PART ONE:
THEORY

CHAPTER

1

Introduction

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter begins by defining leadership coaching as presented in this book. It outlines the reasons why this form of coaching is essential in the current education context, and from there moves to an overview of various international leadership development ideas and theories. The chapter then traces the empirical research underpinning the development of the coaching model documented in this book and the key principles and ideas upon which it is based. The chapter concludes by describing the three research studies that produced the model.

What is coaching and why coaching?

Coaching defined

Coaching, as presented in this book, is a special, sometimes reciprocal, relationship between (at least) two people who work together to set professional goals *and* achieve them. The term depicts a learning relationship, where participants are open to new learning, engage together as professionals equally committed to facilitating each other's leadership learning development and wellbeing (both cognitive and affective), and gain a greater understanding of professionalism and the work of professionals.

Dialogue is the essence of coaching and the concurrent improvement of practice. Leaders elect to be coached because they want to improve their practice on an ongoing basis. The coaching model in this book assumes that two leaders believe they will gain equal, but different, benefits from working with each other as they develop and implement their professional and personal goals.

Underlying premises

Several premises inform the definition of coaching. The first is that educational leaders are often teachers by preparation, and so effective leadership development should include many of the principles that underpin effective teacher development.

The second is that professional development should be a lifelong process. Although leaders may be at different stages of their careers, all need ongoing opportunities to renew, refresh, and redirect their educational leadership practice. New expectations and roles necessitate this—the only constant in education, after all, is change. There will always be a need for leaders to change direction—to branch out into new areas of development. New leaders, moreover, need to be able to embrace change for the possibilities and opportunities it can bring. All leaders have the responsibility to keep on learning throughout their career.

The third premise is that people who are influential in education should focus, as their main priority, on educational leadership that improves learning. Thrupp and Willmott (2003) describe this focus as "critical leadership", where there is not only reflection on learning but also a "public

commitment to doing things differently" (p. 180) and "reflection on wider issues of social structure and politics" (p. 181). This stance requires continual critique of the role and practice of leadership in learning and articulation of the dilemmas and tensions faced within that context.

A fourth premise is that linking theory and research to the study of issues relating to the first three premises and their leadership practices is the key to successful leadership development. That is why coaching provided by practitioners and academic specialists working in partnership can be very effective. The coaching peers provide each other with professional feedback and vicarious learning through the observation necessary for leadership development. The academic professional provides the coaching partners with challenges, critical perspectives, skills, and theories that support and challenge their developing coaching practices. There must be challenge if the professional relationship that coaching partners develop is to serve an educative purpose. The partners also need to be supported and encouraged for changes in behaviour to occur. Outside perspectives are thus paramount in bringing effective change to leaders' practice. This facilitative role is explored in greater depth in Chapter 10.

New leaders for new times

Today, there is increased interest internationally in leadership development and coaching, and this area is now hailed as worthy of renewed respect. This interest has had particular resonance in New Zealand, where the changes brought about by policy developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s led to a focus on self-management of educational institutions and brought particular challenges for leadership. The time was right to begin to explore the use of a coaching model for the development and support of such leadership.

New Zealand was the first (and perhaps sole) country in the world to move to full-scale decentralisation of educational provision across all sectors. The advent of self-management in New Zealand required a new type of leader, and new ways of developing the skills he or she would need. More specifically, the country needed educational leaders who could

- build capacity and commitment;
- build strong relationships and partnerships;
- focus on learning;

- understand the change process; and
- see the importance of finding new approaches to "doing" and "being".

As Caldwell (2002, p. 843) has observed, the need since that time has been for "new approaches to professionalism [that] will challenge the modest levels of knowledge and skill that sufficed in the past, with a vision for values-centred, outcomes-oriented, data-driven and team-focused approaches that matches or even exceeds that of the best of medical practice." For Gronn (2002), "designer leadership development" (his term) based on competencies and standards will not create the types of leaders needed today, for much the same reason articulated by Lupton (2004, p. 31), who contends that "the wide variation between [institutions] … may give rise for differentiated strategies" rather than a one-size-fits-all approach effected through the development of leadership competencies devoid of context. Because the context in which leadership operates markedly influences how that leadership is exercised, development and support initiatives need to focus on the local context—nationally, regionally, and institutionally. This is not always the case in leadership development initiatives around the world.

The need for relevance and challenge

Essentially, if we are to acknowledge the reality and context of leaders' work, then we must establish the type of professional development that will support their daily practice. It is important that leaders can see the direct relevance of their professional development to practice. Development activities far removed from the reality of their work serve no purpose. Educational leaders need to be working with the people, issues, and concerns they face daily if they are to see the need for, and relevance of, leadership development.

"That is the beauty of this programme. We can relate what we are thinking and feeling and doing, to what we are feeling at the time, not to some academic or theoretical thing that we think might happen—it is happening and we talk about it."

Often missing from the theory on effective professional development is *how* leaders can put professional development in place that contains all the principles identified as important. How do we get those in education to see that change and development in their leadership behaviour is necessary and important? The answer is, as the above definition of coaching implies, challenge. Leaders must be

challenged to understand and reflect on how changing their practice will make a difference. Peer coaching provides that challenge, and even more so when coaching partners share their perspectives with other such partnerships in learning communities. The variety of perspectives, the development of activities and skills, and the presence of support all serve as professional development opportunities that enhance coaching relationships.

The leadership development context today

Reconceptualisations

Among the governments worldwide that are moving forward with national policy for leadership development, England's has taken a particularly strong lead in recent years with the establishment of the country's National College for School Leadership. A key focus of the National College is learning-centred leadership and personalised development (Southworth, 2002). A recent study of 15 countries shows many mandatory or quasi-mandatory programmes throughout Europe, Asia, Australasia, and North America (Huber, 2003).

These programmes represent a giant step forward from the early 1990s when interest in school leadership preparation and development was of "relatively little interest" outside the USA (Hallinger, 2003). The programmes also show major paradigm shifts in leadership development, particularly over the last decade. Initiatives have moved a long way from the early days of clinical supervision models (Goldhammer, 1969; Joyce & Showers, 1982), but certain elements and key principles of these have survived the test of time (Joyce & Showers, 1988). Although some policy makers still tend to favour "informed prescription" of leadership development curricula (Barber, 2002), the education profession now places greater emphasis on initiatives such as learning communities (Stoll & Bolam, 2005), coaching and mentoring (e.g., Singapore Educational Administration Society), peer-assisted leadership (PAL), leadership centres, problem-based learning (Hallinger & Bridges, 1997), and action-research communities. These initiatives all focus on building leadership capacity in individuals and in institutions (Harris & Lambert, 2003), distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003; Harris, 2004), and "data-literate" and evidence-based leadership (Earl & Katz, 2002; Southworth, 2002). In so doing, they have

enhanced belief in "informed professional judgement" (Barber, 2002). Various commentators, A. Hargreaves (2003) and D. Hargreaves (2003) among them, stress that networks advantage teacher, institutional, and systemic change.

A number of associations and journals focus solely on school effectiveness and improvement. One such professional association is the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, with its flagship journal, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* (SESI). Some of these associations have added "leadership" to their name to signify a change of emphasis (e.g., BELMAS, which stands for the British Educational Leadership, Management, and Administration Society, and NZEALS—the New Zealand Educational Leadership and Administration Society). Similarly, many academic journals now focus solely on the theory and practice of leadership. Two recent editions of the *International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* (see, for example, Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002) honour and validate leadership thinking from around the world. Such emphases have informed our collective co-construction of knowledge about leadership learning and given us a much better understanding internationally of this area.

The past decade or so has also seen a reconceptualisation of leadership. Sergiovanni (1992) and Fullan (2003a) have advanced our understanding of moral and authentic leadership, while Strachan (1999) and Starratt (2004) have looked respectively at critical leadership for social justice and spirituality in leadership. Gronn (2003) and Thrupp's (2004) call for a move away from "designer models of leadership development" to a more critical focus has been accompanied by calls for cross-cultural and boundary-breaking leadership (Robertson & Webber, 2002; Shields, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2002).

Key principles and ideas

Reciprocity, structure, and support

Different coaching models abound, so it is important that the principles underlying the model in this book are reiterated and maintained when developing coaching relationships. The work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) is reflected in many of the principles, which include or focus on:

- the legitimation and validation of leaders' practice;
- the development of theory by practitioners;
- the informing and changing of leaders' practice;
- the importance of operating at the interface of theory and practice;
- the need to provide support and challenge in leadership development;
- the need to set up a structure that will help leaders continue their development unassisted;
- the development of a model that any leader can use anywhere and in whatever context;
- a belief in "leaders as knowers" rather than "coaches as knowers"—that is, validating leaders as theory makers;
- a belief in leaders as lifelong learners; and
- a desire to alter the traditional relationships between professionals and between institutions.

Several key ideas also inform the model:

1. The process is dynamic, meeting the changing needs of and resulting in new learning for each person. In this way it is also reciprocal.
2. The coach is the facilitator of the learning process, not the "teacher" of how something should or could be done, unless invited.
3. The coached person takes responsibility for his or her own learning, and sets the agenda and goals for the coaching sessions.
4. The partners have a good understanding of each other's role and the social and political context within which they both work.
5. The coaching relationship takes time to develop effectively and sustain, with educational change, innovation and improvement occurring over time.
6. The coaching partners require the interpersonal, communication and coaching skills to work together in different ways.

The role of the coach

Both the person doing the coaching and the person being coached must be taught the skills of coaching and should discuss the principles behind these. When two people know how to play the game, coaching is easy. It is therefore important that the coaches of each partnership empower the coached to make their own decisions about their leadership practice.

"I believe at least 60 to 70 percent of the value of coaching is the mere fact that two leaders with a lot in common, in terms of both successes and problems, can sit down and share these honestly and openly, and be helpful to each other."

Coaches do not tell leaders who are being coached how they should lead but rather assist them to reflect critically on their practice so they can make informed decisions about their leadership. The responsibility for learning must be left in the hands of each leader. Leaders who have been well coached in how best to work with each other advance their respective professional development and offer supervision and oversight of each other's practice.

Executive coaching, life coaching, and personal coaching—all prevalent in the literature today—are often conducted by coaches with little, if any, experience of working within the context of the person they are coaching. In this book, coaching is seen as a reciprocal process, conducted by partners who are from, or have been from, similar positions or roles, and who are, to all intents, equal in their relationship. Coaching partners bring to the relationship not only knowledge of the context in question and different strengths and wisdom, but also, and more importantly, different perspectives and an outside (albeit perhaps less subjective) view of a leadership situation. The coaching relationship is dynamic and constantly changing to meet the needs of the people involved. And even though a coaching relationship may not be truly reciprocal, it can be bi-directional in that both partners gain in different ways, especially if in different roles, such as leadership coach, education consultant, facilitator or adviser, or principal. Such a relationship can also be effective in terms of critiquing the coaching practice if established on the principles set out in this book.

The development of the coaching model

The model of leadership coaching in this book has evolved over a decade of research and development—some undertaken by me and some by my graduate students. Other research literature has also influenced the model's development in the field. However, the three major pieces of research that had the greatest impact on the developing model are described in the following sections. The model is evolving still, as I participate in critical reflection around the process of coaching, with professional colleagues here and overseas.

The first research study

A naturalistic, qualitative study, involving primary, intermediate, and secondary school leaders during the first year of the Tomorrow School's reforms to education administration in New Zealand (Lange, 1988) was considered an important precursor to understanding the role and needs of these leaders and to identifying the most effective professional development for them during a time of major administrative and curriculum change. I spent one year shadowing 11 leaders from across the school system (primary, intermediate, secondary), in a cluster of schools in an urban city. I interviewed each leader on at least three occasions, organised professional development activities for them, and then evaluated these experiences with them. The aim of this study was to develop some substantive theory about appropriate and effective educational leadership development.

The findings indicated that site-based professional development, which included outside perspectives (i.e., another person's observation and views) on the concerns these leaders were experiencing at that time, was most valuable. This and other related research led me to conclude (Robertson, 1991a, p. 130) that leaders' professional development should:

- acknowledge the realities of their daily practice;
- acknowledge the philosophic, values, and visionary elements in the leaders' work;
- offer opportunities for values development and resolving dilemmas;
- have a strong emphasis on educational leadership;
- encourage critical reflective practice and experiential learning rather than offer *a priori* theoretical or prescribed models;
- be needs based, participatory, and collaborative;
- focus on problem posing as well as problem resolution;
- be developmental over time to lead to completed action;
- emphasise interpersonal skills such as communication, presentation skills, stress, and time management;
- acknowledge the needs of individuals for stimulation, freedom, creativity, and fun;
- offer a variety of delivery modes; and
- be provided by people credible within the field of education, often by practitioners and consultants in partnership.

Two recommendations from this study had a direct influence on the development of the coaching model:

1. Leaders need to experience professional development in critically reflective practice, and this needs to be formalised and structured through such initiatives as professional partnerships, learning and research communities, study groups, and action learning sets.
2. Scholar-practitioners need to be made available as consultants to leaders to assist them with their professional development, to help them with problem posing, managing change, critiquing practice and political context, and to assist them with education development generally. The consultants could come from the teaching profession—the untapped source of leadership development that Wadsworth (1990) describes as a "pot of gold" in his article on the School Leaders Project.

Conversations that I had with two of the leaders who participated in the study were another major contributor to my thinking at this time. The first stated that there was nothing new in the professional development offerings and that, during his career, he had been to everything available, or at least some form of it. He also said if the development did not correspond with a "hurt" or a need being experienced by leaders, then no matter how good it looked, or was, other more pressing factors within the institution would take precedence. It seemed obvious, then, that any professional development had to focus on leaders' current leadership experience(s). The second leader had this to say: "What I would really like to do is … buddy with someone. They would spend a day or two with me, and then I would say, 'OK, warts and all, what can you see in here that I am doing wrong—tell me. What things do you like? What things am I doing that I could do better?'" I realised that this type of coaching practice was generally missing from leadership development initiatives, and that a second study was needed to pursue this line of thought. However, it also seemed to me that I needed to move this second leader's thinking away from having somebody else telling him what was wrong, to having him reflect on what might be wrong and what he might be able to do to improve the situation. This reflection and subsequent critical dialogue between the two leaders would allow him to engage more effectively in the vicarious learning he described.

The second research study

A national curriculum leadership development contract provided opportunity to trial the use of peer-assisted learning, of the type exemplified by Barnett (1990). This time round, 44 leaders, from primary and secondary schools, were selected from their individual applications to take part. Each participant was asked to "partner" another leader during a first group session, to set goals. and to focus on their leadership role when leading learning through curriculum and programmes. During each of four group sessions, conducted by a development team of 15 consultants and extending over an 18-month period, the partners worked together in pairs, using skills of listening, reflective questioning, and goal setting. (For a fuller description of this process, see Strachan & Robertson, 1992.) We asked the partners to think of ways of contacting each other and working together between these formal meeting times, which they did, to varying degrees. The consultants also worked with each leader in his or her school, and with the other teachers there, during these "in-between" times.

The study involved over 50 hours of face-to-face data-gathering sessions (individual and group interviews and surveys) with the 44 leaders. During the study, the leaders also completed two individual surveys designed to monitor and evaluate the issues and successes the leaders personally experienced when working in their professional partnerships. The leaders also were each sent five letters across the 18 months, reminding them of goals set from group sessions and prompting them to initiate further action and reflection with their partner.

Data from the interviews, observation, and surveys were shared with the leaders at the group sessions. This action-research process assisted with clarification and validation of emerging findings, but also intentionally influenced the continuing development process. At the end of the trial period, all data were further analysed for grounded theory development—a process described by Strauss and Corbin (1997)—to ascertain how the leaders had established and maintained successful professional partnerships throughout this time. In-depth interviews were then conducted with five volunteer participants whose coaching experiences had been relatively fulfilling, but not without issues. The aim here was to further saturate the emerging themes of data that would influence the selection and maintenance

of the coaching partnerships in the third research study. This analysis took just over 60 hours.

The findings from this part of the study set the direction for the ensuing action research of the third study and firmed the principles of the coaching model presented in this book. The findings were as follows:

1. Leaders viewed the concept of partnership coaching favourably.
2. Leaders needed improved skill development to carry out the processes effectively.
3. One year was insufficient for the coaching partnerships to develop fully.
4. Respect, honesty, and trust were important elements of a successful partnership relationship.
5. Leaders needed more in-depth outside support to assist with critical reflection on leadership practice during the coaching process.
6. Regular, sustained contact between coaching partners was necessary.
7. Leaders considered lack of time for coaching an inhibiting factor.
8. Partnerships involving leaders from institutions of similar size and type benefited problem solving.
9. Engagement in group sharing and problem posing alongside the coaching processes benefited the participants' leadership development by giving them a wider variety of perspectives and ideas.

The third research study

This third study was again qualitative, involving an action-researching community of 12 leaders and an academic researcher (myself). Over a three-year period, the leaders met regularly in their peer partnerships and as a group, and I worked with them as individuals, in their partnerships, and when they were all together as a group. The 12 leaders began by setting goals. They then used newly developed skills to observe, reflect on, and provide evaluative feedback on their own and each other's leadership practice.

A continuing influence on the development of the research and the eventual coaching model at this time was the exciting work in peer-assisted leadership development being conducted by Bruce Barnett, Ginny Lee and colleagues at the Far West Laboratory in San Francisco. Their earlier research (e.g., Barnett, 1990; Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; G. Lee, 1991, 1993)

also had a strong influence on my developing ideas, as did Kolb's (1984) work several years previously on adult learning theory. Ginny Lee came to New Zealand and worked with the leaders in the early stages of the coaching in the third study.

By the mid-1990s, education institutions had assumed even more responsibility for their own management. My aim in this third study was to encapsulate in the coaching model a strategy of professional development that would assist educational leaders to:

- conceptualise and implement new ideas and practices;
- achieve strategic goals;
- deal effectively with current issues and problems;
- gain skills;
- develop strategies to cope with challenges; and
- receive support.

A coaching model was the obvious answer.

The research was therefore designed as a conscious effort not only to develop a theory of professional development for leaders but also, in so doing, to provide professional development that would help them understand and then change their situation at the time of the research. The underlying theoretical principle of praxis was embedded in and interwoven through my and the leaders' methods: the developing findings influenced our practice at the time of the research, and consequently how we worked with one another. The research was practical and based on the needs and concerns of the leaders involved. It was thus both a research and development model.

The study comprised 18 months of data gathering, and employed oral and written reflections, interactive interviewing, observations, and examination of records. The findings were analysed using grounded theory techniques within the methodology of action research. The processes of action research accordingly became methods for both collecting and analysing data, with the leaders and me jointly involved in this process as a community of researchers (after Carr & Kemmis, 1986). During the data collection and analysis, the leaders helped me explain their situation and the dilemmas and tensions they faced during coaching and in their leadership practice.

All 12 leaders testified that the coaching assisted their professional and personal development in many ways. In the words of one of them:

> This research has made me focus on my own educational leadership. It has led me through a series of processes, which have enabled me to reflect on and analyse my own actions. The research has made me take an in-depth look at my own leadership style and has given me the opportunity to observe others.

The particular ways in which these leaders believed their involvement in the research had advantaged them fell into four major categories:

1. Assisted educational leadership development.
2. Enabled critical reflection on practice.
3. Increased professional interactions.
4. Established a structure (action research) for educational review and development.

These findings are described in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Main conclusion drawn from the research

The thesis that is presented in this book thus rests on engagement with the educational leaders involved in the above and other research over the past decade as well as with many other leaders. Their collective perception is that a model of professional development involving leadership coaching, within a critical learning community, and with support and challenge from an outside facilitator, can successfully provide the essential components of professional development in which praxis and transformative practice are the desired outcomes. As an example, the leaders in the third study, when working together, created a mild disruption to their everyday practice, which led to opportunities for reflection on leadership practices. I (as a practitioner-scholar/researcher) also assisted in this intervention process. The combination of the two—support *and* challenge—was effective in enabling critical reflection on practice and subsequent changes in practice and systems.

Are the benefits ongoing?

Research on this model of coaching has produced empirical evidence time and time again that the participants find long-term benefit from it (see,

for example, T. Lee, 2002; Robertson, 2004b; Sutton, 2005; Winters, 1996). For leaders, coaching through professional partnerships is, in the short and long term:

- an effective form of professional development;
- suitable for anyone in any educational sector;
- practice based on sound research and development;
- carried out "on site" and dealing with current leadership issues and concerns;
- a chance to gain outside perspectives and feedback on practice;
- an excellent role model for leadership development in an institution;
- a way of receiving affirmation for work well done;
- an effective model for formative appraisal;
- a way of seeing how leaders' many tasks and interactions link together to form the "big picture"; and
- a framework for all other professional development activities because it is ongoing.

The research also indicates that "one-off" professional development sessions (e.g., a course or a conference) do little *by themselves* to change practice back at the workplace. Coaching provides a foundation for new growth, from ideas gained from other sources such as conferences, workshops, and seminars.

When leaders are asked directly at the end of their coaching experience if they intend to continue with their present coach or to establish a different coaching relationship in the future, they give these types of responses:

> My present partnership will continue, as I believe we have both found it to our advantage. I have begun establishing another partnership with another leader in a much larger institution than mine and have found already that many issues are the same; [they] just involve differing numbers.
>
> Yes, I will continue if my partner is willing… I will also seek other partners for different areas of expertise.
>
> Probably not with the same one. Personalities are very different. I hold different values.
>
> Yes, until the end of the year [as I retire then]. Next year, if it is at all possible, I would very much like to be able to do something similar—if only in a one-way manner, perhaps with a newly appointed leader somewhere!

I hope to keep working with [partner]. My [audit] is next term, and I have invited [partner] to join me.

Yes, we will! We have not only gained professionally but also get on well together—and like the same wines!

Comments like these indicate that the practice of coaching—even the idea of multiple coaches—can be well and truly institutionalised (Fullan, 1985) as an important part of leaders' practice. If leaders do not continue with formal regular coaching once their coaching facilitator is no longer working with them, they still have in place the skills to be more reflective about their ongoing practice. And, as a final point, after experiencing coaching with their professional colleagues, leaders generally are no longer satisfied with less in-depth relationships with other colleagues and so more likely to try to establish professional coaching relationships with them.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- Self-management requires new approaches to professionalism and leadership learning.
- The concept of leadership and its development is being debated internationally.
- Coaching focuses on leadership practice in context.
- Coaching is a relationship between two (or more) people committed to establishing and implementing goals and working together to achieve them.
- Coaching is most effective when coaches take a facilitative approach to learning and are open to new learning through the process.
- Coaching supports the principles of lifelong learning, capacity building, and continual improvement.
- Coaching is a dynamic process that develops uniquely to meet the changing needs of educational leaders.
- Coaching equips leaders with new professional ways of working with colleagues.
- The coaching model presented in this book is based on empirical research with leaders in many educational contexts and across many cultures and sectors. It is constantly evolving.