

# UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL WITH COACHING



Jenni and Chris in a coaching session

**Jenni Monach and Chris Bryant** describe how they have used 'coaching' as a personal development tool

## What is coaching?

*Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them. (Whitmore, 2003)*

As a group of teachers from a family of schools in north Sheffield, we have been working this way for over a year. As a result we have come to the following conclusions about what 'coaching' is and how it helps:

*Coaching is enabling people to identify their potential, and develop it through listening, questioning and supporting but NOT telling.*

*Working together to enable mutual learning and development through guidance and support.*

*Questioning, prompting and supporting people to think through their own concerns and come to a solution.*

## What we have done and how we did it

We are a unique group of six schools hoping to be the first to be awarded Primary Science Specialist School status through participating in a four-year pilot project, supported initially by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) (Box 1). As we were the only science primary schools in the pilot, we operated as a 'family of schools', the Smarter Schools cluster (Box 2), working closely together, and were able to forge cross-school coaching relationships. This was an especially positive experience for Chris as her 'coaching partner', Elaine, works in a special school, thus providing insight into creative ways of tackling problems.

Each of the teachers participating attended Kate Ford's training in Whitmore's GROW approach to coaching (Box 3).

Following this, each half-term we agreed on a *Smart Science* activity to deliver to our classes (Box 4). This lesson was then to be the focus of the half-termly 'magnifier' meetings with our coaches, where we looked closely at, and reflected upon, our practice in the classroom.

## Why it worked

Jenni was concerned that primary teaching had become isolating:

*We have become used to going into our classrooms and, usually unintentionally, cutting ourselves off from the world. Coaching has helped me to overcome these feelings of isolation and restored the network of positive support that we often only experience as students.*

Many teachers are not encouraged to reflect on their work after initial teacher training unless a concern has been raised during performance management. We feel that even experienced and very capable teachers benefit from this type of reflective practice. In a coaching relationship you give yourself time for this with another professional present to listen. The GROW model provides a clear structure for the meetings and each session ends with an agreed outcome.

Chris comments:

*This has been a new way of working for all of us. We had initial reservations about the process; many of us were not sure what the impact of the coaching would be, but by the end of a year this aspect of the project has had the most positive effect on*

## Box 1 Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) pilot scheme

A four-year pilot scheme involving 34 schools, nationally, developing a specialism within a primary setting.

Our family of schools is the only group of schools in the country developing the science specialism. The focus is to use specialist status as the driver to raise standards across the curriculum.

### Box 2 Smarter Schools project

The cluster of primary schools in Sheffield aspiring to be the first Primary Science Specialist Schools has achieved funding for a four-year development project, supported initially by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust (AZSTT).

The Smarter Schools cluster are:

- Monteney Primary School
- Fox Hill Primary School
- Woolley Wood Special School
- Grenoside Primary School
- St Thomas More Primary School, with links to
- Yewlands Secondary School

**For more information see:**

[www.personalcapabilities.co.uk/smarterschools/](http://www.personalcapabilities.co.uk/smarterschools/)

*my practice and how I view myself as a professional.*

'Coach' and 'coachee' swap roles and have a reciprocal relationship. There is no external management of the process. It is non-judgemental. In fact, as our relationships were with teachers from other schools, this allowed us to keep it separate from other issues. As Jenni stated:

*It was self-led. Coaching had more impact on my practice than mere targets set following lesson observations/performance management. I worked on what I saw as important to my own development.*

#### How does it support science teaching in particular?

The Science Specialism pilot has provided a valuable opportunity for this family of schools to develop and focus on one area of the curriculum in detail. Not all teachers within these schools, however, consider themselves to be science specialists. Coaching has played a part in helping

teachers within our schools to overcome lack of confidence in science teaching, particularly developing science enquiry skills.

There is, of course no limit to the breadth of the benefits of coaching. With the creative curriculum on the horizon this is a way of supporting new ways of teaching children.

But, the project does not end there!

#### What is the next step for us?

Our first goal is to disseminate practice throughout all staff in the family of schools. Initially, one teacher from each school will assume responsibility for broadening coaching practice, so that it is used by all teaching staff.

We are delighted that the AstraZeneca Science Teaching Trust has agreed to fund further development of the project into 'Smart Kids' for next year. Another teacher from each school will become the lead Smart Kids coach, bringing coaching directly to the children, where they can learn to coach one another along the same lines and principles used by our adult group.

In order to broaden the project's reach, both teachers will work closely with a previously uninvolved teacher. We aim to use coaching with everyone as a

### Box 3 Whitmore's GROW approach to coaching

The GROW approach (Whitmore, 2003) provides a structure for coaching sessions. It consists of four distinct phases through which the coach and 'coachee' will pass within the session. These are:

- **Goal** – identifying the issue to be discussed
- **Reality** – what the current situation is
- **Options** – what could you do about it?
- **Will** – what action are you actually going to take?

### Box 4 Smart Science

Smart Science is a teaching pack that aims to develop, through scientific enquiry, children's personal capabilities in:

- problem solving
- teamwork
- creativity
- self-management
- communication

**For further information see:**

[www.personalcapabilities.co.uk/smartsience/](http://www.personalcapabilities.co.uk/smartsience/)

personal development tool, where people can look at their current situation and, most importantly, maximise their own potential.

#### How could you get started?

Easily. All you need is a willing colleague. The key things to think about are:

- defining a focus for discussion;
- setting a time limit;
- sticking to a structure to develop points of action (e.g. GROW approach).

If you like it as much as we do, spread the word!

*It takes courage and self-confidence to recognise your own need for self-improvement.* (Elaine Doran, Woolley Wood Special School)

#### Reference

Whitmore, J. (2003) *Coaching for performance: GROWing people, performance and purpose*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

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