

Quality in Education – Coaching, can it help?

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posted June 2014, OLE Ghana

The writer of this article based on his experience working with OLE Ghana which has coaching as a core component of its learning model, addresses the quality question in our education system by suggesting the adoption of the coaching concept. He begins by looking at success chalked in our education regarding Access vis-a-vis Quality and then proceeds with a discussion on Coaching strongly throwing his weight behind the current call for coaching in our education system as a means to solving quality related challenges.

Introduction

Education encompasses our lives; it is the foundation of our society. ¹ Education is more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Education helps to stimulate our minds and mold inquisitive minds into intellectuals. It is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future and is critical to reducing poverty and inequality. Girls and boys who learn to read, write and count will provide a better future for their families and countries. If all students in low income countries left school with basic reading skills 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty. It is for these reasons and many more that the world with one accord set the MDG and EFA goals. As a result ²literacy rates among adults and youths are on the rise and gender gaps are narrowing. The number of out-of-school children has dropped from 102 million to 57 million from 2000 to 2011. Primary education enrolment in developing countries reached 90 per cent in 2010.

However despite these gains there seem to be fundamental issues with the quality of education being delivered. ²It is reported that even after 4 years of primary schooling as many as 250 million children cannot read and write, worldwide. Without these fundamental skills, the basis for all future learning is severely undermined. Going to school is not enough; improving learning is critical. Locally the ³2013 Early Grade Reading Assessment and National Education Assessment report indicate more than 40% of P3 and 31% of P6 pupils performing below minimum competency. Many in P6 struggling to read and write even after 5 years of education.

Quality Education Defined

The various dimensions of perceiving quality education bring to the fore the elusiveness of quality education. While some look at the input resources and others look at the processes of delivery, there are many who look at outcomes in terms of achievements. I have kind of fallen in love with the following definition of quality education I found on Ask.com which says ⁴“Quality education is education that really improves a person's life and sticks with them later in life when they need it. Education should include teaching someone how to think critically and with common sense.”

⁵UNICEF's definition of quality education allows for an understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context. It calls for the learner's creative and emotional development, support objectives of peace, citizenship and security, promote equality and seek to pass global and cultural values. UNICEF in commenting on education quality recognizes five dimensions which are founded on the rights of the child for survival, protection, development and participation (UNICEF, 2000) namely learners, environment, content, processes and outcomes. This definition is also important in the sense that unlike previous definitions it takes into consideration the issue of Quality Processes - how teachers and administrators use inputs to frame meaningful learning experiences for students and how they are supported and supervised in the use of these inputs - in determining the quality of education.

My question then is, “How do we prepare, supervise and support our educators to use inputs to frame meaningful learning experiences for students, especially when available EMIS report indicates 33,108 teachers in public KG and 94,905 at the primary level remain untrained and they have found it particularly difficult to cope with helping pupils transition from a multilingual environment to L2?”

Coaching

My experience working with OLE Ghana as it deploys its leaning model is that the quality of the processes really matter. But most importantly is the quality of those who handle these processes and for that matter the support and supervision given them. My experience with OLE Ghana suggests strongly that Coaching as a concept could be of great help in this regard. In the second part of this article I am going to look at the issue of Coaching first defining it, and then drawing a distinction between coaching and other like professional services, then look at key components of the coaching process and end by suggesting how we can innovate coaching to bring its benefits to all at a reduced cost.

⁶The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines Coaching as, “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole. ⁷Julie Kennedy explains Coaching as a vehicle to transport a client from where he is now in his life to where he wants to be. The coach’s responsibility is to discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve; encourage client self-discover; elicit client generated solutions and strategies and hold the client responsible and accountable for his actions and outcomes.

⁸ Appendix 1: Early Grade Reading Projects in Less Developed Countries indicates that Coaching occurs when a coach helps teachers use their training scripts and lesson plan frameworks by visiting them in their schools, observing their teaching, offering advice on how to improve their teaching, and demonstrating teaching techniques learned in training but not demonstrated by the teacher during the observation. It quotes Bandura (1969) as saying that in addition, coaching helps teachers change their behavior in small manageable steps, which is more effective and has an additive effect.

Experience has shown the need to draw a distinction between what we usually do (Supervision, Mentoring and Counseling) and what we could/should be doing (Coaching). It is important to get these distinctions right because they are now more than just a matter of semantics. They represent, and manifest in, the different attitudes and approaches to helping teachers get better at their jobs.

First of all it is important to note that the INSETs we carry out, whether school or cluster based cannot be equated to Coaching. The INSETs are more of training sessions.

Supervision provides a uniform, scientific approach to teaching focusing on upholding standards and managing resources. The supervisor, like the head teacher and/or the Circuit supervisors, oversees a person or group of people engaged in an activity or task and keep order or ensure that she/he/they perform it correctly.

Mentorship refers to relationship between an experienced professional and a less experienced mentee or protégé. During the mentorship experience, it is common for a mentee to be matched with a "mentor" who will give them advice and help them succeed.

Counseling is a highly skilled intervention focused on helping individuals address underlying psychological problems.

A coach is someone to learn with. Coaching is primarily about skill acquisition, as demonstrated from its origins in sport. It can focus on interpersonal skills, which cannot be readily or effectively transferred in a traditional training environment. It is action and performance-oriented. Coaching facilitates the performance, learning and development of another, unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance, closing the gap between thinking about doing and doing, and performing at your best through the individual and private assistance of someone who will challenge, stimulate and guide you to keep growing. Coaching is about removing obstacles, setting goals taking into account values and purpose, striving for balance and fulfillment in order to get desired results. It is performed in the 'live' environment. It is highly effective when used as a means of supporting training initiatives to ensure that key skills learnt in training are transferred to the 'live' environment.

Do we really need coaching to ensure quality processes in our education?

To answer this question let's examine some existing practices. We will look specifically at teacher training, explicit direction/supervision and mentoring.

Teacher Training: The cascading teacher training model we adopt, and the quality of those along the cascade, makes us doubt if training content is not diluted on its way down the cascade and whether or not training is still effective by the time it reaches the end of the cascade. Rackham (2001) observes that training though fine for acquiring knowledge, exposes employees to more new knowledge and skills than they can absorb in the time allotted since employees can not immediately practice them on the job, but coaching was better for learning skills.

Explicit directions/supervision: provides teachers with the detailed scripts/instructions for teaching each lesson. Head teachers, Circuit supervisors and subject officers usually play this role in the education system. They give these directives by helping teachers incorporate directives in lesson plans. However many teachers do not do lesson plans. Others are done 'any how' without any proper supervision and often do not contain what they have been told to do. Some do the lesson plans alright but fail to 'live' the same lesson plan in the classroom.

Mentoring: Teacher trainees are expected to spend one year in the field understudying existing classroom practitioners. New teachers posted to schools are also expected to be mentored by existing teachers on staff. The big question is who mentors who? How 'solid' is the mentor/existing teacher to be able to mentor the mentee? Is it not in most cases the issue of the blind man leading another blind man?

So will Coaching do the trick where the others are struggling to make headway?

For as long as new skills are being introduced and teachers are exhibiting deficits in the appropriate pedagogy to handle the emerging teaching situations there is the need for appropriate support and supervisory structures to be put in place. OLE Ghana's experience has shown that teachers usually employ teaching techniques similar to the ones their own teachers used when they were students. Such ingrained behavior, reinforced over years of being a student and then a teacher, cannot be overcome in a single training program.

¹⁰Coaching can help teachers who have gained the knowledge of good practice in a training program to slowly put that knowledge into practice in their classrooms. OLE Ghana's experience

so far has shown that though it does not offer a quick fix, instead, it provides a vehicle for change through evolution not revolution. It provides teachers the opportunity to create lessons in areas in which they have not seen demonstrated directly and to select concepts and strategies to teach: reorganizing materials and teaching their students to respond to the new strategies.

Going Forward

OLE Ghana's experience shows that coaching is time consuming, is expensive but has the potential to do the trick in the long run and eventually has a high return on investments. The question is how do we lower the cost of Coaching still while making it more effective, sustainable, and widely available bringing its benefits quickly to its beneficiaries? A few suggestions are offered here.

It is not anyone who can be a coach. There is the need to grow coaches. OLE Ghana's proposed Teacher's Mate would be a self tutoring teacher support kit complete with learning resources for classroom practice supported by Coaching (face to face and eCoaching). The Kit will leverage advancement in technology to mount a Coach supported sequential multi-step course for pre-service and in-service teachers.

The Coach supported self paced course will include resources concerning human development and learning, videos of best practices closed captioned in the appropriate languages, activities for classroom-based practice with pupils, quizzes for monitoring teacher and student learning and techniques for formative evaluation of the learning system itself. It also will provide data from teachers and students indicating the effectiveness of the complete set of training materials themselves and does not affect time on tasks since teachers do not have to leave classes to attend these programmes. It is envisaged that those who complete the self-paced courses will receive a national recognized certificate.

In order to make coaching more effective and bring its benefits quickly to its beneficiaries one need to look closely at the coaching process. Experience has shown the need to pay attention to when to coach, and what goes into the pre-coaching, coaching and post coaching phases.

- When to Coach:** Coaching should be organized taking into consideration the school timetable and teachers' workloads. There is the need to develop an approach which is appropriate to the school context and the needs of individuals otherwise it would risk rejection from the very word go.
- Pre-Coaching:** Knowledge of the local terrain is very important. Local terrain here refers to the national education system, the 'local politics' in the local education directorate and school. A Needs and/or Gap analysis would have to be carried out for both staff and pupils
- Coaching:** Coaching needs to be practical not theoretical. The theories are for you the coach to process and then share the outputs in the form of best practices with the coached. Remember a coach is someone to learn with not a Government Inspector.
- Post Coaching:** It is important that after every coaching session the teacher and his/her pupils are offered appropriate tools and resources to help them as a team develop and benefit from the coaching practice.

It is in this regard that the OLE Ghana BeLL and Tablet Apps come in very handy. In the case where the OLE Ghana BeLL and Tablet Apps are not readily available present the coach

together with the teacher and pupils need to be really innovative and come up with other ways of developing and benefiting from the coaching process.

- **Cost of Coaching:** To reduce cost of coaching and make it more sustainable, and widely available, there would be the need to reduce the number of man coaching hours by external coaches. There could be an initial intensive coaching period followed by less extensive coaching period. Supervisors should be made to take up more and more of coaching roles. Supervisors have a powerful impact on the lives of workers. Workers don't leave their jobs, they leave their supervisors. The traditional model of supervision, however, sharply limits this opportunity. Heads teachers and Circuit Supervisors would have to be coached themselves to bring a coaching approach to supervision.
- Teachers must be encouraged to form communities of practice. OLE Ghana's weekly planning sessions are perfect examples where these communities of practice members coach themselves.
- Efforts at putting in place an eCoaching system should be encouraged. With an ever increase in network penetration, eCoaching could be used after the intensive coaching phase. eCoaching could cover self tutoring/self coaching mechanisms, third party eCoaching through sms and help desks, remote/offsite monitoring systems.

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 6. 'A definition of a Coach' (http://www.kennedy-coaching.com/fileadmin/downloads/A_definition_of_coaching.pdf)
 7. <http://icfminnesota.org/about-coaching/>
 8. Request For Application ACR2 - APPENDIX 1: *Early Grade Reading Projects in Less Developed Countries*
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