

COACHING IN THE CLASSROOM

By Dr. Linda L. Hopper

I believe most people in the coaching community, recognizing the great value in coaching, would agree that there is a great need for coaching in schools. And while coaching has reached the levels of administrators working with teachers, it does not appear to have a foothold in the classroom---yet. Happily, I'm beginning to see the word "coach" show up in education literature when speaking of teachers working with students. Coaching is difficult to define as the coaching literature proves, so one has to wonder, what coaching looks like in education, specifically in the classroom. Is the word coaching another way to define teaching, or is it meant to evoke a different set of skills? Or does coaching in the classroom pattern that of coaching a sport? While there is not a clear cut definition of coaching, it is safe to say that at the heart of coaching is the desire to help people live lives of well-being and purpose, expressing their true potential. This desire is also at the heart of great teaching and for many, the reason to go into teaching.

I believe coaching adolescents and teens in the broader spectrum of personal growth and creativity are areas that will benefit them in making important life decisions---more than solely coaching in a particular subject. Through self-awareness, we assist students in becoming self observers with the goal of better knowing and understanding themselves. This is far more satisfying for those teachers who want to make a difference in students' lives and reaches beyond the subject area to be taught. Business leaders are calling for more creativity and innovation in the workforce, what better way to prepare students than to have them learn to express their personal creativity?

Coaching students and young people is vastly different than coaching adults in a business or professional setting. For one thing, coaching in the classroom lends itself to group coaching, with coachable moments of individual students interspersed, unlike the typical individual coaching in a coach--client relationship. And of course, adolescents and teens are at a different stage of growth and development than adults. They struggle with being unique on one hand and wanting to conform on the other. That along with changing feelings, hormones, and bodies, make this time especially exciting and frightening all at once. Many students feel the stress of having to make decisions about their future that they are not ready or not confident enough to make. So, how do we best begin coaching students in the classroom and what should it look like?

Coaching Mindset

To start, teachers will need to cultivate a coaching mindset. Teaching and coaching go hand--in--hand. Many coaches teach their clients as well as coach and many teachers are coaches. Teachers and coaches alike have an interest in students/clients reaching their full potential. It is not uncommon to see teachers coaching students in goal--setting, monitoring progress, and finding solutions to learning barriers in a particular subject area. This is valuable coaching,

however, we can expand coaching to include the broader landscape of personal development and creativity that will help students take responsibility for creating their lives and who they want to be. With coaching, students become more comfortable making decisions in their lives that are right for them.

The coaching mindset begins with knowing that success must be defined by the student, we are not the experts. As teacher/coaches, we are non-judgmental and our primary goal is to facilitate students in self-discovery by assisting them in clarifying their desires, goals, passions and life-purpose. We support and encourage their self-exploration; who they are and who they wish to become as well as what career path they may want to take. We coach them in self-reflection, so that they learn their strengths, gifts and talents and what brings them joy and a sense of accomplishment. We appreciate them and in so doing help them also appreciate who they are.

The best way for a teacher to understand the coaching mindset and relationship is to be coached. Although any person can serve as a coach, it is best to hire a coach who has had formal training in coaching. To be coached is a unique experience; understanding the process, the relationship, and the benefits that come with coaching should be experienced firsthand with a professional.

Self-awareness and Self-reflection

Adolescents and teens are at a different point of human development; indeed, they are just becoming aware of Self in the context of peers. This is the ideal time to coach for personal development and creativity. The first step is to help teens increase their self-awareness through the practice of self-reflection. Encouraging students to just *pay attention* to feelings, reactions, outside influences, preferences, perceptions, etc. is a tremendous advantage to young people starting the journey of personal growth.

Adolescents and teens become overwhelmed by the life choices and options open to them and are unsure of and fear making a wrong decision. Coaching can assist students in centering and focusing their attention on areas that will help them make good decisions. Emotions or feelings, self-talk, vision, goals, strengths, resilience, mindsets, making decisions, relationships, preferences, interests, and passions are some examples of areas to coach for self-awareness. As students begin to understand themselves better, as they explore more of who they are, they begin to take ownership of their own decisions, understanding more and more that they are responsible for their own happiness and success in life. As students progress through high school, coaching can become more directed, i.e., for career and post secondary transitions.

Coaching in the classroom is a field of coaching that has yet to be fully explored and yet creating a coaching culture in the classroom offers great value to students as they begin making important decisions in their lives. For the past 20 years, coaching has permeated the corporate culture with positive results. Business leaders are calling for more creativity and innovation in the workforce, what better way to prepare students than to have them learn to express their personal creativity? It is exciting to think that coaching can also become part of the education

culture. Hopefully more educators will contribute to the literature on coaching in education, in particular in the classroom and we can begin to collaborate to build a body of knowledge and expertise in this area.