

Creative coaching

In the last two articles we have shown how the creativity behind 'creative coaching' might be developed. Here, we would like to introduce you to the fundamental skills of coaching that will help you and your children develop a creative coaching culture in your classroom.

To begin with, consider whether a child in your class:

- > Shows no interest in most of the learning on offer
- > Has trouble making friends
- > Asks for help with every task you set
- > Puts himself down all the time
- > Is constantly truanting
- > Doesn't enjoy group work, arguing constantly with the others
- > Seems unhappy at school
- > Repeatedly interrupts you and others
- > Jumps into classwork / projects / activities / conversations without thinking
- > Does the minimum required though you know she could do more
- > Is resigned to a life 'on the dole'
- > Knows what job she wants to do when she leaves school, but doesn't know where to start

You may recognise one or more of the children in the list above. These are some of the common habits, beliefs and attitudes we have encountered, and all of them can be improved with the help of their peers and with creative coaching. But let's first define coaching:

Coaching is an empowering approach to maximising individual potential. It helps others help themselves to achieve their goals.

It's not about advising, giving pointers, recommending,

Working together, children can help each other understand what they want and how to get there. But first they must develop three key skills, say Simon Percival and Steven Bowkett...

telling, suggesting or recounting how someone else worked through the same issue. These methods disempower, as the responsibility is taken from the coachee. What could be better for their self-belief than realising they have the power to reach their own goal? What could be better than their ideas and their actions? The coach is 'merely' the catalyst who will one day be able to step back from a more autonomous coachee.

We highlight the creative aspect of coaching because it is important for everyone to be aware of how children can utilise this innate resourcefulness in order to move themselves forward. It might be through the use of their imaginations in visualising how they want things to



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be when they have achieved their goal, through the ideas they generate in response to a great coaching question, or (as the coach) through identifying a way in which to help the coachee look at an issue from a different perspective.

For any useful coaching to take place there are three skills that must be present at all times: establishing and maintaining rapport, really listening and effective questioning. We call this the 'three-legged stool of coaching' – we'll leave it to your imaginations as to what would happen if one of these legs was removed from the coaching process.

1. Establishing rapport

Creative coaching rests on there being a positive relationship between coach and coachee. It is a very human process, the successful practising of which is emotional intelligence in action. We can raise children's awareness of being 'in rapport' with a number of activities. They could:

- > Collect photos and drawings of people interacting. Explain who is in rapport and how they can tell. What do they notice about how people are standing and how they have positioned parts of their body?
- > Select someone from a photo who is not in rapport. Redraw them so that they look as though they are.

Tip

When trying out a coaching conversation for the first time, encourage the class to use what they have noticed to build rapport. Of course, they will already know their classmates so a wise move might be for first pairings to be formed from friendship groups.

> Assume the position of two people who do not like each other and then invite others in the class to arrange them so that they appear in rapport.

> Examine photos of famous people interacting that you have placed around the room. Children could then write speech bubbles for them. How does what pupils have written synchronise with how the relationship is being portrayed?

> Draw or write a short piece about a scene from a television programme describing how two (or more) of the characters demonstrated they were in or out of rapport. What was being discussed and how did this appear to affect their feelings?

> Observe the people they see when they are out of school and make notes of at least three

instances of people in or out of rapport. Perhaps half the class could seek out those in rapport, and the other half seek out those who aren't.

2. Really listening

We all know what it is like when someone is really listening to us, what we notice, how it makes us feel about what we are saying and about ourselves. This second leg of our three-legged stool of skills helps keep the first one in place and ensures that we can perform the third. If you like, this is directly related to the

previously mentioned quality of 'being nosey'. To develop the children's listening skills, suggest that they:

> Stop and listen to the world around them – sounds of nature, other children in school, a music lesson. They hear many of these things on a daily basis, but do they really listen to them?

> Follow a list of instructions that you are reading out slowly. After each short instruction they perform that particular task leading up to an overall goal (e.g. making something). This could be used in relation to areas of the curriculum, such as in using new software in ICT, performing an experiment in science, introducing a new technique in art, and so on.

> Negotiate a chalked-out labyrinth or similar on the playground in pairs: one blindfolded and walking, the other overseeing and giving instructions.

> Collect clichés or metaphors they hear people use. Which were used and in relation to what? What do they mean and what did they mean in each instance? Who used them? Do certain people use them more than others? Do these



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Tip

In the coaching scenario, a skilled coach would listen to both the what and the how (including metaphors, repeated phrases, voice tone and body language) of what is being said. As practice, you could assign several listeners – one for each aspect – to one speaker who is talking and answering questions on a topic of his choice. The listeners could then compare notes at the end to gather a complete picture of what was being conveyed.

people use a certain type of language (e.g. military metaphors, clichés related to the household)? Is there a pattern? Children could keep a diary or design a grid. The complexity of the record-keeping could be easily differentiated.

> Explore how people use the same words but to express different meanings. Exemplify with a simple sentence, such as "I am still hungry," placing the emphasis on different words with each reading. How does the meaning of the sentence change?

3. Effective questioning

If the relationship is positive and the listening attentive, then this third skill is theoretically straightforward, as the questions will follow 'naturally'. However, these should be mainly open questions, which will open up the thinking and not lead it. Done well, this skill will support and reinforce the other two in a co-dependent relationship. Develop the skill of asking effective creative coaching questions by:

> Writing up a selection of at least ten open and closed questions for discussion. Examples might include: What is the capital city of England? What is green? Are you tall? How can we find true happiness?

Ask the children what they notice about the questions and the possible answers that have come out of their discussions. Issues that may arise include the array of answers



produced, how there is not always a 'wrong' or a 'right' answer and questions of interpretation. Here are some fun ways to raise awareness of the types of question and their purpose:

> Invite the children to divide your questions into categories. What would they call these? What questions can they add that would fit into each of those categories?

> Challenge small groups to come up with a question which makes others want to ask lots more questions. They could then try their question out on others in the room.

> Provide a list of answers. How many different questions and question types can be found for each answer? For example, 'String': What type of instrument is a violin / cello / double bass? What rhymes with 'bring'? What is my Dad's vest made out of? Or '12': What is 3 x 4? What is 11 + 1? What is a dozen? How many apostles were there?

Tip

Encourage the class to practise their use of open questions to open up their friends' thinking by suggesting scenarios to them for which open questions must be used to explore the issue further, or even solve it (e.g. they want to play with a group of children they don't know, but aren't ask). They may even find that they really listen and maintain rapport in order to keep their exploration going.



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