



# CollectivED

**Working papers from CollectivED;  
The Hub for Mentoring and  
Coaching**

**A Research and Practice Centre at  
Carnegie School of Education**

**Special Edition  
June 2018**

**Thinkpieces from  
Professor Rachel Lofthouse for  
The National Coaching Symposium 2018**

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## Editorial: Welcome to this special edition of CollectivED Thinkpieces

CollectivEd: The Hub for Mentoring and Coaching is a Research and Practice Centre based in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University. As we develop our networks, practice and research we aim to continue to support professionals and researchers in a shared endeavour of enabling professional practice and learning which has integrity and the potential to be transformative. We are interested in all voices, we will learn from many experiences and will engage with and undertake research. We will not paint rosy pictures where a light needs to be shone on problems in education settings and the lives of those within them, but we will try to understand tensions and offer insights into resolving some of them.

Welcome to our special issue of CollectivEd Working Papers. It has been published to coincide with the National Coaching Symposium 2018. Unlike our other issues the content of this special issue is all contributed by **Professor Rachel Lofthouse**, founder of CollectivED, and each paper has been previously published. Most of the papers have also been published in a collection published by CfLaT, the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University, where Rachel was co-director. You can access that version here <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/media/wwwnclacuk/cflat/files/teacher-coaching.pdf>. The original blog posts are republished under the Creative Commons license. These, and the new working papers taken from CollectivED working papers are presented here as thinkpieces, so that following most papers there are two or three questions which you may find helpful to ask yourself, your colleagues and the leadership team of the school, college or other organisation in which you work. The core educational stance underpinning this publication is the belief that workplaces can be sites of learning, and that professional learning in the workplace is critical to building a sustainable, resilient, creative, adaptable and motivated workforce. For teachers this is especially critical. Teachers face enormous workload pressures, often feel judged rather than supported and can find their resilience dipping. We are seeing the consequences of this in the worrying teacher retention figures.

These thinkpieces offer a way of addressing the need for appropriate Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) which is respectful of the demands of the workplace but nuanced to the interests of individuals. They are not a complete set – more will be written as I undertake research and development in this area, but they are a capsule collection from this moment in time. I hope you find them interesting and useful.

### **Professor Rachel Lofthouse**

[www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/riches/our-research/professional-practice-and-learning/collectived/](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/riches/our-research/professional-practice-and-learning/collectived/)  
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### **To cite working papers from this issue please use the following format:**

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Please add the hyperlink if you have accessed this online.

## Beyond mentoring; peer coaching by and for teachers. Can it live up to its promise?

Creating opportunities for individual teachers to work together for professional development is a common ambition in schools in England. Mentoring forms a critical learning resource for both pre-service teachers and those newly qualified (NQTs), offering instruction, support and critical friendship, and typically engaging the mentor in making judgements about the new teachers' practice. Past the NQT phase mentoring is rarely formalised, and a common concern for early career teachers is that they find themselves exposed to the performance management regime of lesson observation, judgement and target setting with fewer sources of personalised support on offer. For some teachers their next experience of such support comes as they proceed through leadership programmes when they are assigned coaches. In between the NQT and aspiring leader stages a gap can open up, which is typically occupied by membership of school professional learning networks, voluntary attendance at TeachMeets, school-based CPD, subject-based training and engagement in moderation activities. For some teachers there is a growing use of

social media for ideas, feedback and a chance to share practice.

Peer coaching takes many forms, but a typical rationale is to fill this gap and to enable teachers to share good practice, work on issues they are interested in and to maintain a focus on improving teaching and learning. Coaching is usually distinguished from mentoring<sup>1</sup> in that it can be accessed in between distinct career transition stages and is less likely to be based on forming judgements and linked to performance management, but instead be orientated towards professional development through learning conversations. Some coaching models deliberately locate teachers in pairs and triads across traditional working boundaries (such as subject departments or key stages) while others use coaching as a mechanism to strengthen working practices within these contexts. Sometimes coaching becomes a whole school endeavour involving all teachers, in other schools a team of coaches is established and either as volunteers or through persuasion they work with a cohort of coachees. Coaching frequently includes lesson observations, sometimes extending

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.curee.co.uk/mentoring-and-coaching>

to the use of video to stimulate discussion<sup>2</sup>. Coaching is often designed to be cyclical, sustaining sequences of plan, do and review; may be collaborative in that participants work together to plan for learning, and is sometimes reciprocal. Importantly most teachers report that they enjoy being coached. What could go wrong when this sounds so flexible, potentially productive and inclusive?

Having researched coaching over a decade it is clear that issues which support and disrupt it affect its perceived and actual success, and the cautionary tales are useful in diagnosing the potential pitfalls. The first of these might be related to the experience that all teachers have of mentoring. Hobson and Malderez<sup>3</sup>, Wilson<sup>4</sup>, Lofthouse and Thomas<sup>5</sup> all found that mentoring can be distorted away from the personal learning needs of the new teacher. The outcome can be that mentoring conversations are sometimes didactic or instructional, driven by target setting and checking, and do not always

engage the mentee in proactive participation in professional dialogue. Teachers' experiences of performance management observation and feedback can be similar. These experiences can be formative creating conversational and behavioural habits that sustain coaching. Other teachers report that even when coaching starts as a confidential and personalised learning opportunity it gets swept up by the performance management system of the school or is ascribed a role linked to the school's (rather than their own) CPD priorities. Schools are busy places and coaching uses up the most precious resource, that of teachers' time. Managing this and the expectations that are generated is problematic. Associated with this is the degree to which decisions and actions in schools are expected to generate outcomes to which teachers and school leaders can be held to account. The drive for 'improvement' is incessant and as yet there is limited evidence of the direct link between teacher coaching and pupil attainment. We have started to understand

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ipda.org.uk/thinking-beyond-the-toolkit-using-video-for-professional-learning-and-development/>

<sup>3</sup> Andrew J. Hobson, [Angi Malderez](#), (2013) "Judgementoring and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 2 Iss: 2, pp.89 – 108 [http://shura.shu.ac.uk/7224/1/Hobson\\_and\\_Malderez\\_2013\\_Judgementoring\\_IJMCE\\_Post-print\\_draft.pdf](http://shura.shu.ac.uk/7224/1/Hobson_and_Malderez_2013_Judgementoring_IJMCE_Post-print_draft.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, V. (2014) 'Examining teacher education through cultural historical activity theory', *Teach Journal* 6(1), pp. 20-29. <http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/TEAN/article/viewFile/180/294>

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, Ulrike Thomas, (2014) "Mentoring student teachers; a vulnerable workplace learning practice", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, Vol. 3 Iss: 3, pp.201 – 218 [http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub\\_details2.aspx?pub\\_id=207274](http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=207274)

these tensions through a CHAT analysis<sup>6</sup> recognising that coaching too frequently fades in the performative culture of schools.

So, where does this leave us? Schools will continue to set up coaching, using its promise as a motive. Research gaps include establishing what can be known

about the link between coaching and the desired outcomes for learners. As importantly perhaps, at this time of anxiety about teachers' wellbeing and resilience, there are real reasons to establish whether coaching can address issues beyond teachers' and pupils' performance. Watch this space.

**This think piece was first published by BERA**

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise>

### Over to you. Think back – think forward.

What mentoring habits might you have picked up that are getting in the way of coaching?

How can you ensure that coaching lesson observations are opportunities for discussion that helps to develop teachers' personal learning rather than to simply reinforce school level procedures?

How might coaching help teachers to test out some of the ideas generated by divergent thinking?

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<sup>6</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, (2013) "An activity theory perspective on peer coaching", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching

in Education, Vol. 2 Iss: 1, pp.8 – 20  
[http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub\\_details2.aspx?pub\\_id=190955](http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=190955)

## Teacher peer coaching; a story of trust, agency and enablers

This blog is a good news story in terms of teacher collaboration from The Hermitage Academy, a North-East Teaching School. The Academy has deliberately and steadily built a culture of teacher collaboration. It is not perfect, but it is tangible. In this blog we focus on the contribution of teacher coaching to the collaborative culture. At Hermitage teacher peer-coaching is in its third year with a coaching development programme running to support each cohort of new coaches and coachees. All participants are volunteers and each coaching partnership involves teachers working across subjects. Our roles (the blog authors, a university-based educational researcher and a senior leader in the school) are to design and facilitate the coaching development programme, to ensure coaching becomes operational in the school and to create meaningful opportunities for formative evaluation and coaching development. Most recently this has been achieved through an interim review to which all current participants contributed. It is this evidence that we draw

upon to suggest some of the reasons for the successes so far.

Coaching at Hermitage seems to be a ‘feel good’ activity, and this is not to be sniffed at. Coaching has been established in such a way that it builds on and further enhances the trust that exists between colleagues. This was highlighted by the teachers as a note-worthy characteristic. Megan Tschannen-Moran<sup>7</sup> makes a strong case for trust as critical for building healthy relationships and positive school climates, and suggests that between teachers this can evolve from a stance of ‘empathy and inquiry’. Coaching conversations at Hermitage have been framed around this stance – participants are asked to engage in non-judgemental professional dialogue and appreciate that this may be different from many other episodes of observation and feedback. In their review the teachers stated that they were “not frightened to make mistakes” are willingly “more experimental” and work in a “problem-solving mode, with a focus on teaching and

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.schooltransformation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/In-Conversation-11-Tschannen-Moran-ENG-Fall-2013.pdf>

learning and trying to do what is best for the students”.

In busy school environments it is easy to find reasons not to engage in something new or voluntary, so how coaching feels matters as without enjoyment resistance would develop. In their review teachers reported enjoying building relationships through coaching, getting to know people in other departments and knowing more about their work. Coaches stated that they felt good about having learned more about teaching and learning by acting as a coach and were taking this learning into their own practice. The coaching relationships produced a growing collective sense of where expertise and areas of interest resided in the staff. This is reported as having spin-off benefits, with new and productive collaborations in teaching and learning emerging organically.

At even this basic level it could be said that coaching is contributing to teachers’ agency. Mark Priestley<sup>8</sup> has written about this in his BERA blog post, reminding us that a focus on the individual capacity of teachers might overlook the significance of the ‘social context for teachers’

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/teacher-agency-what-is-it-and-why-does-it-matter>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/developing-teachers/>

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Lofthouse & Ulrike Thomas (2015): Concerning collaboration: teachers’

professional work’. The teachers were keen to extend this further, by actively bringing coaching participants together more often as a group to share what was being learned and developed in practice. In 2015 The Sutton Trust produced a report called ‘Developing Teachers; Improving professional development for teachers’<sup>9</sup>. One of their conclusions was the significance of collaboration at two levels – between schools in a school-led self-improving system, and also between individual teachers engaging in professional learning activities. Our recent research into teachers’ experiences of collaboration <sup>10</sup> reveals why collaboration might be so valuable. Collaboration for the development of their teaching practices allowed teachers and student teachers to engage in informed decision-making and to construct a shared understanding of the nature of desired learning outcomes for students and how these might be achieved in their own contexts.

perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices, Professional Development in Education,

[http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub\\_details2.aspx?pub\\_id=211126](http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=211126)

As evidenced in an earlier BERA blog<sup>11</sup> (p4) coaching does not always live up to its promise, but so far Hermitage seem be to resolving tensions that can exist in managerial systems. In our review we considered the extent to which the practice was supported by enablers for effective professional conversations as described by Helen Timperley<sup>12</sup>. She described the importance of resources, processes,

knowledge, relationships and culture in enabling teachers to ‘examine the effectiveness of their practice and be committed to appropriate changes for improvement’. This might best be summed up by a group in our review who stated that the vision for coaching at the school was to create a “collaborative problem-solving culture to enable all teachers and pupils to be successful”.

**This think piece was first published by BERA, and was CO-WRITTEN WITH EMMA BULMER Assistant Vice-Principal at Hermitage Academy with a responsibility for Teaching and Learning.**

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/teacher-peer-coaching-a-story-of-trust-agency-and-enablers>

### **Over to you. Think back – think forward.**

One way to look at the resources of a school is to consider it's the different forms of 'capital' that it holds. Alongside buildings and finance there is social and intellectual capital, but these can either be high or low. Successful coaching could be considered to create greater social and intellectual capital.

In your school how would you judge this? If you consider these forms of capital to be growing through coaching how are you using and mobilising it to maximise its beneficial impacts? In other words what is the organisational feedforward from individual coaching?

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/professional-growth/research/professional-conversations>

## Three women and a camera:

### *Developing a coaching partnership that crosses professional boundaries*

Picture three women; Jo, Bib and Rachel. If you saw us in a coffee shop or pub you would see us in animated conversation. We might even be old school friends. You might overhear us talking about our children and husbands or our holidays. We would probably look like we had been chatting all day as we popped in and out of shops and impersonated 'ladies who lunch'. But this impression would ignore the real reasons for our conversations, and the shared passions that have brought us together.

We three women shared a conference presentation, the very last paper of the very last session, in the most distant seminar room of BERA 2015 in Belfast. Our paper was entitled '**Sustaining change through inter-professional coaching; developing communication-rich pedagogies**' and through it we explained how and why we had come to work together and what outcomes we are now able to identify.

So – a little background. Jo and Bib are independent **Speech and Language**

**Therapists** (SLTs), working in Derby. Their aim is to develop an evidence based model of support that enables the workforce in nurseries and primary schools to maximise the skills of all children who experience communication difficulties. They have written about this work on the BERA blog<sup>13</sup>. I (Rachel) am a **teacher educator and researcher** at Newcastle University. My research and teaching expertise is in teacher coaching and mentoring, including the use of video. We have been working together for about two years (in part funded by a Newcastle University business development voucher) to develop a **model of video-based specialist coaching for workplace learning**. Jo and Bib (as SLTs) have worked with teachers and teaching assistants in a primary school (3-11 yrs) and a pre-school nursery (3-4 yrs) located in multi-cultural and multi-lingual communities in the East Midlands, UK. In these settings 85% of the children are learning English as an additional language to their home language. The coaching is designed to support the teachers' and teaching assistants' professional

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/the-potential-of-inter-professional-learning-in-supporting-children-with-speech-language-and-communication-needs>

development to create communication-rich pedagogies, drawing on the research and practice evidence offered to them through the coaching.

The coaching approach was informed by **models of teacher coaching**<sup>14</sup> and **video interaction guidance**<sup>15</sup>, and was rooted in learning which made deliberate and explicit work processes, learning activities and learning processes<sup>16</sup>. It made deliberate use of video to allow the speech and language therapists to engage teachers and teaching assistants in conversation about their own classroom practices. Video is proving to be a great tool for professional development<sup>17</sup> (p8). We developed the coaching approach through collaborative action research as our combined motivations and work drove us to improve the practice through adopting an *inquiry stance* with a ‘continual process of making current arrangements problematic’ and assumed ‘that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is

to participate in educational and social change<sup>18</sup>.

At the same time we wanted to make sense of the role of the inter-professional coaching in shaping practices in the school and its impact on professional development. We used a **Theory of Change**<sup>19</sup> approach as a structure of two interview cycles, enabling multiple voices to inform both the development and evaluation of the intervention. This ‘Mental model’ of Theory of Change privileges the knowledge & experience of stakeholders (school leaders and practitioners) who have their own ideas about how things will work. This approach is outlined as a case study in the next think-piece (p14).

So what have we learned? Well at this point I hand over to those we interviewed. Amongst their comments we discovered that the coaching helped to **build professional confidence,**

*“The discussion with the SLTs about my video clips was very*

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<sup>14</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, & Carl Towler, (2010) *Improving Teacher Coaching in Schools; A Practical Guide*, CfBT Education Trust [http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414\\_CfT\\_FINALWeb.pdf](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414_CfT_FINALWeb.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.videointeractionguidance.net/aboutvi g>

<sup>16</sup> Eraut, M. (2007) Learning from other people in the workplace, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 33 (4), pp. 403-422.

<sup>17</sup> <http://ipda.org.uk/thinking-beyond-the-toolkit-using-video-for-professional-learning-and-development/>

<sup>18</sup> Cochran-Smith, M., and S. Lytle. (2009). *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/publications/documents/theoryofchangeuide.pdf>

*reassuring. They found things I do well which I see as natural. They asked me questions about my practice, they focused my attention on things I had noticed and gave me advice. This worked because the video coaching came at the end of the audit and training process, so I had got to know them and felt comfortable with them. I trusted them and accepted their feedback. I feel more confident and reflective.”* Nursery teaching assistant

We also found that **video was significant in enhancing the coaching conversations,**

*“Although video was initially an uncomfortable experience through watching myself I noticed many of my own teaching and learning communication behaviours. I realised I needed to stop answering for children and also to give more thinking time. I questioned the concept of ‘pace’. The coaching raised my awareness of the significance of the elements of the SLC training in my classroom.”* Primary teacher

In terms of the development of the schools as learning organisations engagement of

staff in coaching helped to **change the culture in the settings,**

*“There has been a definite shift from individual specialist coaching to staff coaching culture. The setting is open plan and I now notice teachers and teaching assistants commenting to each other while they are working with the children, referring to commonly understood concepts which support SLC. Because they are more informed their conversations with parents about SLC are more meaningful.”* Nursery headteacher

It also **supported strategic capacity building**

*“While some impacts have been diluted by staff maternity and promotions to other schools the teachers who have been coached and remain in post are being given strategic roles in school to support NQTs or lead key stages, with an explicit intention to focus on communication-rich pedagogies with new colleagues. This is being deliberately linked to a renewed whole-school focus on literacy.”* Primary headteacher

**So, what can we conclude from this small scale development and**

**research?** There is evidence here that specialist coaching can play a significant part in creating bespoke professional training. Coaching can create a neutral, non-judgmental space in which teachers' own interactional practices can be exposed and made open to co-construction based on the relationship between pedagogic and communication knowledge and skills. The coaching approach formed a key component of an ecology for focused professional development, providing participants with common understandings, a shared language, a willingness to share ideas, and to be more open to self-evaluation and critique. It also provided

some of the 'triggers' and 'glue' which supported access to, and learning from, other CPD and the development of new leadership and support roles.

What next? Well, that depends on spreading the good news, and also on developing strategies and structures that can fund the co-operation through coaching between speech and language specialists and the teachers and teaching assistants that can learn so much by working with them. We have also published on our experience of what was in essence collaborative action research<sup>20</sup>.

**This think-piece was originally published by Newcastle University and was CO-WRITTEN WITH Bibiana Wigley and Jo Flanagan, <http://www.claritytec.co.uk/>**

<https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/education/2015/09/25/three-women-and-a-camera/>

### Over to you. Think back – think forward.

In this case study video was central to the coaching process, but only very short clips were made and used. The practice was based in part on VIG, which focuses on what can be observed to be 'working' in the classroom interaction.

How often do your coaching and other post-lesson observation debriefs take this appreciative stance? What might be learned by focusing on fine details in the teaching and learning practice? How can coaching support teachers to work on these finer details?

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<sup>20</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, Jo Flanagan & Bibiana Wigley (2015) A new model of collaborative action research; theorising from inter-professional practice development. *Educational Action*

*Research*  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09650792.2015.1110038>

## Improving Mentoring Practices through Collaborative Conversations

Providing a mentor for beginning teachers means giving them support and ensuring that they build up their professional capacity, knowledge and skills. A mentor is usually a colleague with relevant, school-specific experience. Mentoring also bridges the transition between initial teacher education and full employment. In some situations, mentors make judgements or provide evidence that the new teacher has demonstrated required professional competencies.

While national and cultural expectations of mentoring vary, engaging in mentoring conversations is common. However, in most educational contexts there is limited time for teachers' professional development. It is therefore critical that where time is assigned for mentoring the professional dialogue is engaging and productive.

'Targets' (usually about teaching and learning) are a common part of mentoring or coaching conversations: deliberating over what targets should be prioritised, making targets realistic and measurable, evaluating progress towards them and

providing feedback prior to setting new ones can become an all-consuming activity. Add in workload pressures, anxieties about being judged or having to make judgements, and the mentoring conversations can become restrictive. They can go one of two ways: some people experience them as having high stakes, others feel they become relatively superficial.

### How can we ensure that mentoring enables genuine learning processes?

Mentoring conversations can be a **transformative** space where important aspects of professional practice are debated and emerging professional identities, both as a new teacher and a mentor, can be constructed. Creating a genuinely valuable mentoring experience is possible, and much of it comes through conversation.

Trust seems critical, but cannot be assumed. Opportunities to explore problems without fear of punitive judgement need to be created. Respect for the value of the combined expertise offered by the unique mentoring

partnership needs to be felt. Even the newest teachers have something to offer their mentor, so mentoring can be a two-way dialogue.

Lessons from research can help teachers conduct better mentoring conversations. Following a UK research project on teacher coaching, we began to understand professional dialogue through what we called coaching dimensions.

**First**, there is a need to '**stimulate**'. Good mentors know how to initiate thoughtful reflections and stimulate decisions with their mentee. But they also know when to hold back and let the beginning teacher take the initiative. They are aware of how to collect and use available learning tools. Some use videos of lessons (their own and their mentees'); some make lesson observation notes focused on agreed aspects of the lesson; sometimes the beginning teacher creates a professional learning journal from which points for discussion are identified.

**Secondly**, mentors need to '**scaffold**' the discussion. They can, for example, use critical moments in teaching and learning

*Originally published, with references at*

<http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/improving-mentoring-practices-.htm>

– or the lesson as a whole – to help the beginning teacher discuss broader themes about teaching and learning, or explore the 'big ideas' about relationships between school, individuals and society.

**Finally**, it is important to '**sustain**' the learning conversation. Good mentors become aware of their tone of voice, keeping it neutral and curious to encourage open discussions. They create opportunities for their mentee to think back, think ahead and think laterally. The conversation is also sustained through finding meaning and value in it. The mentor and the beginning teacher need to work together to create a dynamic conversation in which there are opportunities to share problems, to pose and respond to questions, to extend thinking, to build solutions.

Mentoring can form part of the social glue between colleagues. It should support the emergence of a network of strong professional relationships which empower the new teacher to play an active role and to meet the needs of the school community. Conversations have a significant role in realising this potential.

## Opening up a discussion: Do coaches and mentors make successful educational leaders?

In October 2015, I was fortunate to be able to lead a discussion session at the first ever WomenEd *un*conference. WomenEd<sup>21</sup> is a grassroots movement which connects existing and aspiring leaders in education. The group exists to address the fact that even though women dominate the workforce across all sectors of education there still remain gender inequalities, particularly at senior leadership level. My session was entitled 'Do coaches and mentors make successful educational leaders?' The session was a learning conversation. I invited the participants to discuss the fact that many women take roles as mentors or coaches in schools and colleges, playing a key role in facilitating professional development and building learning cultures, but to consider the degree to which acting as a coach or mentor might prepare us for, or dissuade us from, leadership. While this is an issue of relevance to women in education, it is not exclusively so. As Teaching Schools and School Direct extend the reach and scale of their combined roles in the 'self-improving school-led system' it seems logical that coaching and mentoring

activities will expand. When working well both coaching and mentoring draw on, and build up, the cultural competency and linguistic skills of both parties. In terms of impact it is frequently reported that coaches and mentors find the role has a positive impact on their own teaching, but what about its impact on their potential and practice as leaders?

I have a history of research, teaching and school-based CPD in coaching and mentoring, as is evident by other blog posts on this site and elsewhere<sup>22</sup>. While they serve different purposes coaching and mentoring might both provide levers and pathways into good leadership. However, in relation to the links between coaching and mentoring of teachers (for the development of teaching practices) and educational leadership I have some concerns.

The objectives and practices of coaching and mentoring often get distorted by the performative culture in schools and can fail to have the positive impact that is their potential. In previous work we have explored this through CHAT (Cultural-

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<sup>21</sup> [www.womened.org](http://www.womened.org)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise>

Historical Activity Theory)<sup>23</sup>. As we wrote in the abstract of the paper, coaching in educational settings is an alluring concept, as it carries associations with life coaching and well-being, sports coaching and achievement and improving educational attainment. Although there are examples of successful deployment in schools, there is also evidence that coaching often struggles to meet expectations. We used socio-cultural theory to explore why coaching does NOT transplant readily to schools, particularly in England, where the object of coaching activity may be in contradiction to the object of dominant activity in schools – meeting examination targets.

Coaches and mentors have the opportunity to develop great communication skills. However, this opportunity is not always realised. Too often these activities are squeezed into very busy working weeks, given inadequate time, or are hijacked (deliberately or inadvertently) by a narrowly-defined target-based sense of professional development. Developing, practicing and sustaining excellent

coaching or mentoring requires a certain language, and a willingness to look beyond the particulars of specific lessons. It requires a more open understanding of a shared process of informed scrutiny than is typically possible in a hurried conversation or one which has overtones of performance management. The communication skills being rehearsed in coaching or mentoring can become rather diminished. If they are not, and coaching or mentoring becomes more sophisticated then the participants develop a new language for talking about teaching and learning, linking together critical incidents and whole lesson characteristics (for example), and exploring each-others' understanding using a broad interactional repertoire which allows for challenge, exploration of ideas and co-construction. Good coaches and mentors support successful formation of teacher identities that go beyond the requirements to demonstrate a checklist of competencies.

Previous research illustrates these levels of development of both coaching<sup>24</sup> and mentoring<sup>25</sup>. But, even when it works at

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<sup>23</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, (2013) "An activity theory perspective on peer coaching", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 2 Iss: 1, pp.8-20  
[http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub\\_details.aspx?pub\\_id=190955](http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details.aspx?pub_id=190955)

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, David Leat, & Carl Towler, (2010) *Improving Teacher Coaching in Schools; A*

*Practical Guide*, CfBT Education Trust  
[http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414\\_CfT\\_FINALWeb.pdf](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/5414_CfT_FINALWeb.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Rachel Lofthouse, David Wright, (2012), "Teacher education lesson observation as boundary crossing", International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, Vol. 1 Iss: 2 pp. 89-103

this level there may still be a problem. Educational leadership has become a very managerial process – one through which a priority is holding colleagues to account. The language of exploration and development which might be developed through coaching and mentoring does not always translate easily to accountability regimes.

While coaches and mentors may gain real insight into the issues affecting colleagues and learners in their school (and sometimes beyond) this 'intelligence' may not then be translated in to leadership. This gap may be caused by the difficulties in resolving activities at different scales. Coaching and mentoring are typically inter-personal activities, focusing on an individual's practices, and only the most sophisticated coaching and mentoring successfully relates this to influences of policy or society (at school level or beyond). Coaching and mentoring can generate the sort of professional knowledge which comes from the ground up or from lateral conversations. School leaders and managers often deal with top down implementation of the latest national agenda. Expertise or dilemmas from the classroom or practitioner conversations

can easily be squeezed out in this context. As such, even when coaches or mentors become leaders they may not easily be able to draw on what they learned in that context.

Good coaches and mentors can get pigeon holed (or even pigeon hole themselves) and their talents may not be developed in relation to educational leadership. This may be exacerbated by the issues raised above. We have evidence that some coaches would rather let coaching dwindle than let it fall in to the hands of senior leadership. We also know that if SLT set up coaching programmes they have to work hard to overcome their own tendencies to over-manage it in the direction of the latest school agenda.

So, my questions at this point are framed by a core concern of how we can use the experience of coaching and mentoring for better educational leadership. I believe that coaching and mentoring can provide genuine opportunities for educational development through a focus on pedagogy, learning and learners, colleagues' professional practices, school and curriculum structures, challenges and opportunities for change and improvement and staff and students' wellbeing. I am,

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[http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub\\_details2.aspx?pub\\_id=185048](http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=185048)

however, concerned that the vital link to educational leadership is not secure.

**This think-piece was originally published by Newcastle University**

<https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/education/2015/10/14/opening-up-a-discussion-do-coaches-and-mentors-make-successful-educational-leaders/>

### **Over to you. Think back – think forward.**

This might be read as a fairly negative perspective – but in writing this piece I wanted to provoke critical thinking about the possible gaps between rhetoric and reality. There are several interesting aspects to consider here. One is to do with the level of skill that coaches and mentors are enabled to develop in these roles. My experience is that start-up training accompanied by a handbook is rarely sufficient. There may be a case for setting up coaching development groups (for example) in which some coaching support and supervision, opportunities to plan, reflect and problem solve collaboratively are provided.

Could this be built into your coaching approach in your school? If so, how would you ensure appropriate confidentiality for coaching participants? Would part of the coaching development group's role be extending their thinking about how coaching is supporting the development of knowledge, attributes and skills that would translate into leadership roles?

You might also find it useful to conduct an audit, to explore whether there is a direct relationship between coaching participation and leadership development in your school, and consider how this related to talent-spotting and succession planning. The next think-piece might help.

## Power to the People; Can Teacher Coaching be viewed as a form of Transformational Leadership?

There is something both alluring and disquieting about theories which can be summed up as a catchy combination of letters and numbers. They create a hook, something which we can engage with, may recall more readily and perhaps therefore start to exploit in our busy professional lives. Teachers may be familiar with the '4 "R"s' of Guy Claxton's Building Learning Power<sup>26</sup>; Resilience, Resourcefulness, Reciprocity, Reflection, or perhaps with the '4 "C"s' underpinning the pedagogic approach of SAPERE's Philosophy for Children<sup>27</sup>; Caring, Collaborative, Critical, Creative. For some these are a powerful shorthand, for others they are overwrought clichés. Recently I was introduced to another one, this time on an academic leadership programme. Wait for it, yes there are four of them, and this time they are the '4 "I"s' of Transformational Leadership identified as:

- Individualised consideration
- Intellectual stimulation
- Idealised influence
- Inspirational motivation

We were asked to reflect upon different models of leadership. It was suggested that rather than be 'transactional' leaders we should be 'transformational' leaders. Transactional leadership was summarised in a way that we recognised as managerial; holding people to account against criteria they were unlikely to feel ownership over and holding fast to hierarchical rules of engagement. Transformational leadership was first coined by Bass<sup>28</sup>, building on the work of Burns. Both men were researching and reflecting on observable qualities of successful leaders in the US political and business contexts of the 1970's and 1980's. On the leadership programme it was proposed that 'transformational' was something to aspire to, and to nail it as a concept it had the magic formula of the '4 "I"s'. Clearly this was the true path. And yes – my immediate response was of sly cynicism and I wondered whose eye I might catch amongst my fellow academic leaders. Then I realised that the '4 "I"s' were begging for my attention, they were the hook and I was dangling on the line.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.buildinglearningpower.com/>

<sup>27</sup>

<http://www.sapere.org.uk/Default.aspx?tabid=76>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0950080402000217>

But wait, I was again distracted, not by the alignment of the transformational leadership model with my own ambitions as a leader, but by their resonance with my work on teacher peer coaching. The ‘4 I’s’ seemed to offer a frame through which good teacher coaching, and the school culture that supports and is constructed by it, can be viewed. I had recently led a workshop and written a blog post<sup>29</sup> (p17) about the relationships between coaching and leadership, perhaps what I had been missing was the concept of transformational leadership.

My work on coaching in schools (both research and practitioner engagement) always throws a spotlight on its limitations and its potential to clash with performative cultures as I illustrated in an earlier BERA blog post<sup>30</sup> (4). That same work, however, offers an equally powerful narrative of hopeful optimism. We know that where coaching is working well, often between peers, and frequently supported by a sustained coaching development programme it creates a different sort of collaborative professional space<sup>31</sup> than is often experienced by teachers in episodes

of training and performance management. Uncannily the ‘4 I’s’ of transformational leadership describe the characteristics of the best of these spaces.

Coaching can create a genuine opportunity for ‘individualised consideration’. Teachers are invited to share concerns and areas of interest emerging from their own practice and a good coach will work from that platform rather than from an imposed agenda. This is critical in building and sustaining the buy-in and trust that means that teachers and coaches will work around some of their workload to give time for coaching. Coaching conversations have impact when they offer ‘intellectual stimulation’. These are neither cosy chats nor dogmatic instructional transactions. Within a coaching conversation there are opportunities for both participants to experience challenge, to engage constructively with knowledge from multiple sources and grow their capacity to make decisions appropriate to the complexities of their teaching roles. And then of course there is the crucial question of professional credibility. Few

perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices, Professional Development in Education, [http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub\\_details2.aspx?pub\\_id=211126](http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk/pub_details2.aspx?pub_id=211126)

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<sup>29</sup><https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/education/2015/10/14/opening-up-a-discussion-do-coaches-and-mentors-make-successful-educational-leaders/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/beyond-mentoring-peer-coaching-by-and-for-teachers-can-it-live-up-to-its-promise>

<sup>31</sup> Rachel Lofthouse & Ulrike Thomas (2015): Concerning collaboration: teachers’

people will accept coaching from someone who they judge unlikely to be able to walk the talk, instead they want a coach who offers 'idealised influence'. Finally hardworking teachers are looking to share a sense of hopeful enthusiasm (not naïve goal sharing). Effective coaches can encourage colleagues to raise their game

by building optimism and thus providing 'inspirational motivation'.

So now I am paying more attention to the '4 "I"s' as I think they offer a route to building an experience of professional solidarity, and I think they reinforce how coaching can give 'power to the people'.

**This think piece was first published by BERA**

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/power-to-the-people-can-teacher-coaching-be-viewed-as-a-form-of-transactional-leadership>

### **Over to you. Think back – think forward.**

This thinkpiece offers a more positive spin on the link between coaching and leadership. While the 4 I's of transformational leadership may seem clichéd they do offer a mental model – dare I say a theoretical frame. Dewey said that there is nothing as practical as a good theory – why not test this out? How could you deliberately use the 4 I's to both support positive engagement in coaching cultures and to build the bridge to leadership?

## Go Observe... a response to #noobservation

Over the last few weeks there has been a hashtag circulating on twitter, which (depending on your mood and perspective) could either make you cry, cringe or chuckle. The #noobservation tweets have revealed a world of lesson observations and feedback which barely makes sense, and seems to have little to do with recognising learning or supporting teachers to further develop their own practice. Just a few examples suffice to illustrate why #noobservation has surfaced in some tweeting teachers' consciousness, and I would agree that if all observations were like this we should stop them immediately.

**@DavidCummins86** *My #noobservation told me my jumper was too similar to the school uniform and I need to stand out. I'm a 6 foot tall man in a girl's school.*

**@HannahLucyM** *"I'm not sure what you can do about it but your voice is annoying" #noobservation*

**@clint2921** *#noobservation in my NQT year: That was a really good lesson. The starter was borderline outstanding. But it requires improvement because no NQTS are good when they start...*

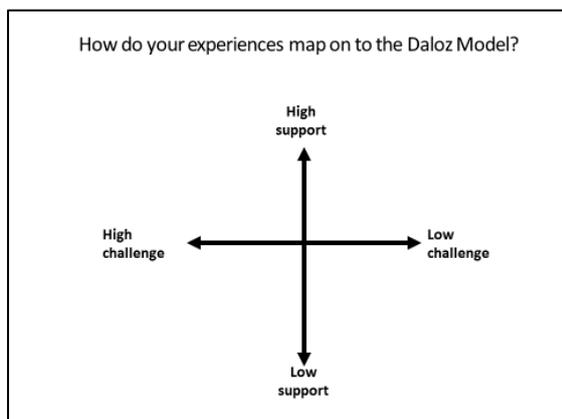
**@Nicola\_Threl** *O inspector "There was no lesson plan. I know I am not allowed to ask for one, but not being offered one makes me think you have something to hide." #noobservation*

I don't doubt that as this hashtag has gained momentum there have been teachers wracking their memories for their most unhelpful, unprofessional or perhaps most laughable observation experiences. Most of us have at least one story to tell. There are others on twitter who have tried encouraging a more positive and productive narrative, but perhaps not surprisingly this has gained less traction (at least in my timeline). I think at least one purpose of twitter for many teachers is stress relief, a place to share minor or major woes, to gain a sense of solidarity and to laugh at some of the ridiculous experiences that our professional lives bring us. #noobservation seems to have been a good opportunity for this. Certainly it also offered pause for thought. Having spent much of my career either mentoring student teachers or visiting them for observations as their PGCE tutor this twitter conversation did make me wonder.... "has anyone posted something I said?"

While I hope not to be able to answer that specific question it has made me remember and reflect. In my last academic post, I taught modules for the PGCert in Coaching and Mentoring and we often started with the following activity:

- In pairs or groups discuss your experiences of being observed, e.g. in initial training, induction, performance management, Ofsted, subject review, part of an interview process etc.
- What followed on from the observation itself? Feedback, dialogue, target setting etc?
- Were they positive or negative experiences?

We extended these by asking relating our experiences to the Daloz model as illustrated here:



Some of the resulting narratives would have made great blogs, with rich discussions and reflections emerging, indeed several students used these

narratives as the basis of critical incident analysis to kick-off their assignments. The over-riding feeling was that 'we could do lesson observation better'. There were few narratives which suggested that routine observations provided opportunities to break the patterns noted by Horn and Little (2010) who found that it is 'difficult for teachers to engage in interaction [with each other] with sufficient frequency, specificity, and depth to generate new insights into teaching dilemmas or to foster [teaching] innovation'. Instead observations seemed largely to support the culture of performativity, 'self-surveillance', and micro-management of teachers' performance acting in the '*mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons, and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change*' (Ball, 2003 p.216).

The PGCert was designed to at least open the participants' eyes to the possibility of an alternative professional culture, and to do this we needed practical tools as well as research-based and philosophical discussion. As part of that offer we wanted to help practitioners (in whatever role) to observe and to be observed in ways that made sense and made a difference. One of the models of observation that we shared with these students was first developed through a small scale research

project which I undertook with my colleague David Wright. At the time he was the Maths PGCE tutor and I was the Geography PGCE tutor, and we were working in the context of a PGCE rooted in practitioner enquiry at Newcastle University. A lot of thought had been put into our masters' level modules and the curriculum and assessment that underpinned them, but we were also keen to ensure that the enquiry stance was not just a means of gaining academic credits. We turned our attention to some of the associated routines and practices during school placements, and being acutely aware that all our student teachers and their mentors (not to mention ourselves and our PGCE colleagues) spent a lot of time conducting observations, we chose to really think hard about how these helped, hindered or just took up precious time during the PGCE year. We wanted our student teachers to gain a sense that being observed could be really formative, that it could go way beyond mapping their performance against QTS standards and short-term target setting, and that it could trigger learning conversations that could have some legacy (Lofthouse & Wright, 2012).

Our research enabled us to develop a four-part model to support a greater sense of ownership of the observation by the teacher being observed, more productive

and less judgemental feedback and discussion prior to and following on from the observation, and an opportunity to use questions to promote focused attention and professional dialogue. The stages are summarised in the box on the next page (from McGrane and Lofthouse, 2012), and one version of the proforma is given at the end of this paper.

While no guidance or observation proforma is immune to distortion or poor use, this one does provide a chance for users to rethink both the purposes and practices of observation. It also proved adaptable; following its development and initial use in an initial teacher education context, it has also been used as the basis of coaching conversations in some school settings, and as a professional development tool promoted for staff development of lecturers and teaching fellows in Higher Education. A small adaptation also meant that it was useful for lesson study rounds.

Without the links to judgements (either during initial teacher education, for performance management or inspection) observation can offer a genuine workplace learning activity. They can be affirming without being graded and they can be developmental without being based on a deficit approach. Curiosity and shared interests can be deployed. This may

**Step 1:**

Often the first step to reflection is to be aware of a 'disturbance' and the first stage is for the teacher to identify an issue which has caused some 'disturbance' for them and to pose a question(s) relating to this issue. These questions are offered to the observer as the basis of an observation and discussion.

**Step 2:**

The observer then supports the teacher in 'framing' the situation by providing evidence or a 'witness' statement composed of a *'brief but vivid' 'account of'* incidents which the observer believes relate to the stated question, avoiding unnecessary interpretation, explanation and value judgements. This 'anecdotal' approach to observation allows the recipient to insert their own interpretation into the observation. It also encourages the observer to carefully analyse the classroom activity and identify evidence which they believe relates to the question posed by the observed teacher.

**Step 3:**

The observer poses questions relating to the practice they are observing, which could be addressed in a post-lesson conversation. The quality of the questions posed is crucial in providing a stimulus for the teacher to reframe their practice.

**Step 4:**

The fourth stage involves the two colleagues in forming a 'community of enquiry' to address the issues and questions raised by the evidence and questions captured in the first, second and third stages of the framework. Questions arising from this discussion may then feed forward and provide the first stage of a subsequent observation, form the basis of discussions with other colleagues, or perhaps trigger action enquiry or an investigation of relevant literature or policy.

seem far-fetched in some contexts or teachers' experiences, but I'd like to work towards a professional world where the opportunity to be observed teaching is seen as a luxury. When time is allocated to teachers to engage with each other around the realities and nuances of practice, including prior to, during and following on from lesson observations

lively and informed discussions can occur. And if we get this right we can make the #noobservation hashtag redundant, because no-one wants to experience this...

@SaysMiss 'It was outstanding, but I don't want you getting ahead of yourself' (true story) #noobservation

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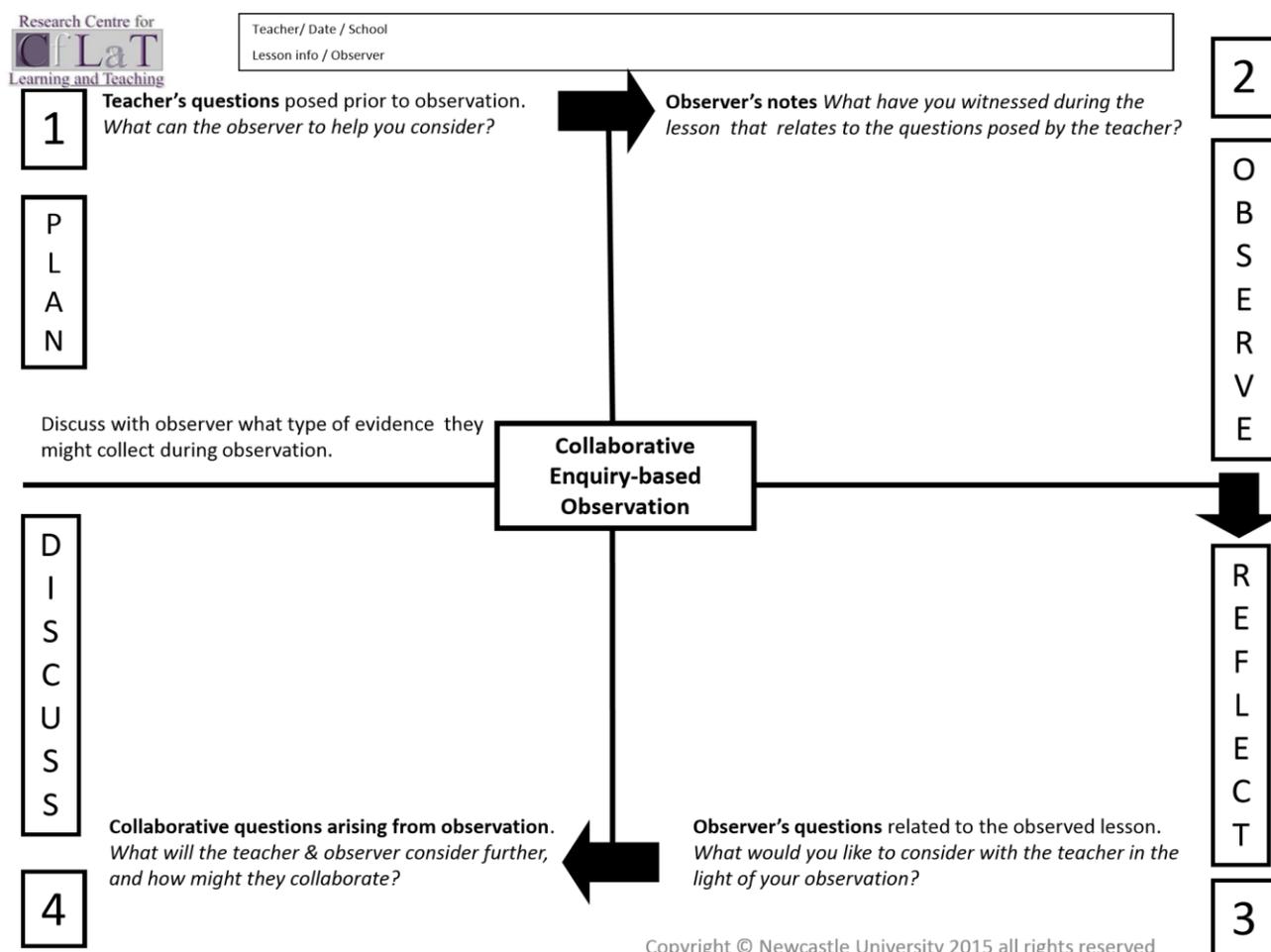
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## Over to you. Think back – think forward.

This thinkpiece suggests that rather than using lesson observation as a monitoring tool, or as part of practices associated with proving that some-one else has done their job (other than the observed teacher), it can be used as the basis of co-enquiry.

Think about how you have experienced and used lesson observation, both within and beyond coaching approaches. Who sets the agenda? What role does the observer play? How is the observation used as a means to engage teachers in discussion and debate? How is the observation allowing teachers to develop their own agency? What approaches to coaching, mentoring or leadership is your style of observation modelling?