PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Mentoring & Coaching: Effective to Advance Development

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ABSTRACT

With the fast social development in terms of economy and technology, teachers' academic performance and teaching skills have gained more attention to boost the progress of schools and even societies. According to a comparison and summary of articles from various scholars, and also interviews with some teachers from Chinese secondary schools, this article mainly discusses mentoring and coaching, which can be regarded as two vital factors for teachers' improvement. Based on the discussion towards different models of mentoring and coaching, this research can evidently find that both mentoring and coaching are significant for educators and educational organizations as they can help to achieve goals and advance development. However, some difficulties still need to be acknowledged and tackled in the future, which is demonstrated in this article.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education plays the central role in the modern society as it can influence economic and technological development directly. Within the education context, teachers' professional knowledge, teaching strategies and style are the foundation to ensure education quality. With more beginning teachers enter schools, mentoring and coaching is increasingly being focused as it is helpful for beginning teachers especially for those who are in their first year of teaching to improve their quality of teaching [1]. Although mentoring and coaching always be mentioned at the same time, there are some differences in terms of conception and practice. According to the Department for Education (DfES), mentoring can be recognized as a supporting process to help novices through career transition while coaching is a structured process which enable learners to acquire knowledge and skills to improve their development in specific aspects by learning from specialists or experienced people.

It is apparent that there are different types of mentoring and coaching models towards various aspects to help beginners achieve their goals. One of the most typical mentoring models is strength-based mentoring, which is grounded in the theory of social constructed cognition [2,3], which emphasizes active learning and teaching within both parties' strength, interests and passions through social communication, interaction and practice in daily life [4]. Concerning the coaching model, both specialist coaching and collaborative coaching are commonly used in educational organizations. New teachers' professional knowledge and skills can be enhanced during the day-to-day coaching practice. However, implementing mentoring and coaching is a complex process since they heavily rely on different situations such as national or school culture [5], meaning that models cannot be universally transited or practiced in every context as they can be affected by culture directly.

This essay aims to critically evaluate the practice of mentoring and coaching based on the Chinese secondary school. First, in the first session within context, this essay will introduce the mentoring in terms of different typical models, especially for strength-based model, and a critical evaluation will be stated according to analyzing the importance of mentoring in educational organizations and current mentoring activity in Chinese secondary schools. Second, coaching in Chinese secondary schools will be demonstrated in the second session in terms of the introduction of specialist coaching and co-coaching, features as well as its practice evaluation. In the discussion part, some practical recommendations will

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be presented after analyzing the relationship between mentoring and coaching and their efforts which can improve teaching quality as well as students' learning outcomes. Finally, a brief conclusion will conclude all arguments analyzed in the above sessions.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1. Mentoring

Mentoring is commonly and widely used in different organizations such as schools and enterprises. Therefore, various definitions of mentoring are existed from simple to complex. Many researchers [6,7] support that the most understandable and straightforward definition is helping people to further their development in various circumstances. This is a process that experienced practitioners provide novices with their support to help less experienced people facilitate personal development in terms of career and emotion [8]. Apparently, mentoring cannot be finished in a short time as it is a step-by-step program which can be separated into four stages, including initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition [9,10,11,12]. This means that forming the mentoring relationship is the first step, then mentors provide their guidance and help for mentees, after mentees can act independently, the mentoring relationship can transform into a peer-like relationship at the end. During this process, both formal and informal mentoring can exist at the same time although there are some differences in relationship initiation, relationship structure as well as characteristics [13,14]. Formal mentoring is structured with a clear mentoring objectives and scheme by institution authority to evaluate and assess outcomes while informal mentoring enables novices to select other talents to help their development [7]. In formal mentoring program, both mentor and mentee have clear goals and responsibilities to further this process, mentors are encouraged to employ their skills and experience to help mentee in a structured approach, which means that there is a structured format to ensure the quality of mentoring. Comparing with formal mentoring, informal mentoring is more flexible since there is no "stick pattern" during the process, mentees is taking the main responsibilities to initiate the contact instead of mentors [15]. Most people [16,17] believe that formal teacher mentoring is indispensable since this program can bring a lot of benefits for novices including the build of self-confidence and self-esteem as well as the career management, while others argue that formalized mentoring is not essential [18] as informal relationship is more able to provide better results

than formal mentoring [19]. Despite of different arguments towards mentoring format still exist, it is true that mentoring can help novices improve their performance and achieve career goals [20,21].

Based on the various types of mentoring, multiple models of mentoring can be provided to enhance the quality of mentoring, such as content-based model, mosaic mentoring model and so on. However, strength-based model is the most typical one [4]. This is a model which focusing on mentee's positive experiences and strength rather than shortcomings or weakness. Based on the theory of positive psychology [22], encouraging people's strength development is an effective approach to facilitate their positive attitudes and maximize potentials for performance. In addition, hope theory [23] and academic optimism theory [24] are significant to further strength-based theory development. Hope theory emphasizes the motivation of leading people to seek alternative strategies and achieve their goals at the end. Three crucial stages are set in this theory by Snyder et al. [25]: the first one is setting meaningful and practical goals since it is the foundation and guidance to impart hope and pursue positive outcomes; the next step is developing pathway thinking, which means that pre-service teachers are encouraged to break the whole goals into small objectives with the help of mentors, in this case, novices would find easier to seek various methods to achieve their goals; and the final stage is enhancing agency thinking, it is a self-reflecting process to help mentees maintain motivation to pursue their career improvement according to identify their enhancement and generate positive memories. Contrasting with traditional mentoring models, strength-based model is intensively related to the education improvement as both mentors and mentees are encouraged to further improvement continuously within this mentoring model [26]. In other words, according to strength-based mentoring, not only novices but also mentors can acquire a huge improvement according to interaction through introducing and identifying strengths, establishing motivations and strategies as well as monitoring their improvement.

Strength-based model is the most similar one with the current Chinese mentoring practice in secondary schools. In China, the mentor-mentee relationship has existed for thousands of years from ancient decades. The role of mentor is regarded as a teacher as well as a father in the past, which means that mentors take amounts of responsibilities such as imparting knowledge, passing truth, and offering emotional consultations and even daily caring to guide mentees' improvement [27]. However, the current practice of mentoring in educational context has transformed to a modern model influenced by social context and

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global development. Due to the fact that mentoring is an effective approach to improve novices' teaching quality and skills [28], mentoring has become an indispensable part for in most Chinese secondary schools. Mentoring program would operate before new teachers starting their teaching working. Leaders of School would assign an appropriate mentor to a mentee after meeting with novices and analyzing their strength and characteristics, which means both mentors and mentees' strength and personality can be matched with each other. At first stage, mentors are required to introduce basic school situation and policy information to beginning teachers. Observing lessons and giving feedback are two vital responsibilities in the second stage for mentors after shared goals setting through communication. At the same time, mentors also need to encourage mentees to maximize their own advantages and develop their potentials to seek various approaches to address challenges during the mentoring process [29].

During the whole process, mentors are regarded as a developer and sponsor [30] to fulfill their potentials and self-confidence. However, although the strength-based model emphasizes on equal status and together-progress, the hierarchy in Chinese mentoring relationship is a remarkable concern which cannot be ignored because of cultural background. China is a country emphasized on and dominated by Confucian culture. Li [31] as one of key components of Confucianism has demonstrated the importance of behaviors limited by social rules and norms [32]. This means that people need to obey social disciplines and their behavior has to be in accordance with social hierarchy [33]. These principles of Confucianism are embedded in Chinese culture and deeply influence people's social activities [33]. As a consequence, the hierarchical relationship is still influencing Chinese mentoring relationship although this type of unequal relation is gradually decreasing in recent years.

Within this mentoring relationship, novices can acquire huge improvement as they have opportunities to learn from experienced mentors in terms of professional knowledge, teaching skills and some meaningful experience. The relationship between mentors and mentees can be harmonious and increasingly intensive over time since mentees might obey all guidance from their mentors unwittingly [34]. However, long-time exposure to this hierarchical mentoring relationship might lead to mentees losing their independent problem-solving capacity and creativity since they are more likely to accept their mentor's suggestions instead of seeking autonomy or initiating changes [27]. Consequently, balancing the power and intensity of mentor-mentee relationships is still challenging for Chinese education institutions.

2.2. Coaching

Coaching in educational institutions has acquired more attention due to the various challenges caused by education reform in 21st century. Many researchers [5,35,36] have confirmed that coaching is a holistic and powerful tool to improve the quality of learning, teaching and even leading. Coaching also can be regarded as the cornerstone of teacher's professional development [37]. Devine et al. [38] suggest that coaching is a process to facilitate educators' professional improvement according to continuous learning and inquiry actively, which is also supported by Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh [39] as they claim that coaching is a one-to-one conversation which can enhance learning and development while others [40] suggest group coaching is more effective to create a high-performance team. Despite of these different arguments, the final goal of coaching is improving an organizations' quality of efficiency regardless of individual or group coaching.

Several coaching approaches have been applied successfully, including behavioral coaching, solution-focused coaching and cognitive-behavioral coaching. However, instructional coaching is commonly acknowledged as the most effective approach in supporting and enhancing teachers' professional development [41,42,43,44]. Instructional coaching is a specialist and content-based approach to facilitate teachers' growth in a short time. Comparing with other coaching approach, instructional coaching is aiming to support teachers to meet their personal career goals in a specific context in terms of subject or teaching skills [45]. As a consequence, instructional coaching can be regarded as an embedded work which has situated in teachers' work life. During this process, coaches can be regarded as a change agent, who are taking the central role to change current situation and further development [46]. According to the Vygotskian theory and a conceptual framework conducted by Harré [47], it claims that individual development can boost organizational enhancement as social improvement can be attributed to individual contribution to a great extent. In other words, the coaching quality in educational context not only can further personal achievement, but also has a positive impact on organizational enhancement.

According to Knight and van Nieuwerburgh [48], there are four stages to successfully process the instructional or content-based coaching, including goals setting, high-leverage practicing, explicit explaining as well as modelling. Fritz [49] declares that a clear understanding of current reality and specific goal which beyond the current situation are two essential factors to facilitate personal or

organizational advancement in the coaching process, because this gap can motivate coachees to make improvement effectively. After identifying goals, coachees would be required to make their efforts to achieve goals based on practices conducted by coaches. Within this stage, content planning is the basic and fundamental practice, which refers to the plan of courses, units and lessons [50]. The next step is formative assessment: coaches are required to give feedback after identifying coachees progress and weakness so that coachees would know how they can process the next step [51,52]. After formative assessment, instructional practices take place which aim to increase engagement and mastery during the coaching lesson according to cooperation ([53], questioning [54] and challenging [55]). Within the next stage of explicit explaining, coaches are required to describe their practice in classroom in an effective approach, which means that teachers need to do self-reflection positively as filling the gap and change methods appropriately after practicing is significant to improve coaching efficiency [56]. The final stage of instructional coaching is modelling as teachers need to understand how these practices worked in reality [48]. In other words, the aim of modelling is demonstrating and clarifying the implementation of instructional coaching to help teachers deepen their understanding towards coaching, and further their future plan of classroom organization and skill development. Modelling can occur in every stage of the instructional coaching. However, it would only summarize after finishing all above stages.

With coaching recognized as an effective method to achieve individual and organizational development, most Chinese secondary schools have widely employed instructional coaching in teaching activities. In most Chinese secondary schools, not only beginning teachers but all teachers need to participate in the coaching program although novices are required to take more coaching. For beginners, they need to be coached for a period time before starting work although the time is depended on different schools' situation. This type of coaching is focused on the strategies improvement in a short time, which is conducted by some teaching experts or experienced specialists. In other words, specific subject-based coaching will be conducted for beginning teachers after they receive the job certification. During this coaching process, novices need to set up a clear and specific goal towards their future performance after coachers' introduction. This short-term coaching can introduce some practical methods to help novices have a better preparation for adapting career life and tackling challenges. After they start the first period of teaching, observing other teachers' classroom and being observed by coaches regularly are required.

This means that the conduction of coach-coachees program is based on the subject and grades. In this case, some specific problems related to professional knowledge can be solved immediately. Moreover, coaches also supervise them to do self-reflection in a written form, which is highly matched with the formative assessment stage of instructional coaching.

As for normal coaching for all teachers, inviting successful teachers to become coaches and delivering "model class" has been confirmed as an effective practice of enhancing quality by the US experience [48]. Thus, conducting open class from some excellent teachers as model is widely used in most Chinese secondary schools to improve their teaching quality. Besides, class planning or content planning is another coaching aspect in Chinese secondary schools as class preparation can affect teaching quality directly. In addition to independent class preparation, subject group also organize group content preparation regularly, which means that teachers are encouraged to share their knowledges, class strategies, as well as other creative ideas with each other. This can be regarded as a content-coaching or co-coaching approach within the instructional coaching. This coaching approach can help teacher check and fill the knowledge gap, meanwhile, their teaching strategies can be adjusted immediately through the seminar discussion. Due to the fact that secondary students need to take the high-school entrance examination, in this case, co-coaching is essential for teachers to learn from each other in order to enhance teaching quality. However, although these types of coaching can help to improve teaching quality to a great extent, there are still some difficulties in the practicing process. Firstly, the limited time of coaching preparation might affect coaching quality. Both coaches and coachees need to spend time to prepare the coaching program. However, the workload of secondary school teachers is too heavy to give them adequate time to prepare coaching class. As a result, the quality of coaching cannot be ensured. Additionally, the hierarchical relationship between coaches and coachees is still existed because of the impact of culture. The consequence is that coachees or less-experienced teachers may not share their creative ideas actively in order to show their respect and avoid argument. Hence, the coaching might lose efficiency if this phenomenon last for a long time.

2.3. Discussion

It is apparent that the relationship between mentoring and coaching is coexistent rather than hostile since there are a lot of similarities between them, although differences exist to distinguish them from each other. Mentoring and coaching can exist at

the same time as both of them can make contributions to teachers' (individuals') or schools' (organizations') improvement. Moreover, the quality and efficiency of mentoring and coaching can influence students' learning outcomes directly.

Mentoring and coaching have become an indispensable part in most Chinese secondary schools as the goal of the two programs is improving teachers' and schools' quality to further education development. Especially for beginning teachers, mentoring and coaching can help them become familiar with working conditions, understanding job responsibilities, acquiring professional knowledge, as well as mastering strategies to better start their working life. In addition, some practical models of mentoring and coaching such as strength-based mentoring and instructional coaching, has successfully implement into the reality, which means that the quality of these models can be ensured although there are still some specific problems during the practice process. Setting clear goals is the basic and fundamental requirement for both mentoring and caching, and self-reflection is crucial to help teachers boost improvement. Concerning about the differences between mentoring and coaching, Dennen [57] claims that mentoring is an effective approach which can provide mentees with general support in terms of career advancement and ongoing capacities while coaching is targeting to help coachees achieve a particular goal or subject problem. In other words, based on the educational context, mentors can help in mentees' career advancement and job skills and coaching is more oriented by tasks to tackle problems.

Another main reason for practicing mentoring and coaching in schools is that these activities can promote students' learning outcomes directly. It is widely acknowledged that teachers' quality is the key factor influencing students' learning outcomes and schools' development [15]. This means that the level of teachers' professional knowledge and teaching strategies can decide students' learning efficiency directly. Concerning about professional knowledge, it is no denying that the professionalism of teachers is the key element to influence teaching quality. Especially in Chinese educational system, people even have no opportunity to become a teacher without adequate knowledge and qualified certification. Additionally, whether teachers can grasp key knowledge points for examinations also can influence students' outcomes. In the Chinese educational system, grades are the main standard to assess students' learning, which means that students with higher marks can be regarded as more excellent than others. The knowledge of examination points is prepared in the teaching handbook. Consequently,

teachers' professionalism and experiences can decide whether they can provide better guidance for students to acquire higher grades after knowledge impartment and examination paper analysis. As for teaching strategies, classroom atmosphere depends on teachers' teaching style to a great extent. For example, students would be engaged to learn more knowledge in an active classroom and may lose learning interests in a humdrum one. Thus, mentoring and coaching can help teachers to acquire more strategies to active the learning atmosphere and enhance students' learning efficiency.

However, there are some challenges within mentoring and coaching practice. The main difficulty is balancing mentor-mentee and coach-coachee relationship. As mentioned in above sections, the hierarchical conception is rooted in Chinese culture because of Confucianism. Unequal communication is still inevitable during the mentoring and coaching process. As a result, the quality and creativity of mentoring and coaching might be reduced since mentees and coachees are more likely to follow guidance without critical thinking. Therefore, encouraging mentors and coaches to communicate with their mentees and coachees equally and actively is significant to improve the quality of mentoring and coaching. This means mentors and coaches need to motivate novices to share their ideas and maintain a positive relationship. In addition to the equality in relationship, flexibility is another concern. This means that the mentoring and coaching relationship needs to maintain the self-selecting nature instead of appointing by authorities. Both mentors and mentees should have the right to select each other based on the personal characteristic and initial goals. Consequently, maintaining two-way selection in mentoring and coaching relationship instead of assigning is an effective method to maintain the flexibility and efficiency at the beginning of mentoring and coaching program.

3. CONCLUSION

According to what this research has discussed above, mentoring and coaching is increasingly being focused in educational organizations including the state secondary schools in China. These types of programs are essential for every educator, especially for new-hired teachers or those who are struggling to improve, since both mentoring and coaching are helpful to boost career development and enhance capacity of dealing with challenges. With mentoring or coaching, both individuals and organizations can obtain various help including knowledge and emotional support to achieve their goals. The current models of mentoring and coaching are supported by

scientific theory although more themes are needed continuously. Based on the above demonstration, it shows that meaningful goals, effective guidance and supervision, as well as reflection are significant for mentoring and coaching, although mentoring is more focused on mental and skill enhancement while coaching pays more attention to specific content or tasks. With the higher demands of education development, mentoring and coaching should be used into the educational institutions continuously because of its benefits. However, due to the fact that these types of models are generated in western cultural ethos, it is needed to recognize that the validity and applicability should be concerned basing on the various cultural context [58]. In other words, it is significant to make some appropriate changes to adapt the cultural context when people employ mentoring and coaching model into the Chinese context. Furthermore, a forced or unequal relationship between mentoring and coaching is less effective for transforming benefits and even can lead a prevention of improvement and development. Thus, in order to ensure the quality and productivity of mentoring and coaching in educational system, the process of mentoring and coaching should be formulated in a two-way choice approach.

To conclude, this research has illustrated and analyzed the practice of mentoring and coaching in Chinese secondary schools. It is true that both mentoring and coaching are beneficial to individuals and educational institutions to achieve their goals and advance development although some practice problems still need to be concerned and tackled. In this case, based on the current situation, difficulties related to the cultural difference and model adjustment in Chinese context should be more focused in the future research.

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