in the district.
- I heard it was a really worthwhile experience.

3. *How closely did the actual training meet your expectations?*

- Not at all – 37.5%
- To some degree – 25%
- Fully – 37.5%

4. *What challenges did you face in participating in the coaching training?*

- I had to juggle my schedule and field trips to make it work.
- I did not have a clear idea about what coaching was at the start of the program. It seems to be more like talk therapy and teaching us how to work through our own problems. I didn't find it useful.
- It was hard setting up times for our triad sessions (people's busy schedules, especially with Christmas in there).

- I was not able to connect with a Royal Roads coach as I had expected. - I was not expecting to establish time to meet with other teachers in the district - which often proves difficult....It's tricky to find time to gather together.
- Sometimes it was difficult to coordinate times to meet for the practice sessions.
- None
- Fitting it into both a work and personal schedule.
- We did not get our appointments with our coaches first so I had no idea what to expect or how to do it.

5. *What learning and immediate rewards did you experience from being a part of this training?*

- Lots of learning around communication and problem solving
- enjoyed having professional discussions with fellow teachers
- Different questions to ask and different ways to approach problems. Getting to know other staff in the district.
- Meeting with Debbie was fantastic - she was a fabulous facilitator and provided space for meaningful dialogue.
- It was a good review of how to actually listen and hear what some one is trying to say.
- Better understanding of communication and things I can work on to get there.
- It was immediately easier to help other people discuss their problems and come up with actions to help them out. It has also helped in how I frame questions in my class.
- I learned some important "ground rules" for coaching that have already come in handy when I'm discussing big (ie, "coachable") issues with friends and colleagues. I learned about my own idiosyncrasies, strengths and weaknesses as a coach (and as a friend, it turns out).

6. *Describe some key qualities of the trainer's instruction.*

- Good communicator and lay out of what was expected.
- Because of ferries and water taxis, we didn't have as much time as I'd have liked. But within that short framework, Debbie fit in just the right amount of theory to make the practice worthwhile and helpful. Debbie has a very calm manner, which helped make us feel more comfortable opening up (with professional issues/problems to be coached on) with each other. Debbie was okay about being honest with us, pointing out foibles in our coaching skills, but also ideas and strategies for strengthening them.
- clear, humourous, open to discussion and questions
- Open minded. Good communication skills. Friendly
- -insightful - patient - provided compassion/empathy as an educator
- Friendly, understanding, listened to our concerns and wishes, knowledgeable

7. *What ongoing benefit(s) do you anticipate from engaging in the coaching training?*

- Well, I'm much more aware now of the pitfalls of just dishing out advice! And that has already made me a better listener and a better prober/questioner. I've also learned to ask for permission before giving advice.
- Coaching experience for helping others work towards goals and find solutions.
- not many at this point
- How important it is to remain neutral when talking to someone about their issue.
- better listener and problem solver
- ability to practice my new found skills
- A better understanding of how to listen and get the speaker to come up with solutions to their own problems rather than offering solutions.
- strengthened relationships with fellow teachers

8. *Describe the impact(s) the coaching training will have on your professional practice.*

- Building relationships with and offering support to-workers and students.
- I am not certain at this point, as I still don't have a coach.
- I believe I am becoming a better listener and to actually make probing questions and speak my mind.
- None (x2)
- It will help me clarify roles, find support and manage my own time and resources better
- I sense that the skills I've learned will make me a more valuable colleague -- goodbye bitch sessions, hello mini-coaching sessions. I've also heard myself saying things to students that are more coaching-oriented ("guide on the side"), which is wonderful for a discovery approach classroom.
- It will help me be a better communicator, listener, and roll model. It will help me work towards becoming an administrator in the future as it gives me practice with communicating in a professional manner.

9. *What would help you sustain your coaching skills?*

- Probably random practicing
- If we had time for ongoing refresher sessions every once in a while (3 times a year)
- a periodic coaching triad / practice session
- Ongoing practice.
- Monthly check in with my SD 64 Triad
- follow up sessions.

10. *Please provide suggestions to improve the coaching training.*

- Improve description of program so that teachers have a better idea of what it is before they sign up.
- None - it was great

- Going through coaching with a Royal Roads coach concurrently would have helped me see the theory in practice. Explain the whole thing better before people sign up -- that could perhaps have ensured a more committed cohort.
- Scheduling of meetings, both workshop times and small group sessions.
- I wish that Royal Roads could have been "on board" and organized before this training was offered.
- I thought it was a fantastic opportunity and would highly recommend it to others. I always look forward to the afternoon sessions with Debbie, and would love to have more of them! They were great in teaching me how to communicate and listen better and as a bonus, allowed me to discuss real problems I was facing.
- Need to get the Royal Rhodes coaches on board sooner so we know what we are suppose to be doing and why.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS ON THE TRIAD TRAINING PORTION OF THE INITIATIVE

- Was informative and has already changed a construct which I have attached to action through archaic social expectations
- Enjoyable, time to relax, refocus, talk...coach
- Was a great opportunity to think about how I talk with others and the questions I ask.
- Helped me understand what coaching actually is
- Was evocative, effective, fun and useful
- Was a good reminder of some excellent communication skills
- Made me think

The most valuable concept(s) for me:

- Asking questions which open the discussion: not in a theoretical ways, such as an open question but in a practical way which accounts for the human behavior to play a role in the perpetuation of thought and movement through meta-cognitive mud
- Asking about an 'ideal scenario' - the miracle question
- The perfect-situation question, and probing for more information
- Changing language to not praise or criticize
- Coaching is EXPANDING my thinking, not 'solving' my problems
- Developing open-ended questions. Examining 'behaviours' that people do when listening
- Was practicing not 'to solve'; Posing open-ended questions – not just handing out advice
- "Not what happened but what happens next", practice asking coaching questions, being with other teachers (it's a concept!)
- ...was a a reminder of the beauty in shaping authentic conversation
- To value our own abilities to find solutions
- "What do you do next?", Feedback – concept, behavior vs. emotion
- The "easy steps to becoming more coach-like"

I found the triad work:

- Useful
- Beneficial – working with co-workers, practicing strategies & talking about current issues
- Challenging, as I had to think about my actions and what I was saying while focusing on the client
- Interesting. I found it to be the most helpful part of the session. I would have liked more time spent on this section, less time spent on introducing the ideas
- Engaging and has made me think about the way I think
- Helpful, but I was a bit uncomfortable at first because I felt I lacked the confidence in feeling effective in what I was doing. After the roles reversed a couple of times, I gained my rhythm.
- A good practice
- Rich!
- Difficult, very enlightening, too short
- Rewarding – helpful in building practical skills
- An informative practice – let's do more!
- I like it – it is going to need work, I like the concept and the challenge it possess for ME!
- Fun and valuable to take each role

COACHING TRAINER'S REFLECTIONS

(Debbie Magnusson's comments can be seen below. They outline her experience with this initiative, offering the district some insight beyond just the survey information from the participants.)

Some of the participant's comments, in particular, made my heart sing! "There is a good time to stop thinking and start acting." "I've learned that the solution exists within the framework of each problem." "I work with an incredible group of people in this district." "I have begun to be a better co-worker in that my interactions are more productive." For me, each of these statements captures, in a deep and integrated way, an aspect of the training. The basic concept of coaching, the vitality of the coaching relationship, introspection and personal achievement, plus new-found appreciation for the opportunity to connect in a totally different way with colleagues are genuinely brought forward.

Throughout the training, I openly stressed self-care and gentleness while using new skills. Re-enforcing and encouraging participants to take the stance of an open-learner was also repeated throughout the training. What was quickly evident was the thirst of these educators to have the opportunity to engage in structured and meaningful professional conversations ***of their own choice...to further their own professional goals...within an emotionally safe environment...with colleagues who will provide feedback, caring and shared experience.*** Participants quickly found themselves using skills newly acquired and they valued both the chance to learn new questioning strategies and the opportunity to try them.

The group's diversity helped create a dynamic that thrived on the variety of subjects, issues or goals each person brought, every time. There was no "acting". Genuine and authentic curiosity drove each session and,

even by participants who did not think that they would professionally benefit from the training. Participants quickly believed they would be helped in working through individual issues, as well as grow in their ability to acquire and use new coaching skills. There was immediacy and intimacy; laughter and compassion. Trust increased.

Several participants identified that, "I am so glad to meet other colleagues in the district. What an amazing group of people!" **Several participants commented that while interacting with colleagues, parents or students, they found themselves (much to their delight!) taking a coaching stance.** While there were a few people who commented that they were either skeptical of coaching or whether they, personally, would ever use the skills, every participant demonstrated respectful participation and engaged fully in the triad practice.

I believe this training provided the Teachers with skills they will continue to refine and use in their professional lives. The degree in which personal goals, issues and reflection were integrated helps this be a profoundly powerful Professional Development opportunity. It was a wonderful experience for me, and I believe the potential of its benefits will extend from the participants, to their school culture and throughout the district.

Key components that enhanced the learning and integration of skills:

- Dissemination or review of theory and skills offering an expanded 'repertoire' of coaching techniques
- Triad work allowing participants to rotate taking turns at being coach, client and observer. The role of "observer" required diligent focus on the coach and the skills s/he used. They had to practice giving feedback using behavior observations which further integrated skills and helped them stand back from the compelling nature of issues being discussed.
- Having the "'Practice Coach' identify their goals for each round created focus for the coach and the observer.
- The depth of participants for providing feedback and individual self-reflection exceeded my expectations. There was an amazing capacity and capability on the part of all participants for making accurate and deep observations and for articulating perceptions.
- The 'buy-in' from each participant helped create a safe environment, thus allowing each person to bring forward a meaningful, current issue that served as the touch-off point for dynamic triad work.
- There was a willingness of participants to allow me to 'stop action', ask coaching questions, provide feedback or make suggestions as they engaged in triad work. This provided an additional layer of feedback and awareness: "When you give feedback as we go, it helps me focus more." Gentle reminders for improvement always helps."

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Overall, we were extremely pleased with the outcomes of this initiative, recognizing that at the time of this report the initiative was not quite done yet. After analyzing the responses from the participants' surveys and

the feedback that participants gave to the coach trainer, Debbie, we have concluded that a number of elements need to be altered slightly in order to increase the effectiveness of this approach to teacher support:

- We think it would be beneficial to ensure that each participant has experienced at least one one-on-one coaching session before beginning the triad training. An overall closer synching of pro-bono coaching with the triad training and practice would likely be better. We did not have an opportunity to synch these two elements in this case, as the QTL timelines did not permit much lead time to invite Royal Roads to join in with their executive coaching students.
- We believe that we would have better met the expectations of the participants if we had given more notice (not much choice in this QTL project, as we were operating under very short timelines) before inviting people to join the initiative. That would have given us more opportunity to prepare the participants and to answer questions they might have had before starting. We are even thinking that having an invitational general information session, open to a larger number of potential participants, would be a better starting point, allowing participants to self-select after that session.
- We know that this year (post job-action) has been an extraordinarily busy year, with many initiatives besides this one coming off the back burner and put back on the front burner. Everyone in the district seemed to suffer more from a lack of time this year than many of us remember ever having seen before.
- Certain elements of the coaching training were key to the effectiveness of this initiative as a way of supporting teachers in new ways. Perhaps the most important element was the recognition by participants that they needed to shift from giving advice to asking powerful questions. A close second, and closely related to the first element, was the recognition by participants that coaching is about listening without telling.
- We learned that we need to have a better plan for how to support participants who miss a training session. This could be very simple – perhaps even just a communication with that person – but it must be more than just waiting for the next one and seeing if the person can “catch up.”

We will be asking participants a few more questions after the writing of this report, and when more of them have finished their one-on-one coaching and have practiced in their triads more. One of the questions we feel we must ask is, “What do you imagine will be the best use of this learning?” The answer to this question will help us to really see even more clearly the connection between coaching training, coaching itself, and teachers’ professional practice.

We think that we would like to do this again, employing some of the improvements and adjustments noted above, to further infuse coaching as a way of doing business in our district. We feel, given the modest costs of the initiative, that this is a sustainable and effective way of supporting teachers as they set goals related to system change and continual improvement of professional practice.