

How a Solution Focused Coach Approach Supports Teachers Implementing 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Curriculum

by

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**Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

**Introduction**

This project is focused on answering the question, "How does a Solution Focused Coaching approach influence teachers to shift their practice to support implementation of 21st century curriculum?" Preceding the creation of an artifact to support teachers implementing a coach approach, there will be a process using a coaching approach to interview educators to understand the challenges, needs, and wishes they have in relation to delivering 21st century curriculum. There will be a component that supports educators and their students through different stages and components of change as formulated by Gleicher (Eaton, 2010), Prochaska, and DiClemente (Miller & Rollnick, 2014). This additional focus is intended to support educators, administrators, and students to implement and sustain these shifts in a meaningful manner (Duhigg, 2012).

**Setting the Scene**

There is an emerging shift in how teachers are expected to teach to prepare students for success in a faster changing world and workplace. This shift is also intended to counteract the dropping rate of engagement, enthusiasm, and satisfaction of students and teachers (Fullan & Donnelly, 2013) (Robinson, 2012) (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). Teachers being a "sage on the stage" or the "dispenser of information" is becoming less desirable. Terms such as "guide on the side", "teachers and students as learning partners" (Fullan, 2013, p. 24), "teacher as

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activator" (Terhart 2011, p. 433), and "teacher as facilitator" are increasingly being used. There is an increasing focus on developing student's skills such as what Fullan describes as the 6 C's:

- Critical thinking and problem solving.
- Communication.
- Collaboration.
- Creative thinking and imagination.
- Character education.
- Citizenship (2013).

As a lecture or transmission format is not optimum for teaching these types of skills (Bligh, 1998), a more active pedagogy is required (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

One of the skillsets that is increasingly being recommended for teachers is coaching. Interestingly, most articles and publications do not define what they mean by coaching (BC Ministry of Education, 2014). Modern coaching is defined in a general way by the International Coach Federation as, "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (International Coach Federation, n.d.). Although awareness of coaching is increasing, over sixty percent of people are incorrect in their definition of modern coaching (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2014). Coaching today, is being used in education primarily in the area of teacher training (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012), rather than being used as part of the process when teaching students. The proliferation of coaching approaches seems to blur the lines of what is effective (Fletcher, 2012) (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2010). There does not appear to be a clearly defined model of coaching suitable for teachers to adopt to meet the needs of teaching students 21st century curriculum.

### **Coaching 6.0 Explained and Defined**

Coaching 6.0 is the term used by this paper's author to differentiate this model from the variety of coaching models being used today as accredited by the International Coach Federation.

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This model of coaching is closely based on the Erickson Coaching Model which is solution focused and future oriented. The Erickson Coaching Model uses a blend of Solution Focused methods, Neuro-Linguistic Programming techniques, and Erickson principles which are:

- People are OK.
- Change is inevitable.
- There is a positive intention behind every behavior.
- People make the best choice available to them in the moment with the resources they have.
- People have access to all the resources within to be a success (Atkinson & Choisis, 2007).

While the Erickson Coaching model is accredited through the ICF (International Coach Federation), it has a number of unique qualities that differentiate it from many other coaching models. These include a strong solution focus, a future perspective, the use of imagery, a questioning hierarchy known as Neuro-logical Levels, and a strong intention to not influence or guide the recipient based on the coach's knowledge or opinions. This last point is known as Coach Position and is important as it allows the recipient to develop their own creative process, solutions, and direction.

Coaching 6.0 is intended to be used not just in a distinct coaching session, but also informally with individuals and groups. The Coach Position used has a stronger influence of what Grove (1998) developed as Clean Language, supporting clearer communication, objectivity, understanding and highly productive relationships that are more neutral and objective. There are a number of other benefits related to the components of the coaching approach which also support people in other environments. It is important to note that this is intended to be a process where the "coach" is asking powerful "open" versus "closed" questions (Fisher, Ury, Patton, 1991) similar to what McTighe and Wiggins (2013) define as Essential Questions. The coach is not offering suggestions, guidance, hints, judgements or any form of

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advice. This supports an environment where the recipients are encouraged to develop their own resources, unique direction, and answers.

### **Application and Benefits of a Coaching 6.0 Approach**

With a future oriented, solution focus as opposed to a problem focus there is a greater clarity, efficiency and effectiveness in getting answers. There is less time spent focused on what was, details, and the negative. As there is a shift to the future and solutions, recipients generally feel more relaxed and optimistic, which is linked to creativity, creative links, and developing solutions faster (Bolte, Goschke, Kuhl, 2003). There is lots of research supporting a solution focus as a more efficient structure than using a problem focus (Osborn, 1999) (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000).

In every conversation there is a contractual component where the recipient is supported to become clearer on what they specifically want and how they will know they have achieved it. This also helps the shift to a solution focus. Becoming clearer on what the focus is and having a measure to evaluate progress will fast track forward movement and success. This also supports recipients to gain greater conscious awareness of achievement which promotes esteem, and greater ease with problem solving (Spady, 1994).

Coaching 6.0 uses a structure of questioning termed as Neuro-Logical Levels (Day, 2005). Neuro-Logical Level questioning is a method that supports people so they have greater understanding of the topic being discussed, building greater motivation, ownership, creativity, and resourcefulness (Atkinson & Chois, 2007). With this type of questioning people consciously start to understand why something is important to them, the type of person they are and/or perceived by others, as well as what positive benefit are their actions having on others. This can

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have great positive impact on them and their ability to solve problems, as well as their commitment, motivation, and ownership.

Another component incorporated into coaching is Representational Systems (Childers, 1985). People collect and interpret information through a variety of sensory inputs. The five primary inputs being Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Olfactory, and Gustatory. Most people have one input type that they focus on and notice primarily. An effective coach will support the recipient to notice and recall sensory input not only in their primary sense but also to detect and retrieve input collected by the other senses. This helps recipients to be more creative finding answers and developing solutions.

Using imagery, creative visualization, or imaging something as done, complete or working is another of the foundational tools of Coaching 6.0. This is a well-documented approach that supports not only developing skills but getting answers and gaining new perspectives (Lewis, 1990) (Neck & Manz, 1992).

A coaching approach supports both the recipient and "coach" to develop flow states, as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014) which supports greater effectiveness, efficiency, engagement, and satisfaction. Implementing a coaching approach supports the recipient to tailor their skill-set to the challenge they are experiencing, critical components for entering into flow states (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

### **Application to a Learning Environment**

When we examine many of the emerging shifts in teaching, there is a movement to a more inquiry based, interactive, engaging pedagogy that supports greater learning at the higher domains of Blooms taxonomy (Armbruster, Patel, Johnson & Weiss, 2009). Using a Coaching approach will provide a foundation, structure, and process for educators and course designers to

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support and enhance these types of initiatives. A coaching approach supports educators and course designers setting down the parameters or desired results (McTighe, n.d.) creating an environment where students can take more charge of their process of learning. As more students do this, there will be a shift in the culture, and an expectation and right for them to do so. This does not mean the teacher abdicates all responsibility for their students in creating structure and process for learning. Rather the teacher can continue to make resources available and create parameters with built in choice which will allow students to be more in charge of, and responsible for, their learning (Barkely 2010). As previously noted, a solution focused approach has many benefits.

Building opportunities for imagery and incorporating Representational Systems (Tosey & Mathison, 2010) (Childers, n.d.) (Kudliskis & Burden, 2009) into the curriculum and conversation will help students to be more successful in their investigation, learning, integration, and application of that learning. Imagery can also be used for application of concepts and learning in a relatively easy manner without being physically in the future environment or situation. It can also be easily taught, especially when incorporated into the culture of the classroom, virtual or real.

As this approach is applied there is a shift for both the educator and students. For the educator there is a need to step back and let go of a portion of control over the situation that can be difficult, and produce fear. Yes, as a result, students will make mistakes and try approaches that will not work as envisioned. Lenz (2005) postulates that the concept of mistakes and failure is one that builds resiliency, drive and longer term ability to problem solve and critically think. Building in failure as part of the learning and continuous improvement structure is an important component for successfully teaching 21st century curriculum (Cannon & Edmonson, 2005). In

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addition, allowing students more control over their learning is directly related to increased engagement, flow, and success in school (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, Shernoff, 2003). For the student, especially students that have not experienced this type of environment before, there will be initial discomfort with this type of responsibility and process. As educators step back, students are more likely to step forward, especially once they test the teachers resolve that this new type of process and approach will be a lasting one.

As educators and course developers embrace this type of questioning or inquiry approach they will hopefully develop a stronger drive to make the shift from telling to asking. It should be understood that this is a continuum type of process that takes time, practice and commitment to master. As educators shift their approach they will notice more and more opportunities to use questions and a coaching approach to support students to create their own inquiry and learning processes. If an educator or course developer is committed to a coaching approach and eliciting what works for students, rather than knowing what is best for them, they will be more likely to ask for, collect, collate, use and incorporate that information into their course design, approach and continuous improvement process (CIRT, n.d.). Course developers will also discover more opportunities to support students creating processes for learning instead of the teacher simply supplying the answers, or data, or the location to find those answers or data. As educators apply the concepts of Coaching 6.0 to their course design and delivery they will find that students will become more engaged in, as well as becoming more responsible for their own learning.

Another opportunity this type of approach creates is for students to become contributors to the curriculum and to mentor and support other students to learn. Also as students take more responsibility for their learning and drivers of their unique methodology of learning they are more likely to enter flow states which will increase their performance, efficiency, satisfaction,

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and engagement (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The intent is to create a cultural shift rather than simply using tools, techniques or an approach. This helps to create lasting change not only in the classroom, but also in the community and lives of students. This is what creates lasting sustainable change (Duhigg, 2012).

### **Conclusions**

Although there is great interest in, and support for coaching being utilized today, there is confusion on exactly what it is, how it is done, and specific results that can be achieved. While coaching is increasingly being used and supported in teacher training and development, there does not appear to be much research or focus on a Solution Focused Coach approach being incorporated into teaching pedagogy. There is however research on the positive effects of incorporating coaching and the micro-skills used in coaching, in sectors such as business, psychology, and sport. These positive effects, such as increased engagement, creativity, locus of control, problem solving, and flow, are all factors that support teachers and students to be more successful and satisfied.

Introducing a coaching approach into teaching pedagogy is not intended to replace other approaches such as the use of technology or blended learning, but rather as a tool that augments and builds greater efficiency and effectiveness into the approach being used. This allows educators to expand the effectiveness of their own unique area of pedagogical approach while modeling and supporting students to creatively, in a personalized manner, to expand and build their success.



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