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Evaluating the longer-term impact of the Alliance for Learning's CPD courses

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Introduction

The following report summarises the main findings of qualitative research into the longer-term impact of three professional development courses run by the Alliance for Learning. Specifically it looks at the ongoing impact of the courses on the teachers' own professional practice, their school (colleagues and pupils), and where relevant, on other schools in their networks. The courses evaluated are Coaching, Outstanding Teacher Programme and Youth Mental Health First Aid.

Methodology

A total of four schools were visited over a period of 8 months (October 2017 – June 2018). Of these, two were primary schools, one secondary, and one was a sixth form college. A total of 14 teachers were interviewed across the four schools (Table 1). Based on information gleaned from the post-course evaluations and in consultation with the Alliance for Learning, an interview schedule was drawn up and used as a basis for exploring impact with the participants (Appendix 1). Interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. All were recorded with the permission of the participants so that accurate quotes and information could be retrieved.

Table 1: Study participants by school and course

	Coaching	Outstanding Teacher Programme	Youth Mental Health First Aid
Christ Church Primary	1		1
Stanley Grove Primary	1	2	1
Connell Sixth Form College	1	2	2
Wellacre	2		1
Total	5	4	5

Participants

The participants held a variety of roles, ranging from Executive Headteacher to classroom teacher. The majority of teachers also held additional roles in the school.

Summary of findings for each programme under evaluation

Coaching

It's been the best CPD training I've had
Director of English and Whole School Literacy

It gave me the opportunity to think through and adopt a model of coaching that I felt would be the most effective model of coaching within my own school
Executive Headteacher

At the time of interview, three participants had done Levels 1 and 2, and two had done only Level 1.

General impact

- All teachers without exception were using the coaching principles in their own practice, and to help execute their specific role in school.
- All schools were actively seeking to develop the right coaching model(s) for their context and embed coaching in their schools in a variety of ways.
- School encouragement and support had been vital in providing time and a platform for teachers to implement their learning, and thus gain value for money for their investment.
- All considered the course and trainer to be 'first class'. Specific points mentioned were delivery, clarity of concepts, total command of content, and evident expertise.

General learning points

- Coaching encourages people to find their own solutions, and is therefore enabling and empowering.

It allows teachers to come up with their own solutions and their own ways of moving forward through a problem
Director of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

It encourages that kind of accountability, responsibility, talk and discussion with staff ... so they're problem-solving for themselves in their own teams.
Executive Headteacher

- Coaching helps educators slow down and resist 'the constant pressure to do things fast, get results fast, evidence things fast' (*Assistant Leader of Maths*).

If you focus on evidencing superficial results, in the long-term nothing lasts, whereas all the strategies we've learnt will have a long-term lasting impact
Assistant Leader of Maths

- It is not a one-size-fits-all coaching model, rather it gives the underpinning theory and techniques which enable schools to develop a locally appropriate model for their context. This is time-consuming, but ultimately more valuable.

While it was considered too early to evaluate the wider impact on schools at this point, there were many examples of change to practice at school and individual levels:

Examples of school level practice

- The Three Circles Model has been used to both inform policy and evaluate policy within a pastoral team.
- The course directly influenced the introduction of a 'Guardian Angels' policy, which has been one factor in reducing lunchtime behaviour issues and referrals, and there is a perceptible difference in the way staff notice and think about the children; they are more tuned in to every child.
- In one school the Three Circles Model is being introduced to staff.
- Teachers in two schools have developed their own simplified model (e.g. 'Coaching for Dummies') to train other teachers in coaching. In one case this includes training a primary inclusion team who use it to work with teachers in a number of different schools.
- In one school, the strategy for implementation has been refined after the Level 2 course. Instead of a 'coaching for all' approach with the whole school, they plan to start small and build slowly. There is a clear plan to implement a coaching strategy over two years.
- One school noted that perceptions of coaching in the school were generally negative (being assigned a coach meant you were failing in some way) and they have had to work at changing those perceptions.

Examples of individual practice

- The advanced coaching model has been used by one participant to coach a deputy head through to successful headship.
- It has also been used to coach an NQT, who has since decided teaching is not for her.
- The questioning styles and coaching language (rather than the model) are used to give feedback on observations.
- The course has influenced how one participant approaches behavioural problems; the Three Circle Method is used to discuss misbehaviour with pupils.
- Coaching principles have been extended to life beyond the workplace.

I use it personally on a daily basis for sure ... with pupils, with friends, at home, with parents, the whole wider community for sure ... it becomes part of you, it becomes part of the way you are, the way you deliver, the conversations you have ...

Professional Mentor

Recommendations

- Provide suggestions on different ways to introduce coaching in schools.
- Offer simpler models that can be used immediately.
- Offer suggestions for different uses of coaching e.g. dealing with misbehaviour.

Outstanding Teacher Programme

The OTP course has been massively influential for me

Director of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

I gained a lot of information and a lot of skills from the course that has helped me every day really.

Head of Faculty

Four teachers were interviewed for this programme, two working in primary and two in sixth form.

General Impact

- The aspects of the course that most impacted on practice depended on the role of the individual in their school.
- The coaching part of the course had influenced the practices of three teachers in their role as mentors and in their work with pupils.
- The range of teaching and learning strategies introduced had been particularly beneficial to two teachers in their classroom practice, and for one in her role as CPD lead of teaching and learning.
- The course was generally considered very good, with particular emphasis on the process, which gave opportunities to practice and reflect.

Examples from school level practice

Only one teacher reported changes to school practice as a result of the course. This was due to her move into a new role as CPD lead for teaching and learning at the start of the course. The course informed the training and CPD she has delivered in school as part of that new role, and taught her how to deliver effective training. She is observing a knock-on effect on teaching and learning in the college as a whole. This is observed during learning walks and lesson observations, and in positive feedback from staff. Examples include:

- Bloom's Taxonomy is being used throughout the college on a daily basis, especially in questioning techniques;
- Students are encouraged to question each other;
- The 'silent conversation' strategy is now used by many teachers.

It gave me a lot of inspiration for my new role and reassurance really.

Director of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Examples from individual practice

- Coaching techniques have impacted on how teachers talk to students in safeguarding situations, when dealing with behaviour issues (helping children to evaluate their own actions), and in helping children who struggle with things such as time management to come up with their own solutions.
- One teacher uses coaching techniques for observation feedback and to train others in observations.
- These techniques are also used for mentoring NQTs and trainee teachers.

Coaching has become embedded in my practice

Head of Faculty

- The hierarchy of questions had helped one teacher develop her questioning techniques to extend children’s thinking skills and given her deeper understanding of what the children are learning.
- One teacher had gained confidence in her teaching (increased ability to respond when something is not working in a lesson), had her beliefs and assumptions challenged (e.g. there are alternatives to ability groups), and become more open to different ways of doing things (e.g. giving children practical experience, increasing opportunities for children to talk, and giving them more choice).

Some things we learnt that I would never have done, so it did challenge my perceptions

Year 2 Teacher

- Another teacher had been inspired to continue her own research into strategies that work and fit in her context.

Recommendations

- Would have liked the opportunity to see an outstanding lesson.
- Would have liked to observe more specialist (college) and age-specific classes (primary and college).
- Would have liked to observe schools that have a different type of student to Altrincham High (maybe other Alliance schools).
- More discussions around primary-focussed issues (it was very secondary-focussed).
- A follow-up one year on, perhaps related to a follow-on project to keep alive the breadth of what had been learnt. This could include an online component.

Youth Mental Health First Aid

It was a great knowledge share as well as training course

Assistant Head

So I went to this course in all honesty not having a clue what to do ... I got awareness on the course that built my confidence

Safeguarding lead

Five teachers were interviewed. Two had done similar courses in the past, so this was more of a refresher course with less tangible impact. For three, this sort of training was new, and the impact was very clear at both individual and school level.

General Impact

- For some the course reassured them that they had the correct procedures and systems in place.

It was an opportunity to validate that what we were doing was right and was meeting the needs of our children

SENDCO lead

- For others it gave them the tools to begin to put structures and strategies in place..

Immediately after the training we put loads of things in place which have had a sustainable long-term impact on our school

Assistant Head

- The handbook was considered a great resource by many.

Examples from school level practice

- The course has been a contributory factor in the development of the college recording system, and on training done with lower-sixth form tutors on how to recognise issues and deal with students.

Everyone's a lot clearer of how to deal with and recognise situations

Safeguarding lead

- Strategies such as the Stress Bucket (used with staff and adapted for children) and the First Aid Kit have contributed to a 70% drop in reported behaviour incidents among tier three children in one school.
- One school had invited the course trainer to run a session for all staff in the school and a neighbouring school within the Trust.
- Another cascaded information through a mental health session for all staff using methods learnt on the course. This empowered and equipped teaching staff with key strategies to deal with disclosures and spot warning signs.
- In one school, the course has highlighted the necessity of devoting a large portion of their CPD budget each year to mental health training.
- Rather than rely on over-stretched external agencies, one school now emphasises self-help and works with students on what they can do while waiting for an appointment with CAMS or whoever. This has had a big impact on some students who have been struggling, and in some cases behaviour has been changed with little input from outside agencies.

It's about acknowledging that we need to engage at the earliest opportunity to support them

Pastoral Assistant

Examples from individual practice

- The course increased confidence in spotting signs and speaking to students.

Now it's just go and speak to them, don't be afraid to speak to them

Safeguarding lead

- The training on suicide was particularly useful to two participants, challenging thinking about suicide, and changing practice when dealing with students with suicidal thoughts.
- One participant uses relevant sections of the handbook to give to staff dealing with a certain situation in class, such as bereavement.

Recommendations

- Provide more relevant materials and training for those working with 16+ students.
- Provide a key list of resources that staff could use with students for self-help.
- Include more scenarios, role-plays and preventative strategies.
- Provide a termly programme of short courses on different subjects such as substance abuse or domestic abuse, so that staff could be trained on specific issues as they arise in school (potentially very useful for TAs and Support staff).
- More help in how to encourage mental well-being as a whole college strategy, particularly prevention and awareness-raising strategies.
- Would like to have worked with people who have a similar cohort of students.
- Condensing the course into one day would be preferable (two participants).

Conclusion

All the courses have had a longer-term impact on individual and school practice. There are recommendations for the Alliance of Learning to consider from all courses. The longer-term impact of the coaching course is still ongoing as schools work on contextualised implementations. This course might benefit from further enquiry in the future.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

1. Just thinking again about the course/s, what would you say was the single most important learning point that you took from it?
2. Can you talk me through any changes you have made to your own practice as a result of the course? ACTIONS
3. What changes have you seen in your colleagues/pupils/school/wider afield as a result of your doing the course?

(Pupil attainment/behaviour/Policy changes/curriculum changes/staff relationships ...)
4. In your evaluation you said you wanted to ... Why might that not have happened?
5. Is there anything the Alliance of Learning could do/have done to help you increase the impact?