

Action Research

ACTION RESEARCH: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT'



Tom Lyons

2009

Can coaching strategies be applied to students so successful behaviours are achieved?

Steven Rhodes

INTRODUCTION

Context

At the Sixth Form College Farnborough it has been identified that in order for students to reach their full potential they should display successful learning behaviours. These behaviours focus on:

- Time management including
 - Deadlines
 - Punctuality
- Attendance
- Standards of work
- Language, attitude or behaviours in lessons

If there is a concern regarding a student not displaying successful learning behaviour then certain “stages” are put in place in order to help the student become a successful learner. These “stages” can be found in **appendix one** but just to summarise:

Stage One: Help is given by the Subject Tutor in line with their Curriculum Area guidance.

Stage Two: Student referred to Curriculum Manager who also follows Curriculum Area guidance. A CM1 letter would be written home official handing the matter on to the student’s Personal Tutor.

Stage Three: Student is referred to their Personal Tutor who will have discussions with student and provide support e.g. discuss emotional intelligent strategies, set up “contracts” to address the unsuccessful behaviours and monitor them.

Stage Four: Student is referred to a Lead tutor who again will discuss various strategies and put the student on “contract” and monitor them.

If at this stage the unsuccessful behaviour is not addressed then the student is referred to the Director of Careers and Guidance and it will become a disciplinary matter and the Disciplinary Procedures – Misconduct will apply.

I work at stage three in the above process and I wanted to know if I could use coaching methods to help students develop successful learning behaviours. Therefore my action research project was based around this idea.

Theoretical Background

When I did some initial research into how coaching methods have been used with students in the past I found a dearth of literature. I did however find quite a lot of information on how mentoring has been used with students (Bennetts, 2003). I then asked myself “how is coaching and mentoring different from each other?” a vital aspect to my action research project that needs elucidating.

Coaching vs. Mentoring

Coaching and mentoring are terms that have often been interchanged however this should not be the case. It is now recognised that while coaching and mentoring are both learning relationships and share that same outcome, helping people take charge of their own development and to release their potential to achieve results that they value (Connor and Pokora, 2007), the processes of arriving to the outcome is different. Coaching is generally seen as non directive in nature while mentoring is more directive but the boundaries between the two are fairly blurred (Ives, 2008). If we look at Figure one, we can start to see how the coaching and mentoring continuum may blur.

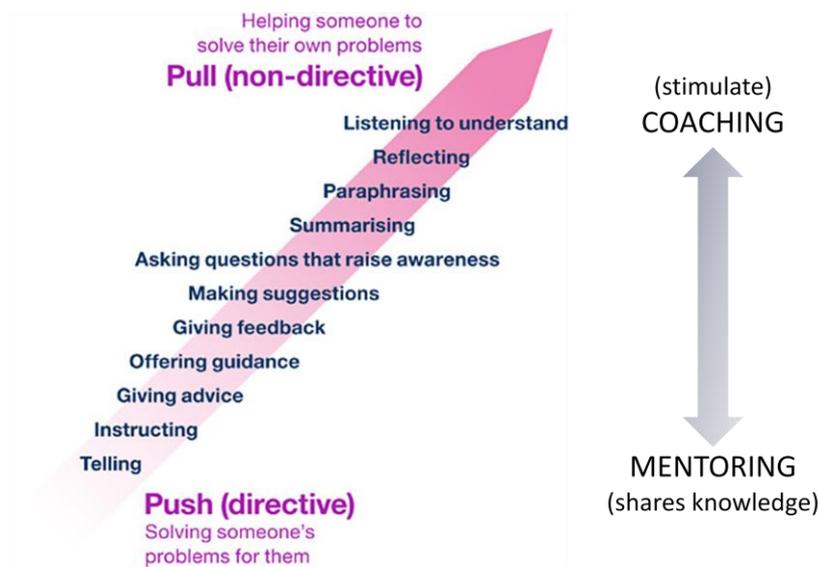


Figure one: The coaching and mentoring continuum (adapted from Excellence gateway)

Coaching techniques tend to involve ways of stimulating the coachee to come up with their own solutions to address their own needs. It is assumed that the coachee has all the inner resources and a wealth of experience to generate pathways forward and the coach uses open-ended questions to provoke thought, raise awareness, and to inspire motivation and commitment (Ives, 2008). Mentoring on the other hand is where the mentor shares knowledge and their skills with the mentee. Given this continuum it is not unusual for the coach to use some mentoring techniques and vice versa for the mentor when mentoring hence a lot of overlap between the two (Figure 2).

- Both require well developed interpersonal skills
- Both require the ability to generate trust, support, commitment, generate new actions through listening and speaking skills
- Both shorten the learning curve
- Both aim for the individual to improve his or her performance
- Both encourage the individual to stretch, but can provide support if the person falters or gets out of their depth
- Both provide support without removing responsibility
- Both stimulate personal growth to develop new expertise

Figure 2: Similarities between coaching and mentoring (adapted from Zeus and Skiffington, 2000)

Connor and Pokora (2007) outlines many other differences between coaching and mentoring, however during my action research project I tried to use the coaching skills of listening to understand, reflecting, paraphrasing, summarising and asking questions that raise awareness rather than those skills further down the coaching and mentoring continuum.

METHODS USED

Who to coach?

I initially wanted to coach students in my tutor group who had been issued a CM1 letter but I found these students few and far between. I then canvassed various teachers to see if they had any student who they thought would suit or in need of coaching. I received about six names and I sent an email to them explaining what coaching was, that they had been referred to me by a concerned teacher, and I invited them to discuss possible coaching sessions. The reason I invited them was because in order for coaching to be successful the coachee must want to take charge of their life, they must want to change. As Gray (2006) says "The coached client is someone who *wants* to reach a higher level of

performance, personal satisfaction or learning” (italics added) so if the student really did want to change then they would have replied to my initial invitation. This was not the case as I received no replies! In the end I sent a message to all Personal Tutors asking for students to be referred to me, these students were held accountable to their personal tutor for showing up to an initial meeting at least. I had 5 students to coach and all five came to an initial meeting. During this meeting I explained what coaching was and how it could help them and then again invited the students to be coached. All agreed so future coaching sessions were arranged. Table one provides information on who I coached, why they were referred to me and how many coaching session they attended after the initial meeting. For reasons of confidentiality I have assigned students a letter to replace their name.

Coachee	Profile	Number of coaching sessions
A	Male, second year, attendance, time management, learning attitude	0
B	Male, first year, attendance, time management, learning attitude in class	2
C	Male, first year, time management, learning attitude in class	6
D	Female, first year, attendance and learning attitude in class, time management	5 (left college)
E	Female, second year, attendance	4 (left college)

Table one: Coachee Profiles

The Coaching sessions

The timings of when the coaching sessions were held was quite crucial. I had to find a time that was convenient to both me and the student. The sessions were held when we had a common free period. This was very time consuming and proved problematic, this will be explored in my discussion. The coaching sessions were held in my office to avoid disruptions and the length of time they ran was determined by the coachee. It is important that length of meetings and frequency of the meetings is agreed upon to maintain the commitment to change (Connor and Pokora, 2007).

I used the GROW model as a framework to help structure the coaching sessions. GROW is an acronym for Goal, Reality, Options and Will (sometimes called Wrap up). The coaching sessions began by establishing the goal that the coachee would like to achieve; this goal may be a goal for the session or a goal for a series of sessions. This step is very important as it provides an end point to work toward. The next step in the process is for the coachee to explore their current situation or reality. The reality of the coachee or their current set of truths or beliefs is the starting point from which the coachee will move toward their goal. The next step is exploring all the possible options available for the coachee to move from their current reality to their goal. These options and barriers that may arise when taking a certain option are evaluated at this stage. Finally the coachee commits to action in the will stage and an action plan is set up. Sometimes all GROW steps may have all been explored in one session or only parts of the model so for some individuals moving through GROW may have taken two or more sessions. The questions that are used to make the coachee explore themselves and their situation when moving through GROW are very important. I therefore had a set of questions that I used to help the coaching session move along. I had to be flexible in their use but

they served excellent as prompts. A summary of the GROW model and possible questions can be seen in table two.

Acronym	Description	Example Questions
Goal	Coachee is asked to clarify what they want to achieve from each session(s). Determines the focus of coaching.	What do you want to achieve this session? How would you like to feel afterwards? What would be the best use of this time?
Reality	Raise awareness of present realities. Examine how current situation is impacting coachee's goals.	How have things gone in the past week? How have you handled any problems? What worked? What didn't work?
Options	Identify and assess available options. Encourage solution-focused thinking and brainstorming.	What possible options do you have? What has worked for you in the past? What haven't you tried yet that might work?
Will	Assist the coachee to determine next steps. Develop an action plan and build motivation.	What is the most important thing to do next? What might get in the way? Who might be able to support you? How will you feel when this is done?

Table 2: The GROW Model (Adapted from Spence and Grant, 2007)

How will it be measured?

I decided to measure the impact of the coaching sessions in three ways. I sent a survey to the coachee's subject teachers and asked them to comment on how well the coachee is doing in three separate areas focus in the lesson, quality of work bring produced and participation in the lesson. The subject teacher rated the student on a scale of one to ten for each of the focus areas for a four week period or 12 lessons. If coaching was effective in helping students establish successful learning behaviours I would have expected that the grade the students got would increase over the time they were being coached. The second measure was an analysis of the coachee's tutor log. The tutor log is a record of concerns that a teacher has sent to the coachee's personal tutor. This log in effect is a record of when unsuccessful learning behaviour occurs. I assigned a value of one to each incident so when graphed I would see is a reduction in logged complaints over the coaching period if coaching helped the coachee. The third measure was a qualitative survey given to the coachee once the coaching sessions had finished (see appendix two).

FINDINGS

All graphs supporting the findings can be found in appendix 3

Coachee A – no coaching sessions

After the initial meeting coachee A did not attend any coaching sessions. This was disappointing however the data collected will act as a set of base line data to compare other coachees. Looking at A's subject tutor survey and tutor log it can be seen that there has been no improvement in developing successful learning behaviours.

Coachee B – two coaching sessions

By looking at the data gathered on B it can be seen that there has been no visible effect of the coaching sessions as there was no increase in subject tutor grades over the period of coaching or a change in the pattern in logged behaviour.

Coachee C – six coaching sessions

Again by the data suggests that there is no visible difference of behaviours after coaching compared to after the coaching sessions.

Coachees D and E

Unfortunately these students having participated in a number of coaching session left the College without providing the chance to gather any data.

The Qualitative Survey

Even though the subject teacher survey and the analysis of the tutor log didn't show any visible improvement in achieving a successful learning behaviour, it seems that the students did think that their time management and attitude to private study had improved, an aspect not measured. There also seems to be a conflict in what the student thinks they are improving on and what the subject teacher observes, for example Coachee C believed his focus in lesson improved but this wasn't supported by the data gathered on this aspect.

Even though the data suggests that coaching has had no visible impact on helping students develop successful learning behaviours it is not to say that the coaching hasn't had an impact at all. It is quite possible that the coaching sessions prevented students from developing more unsuccessful learning behaviours and helped maintain the status quo. Additionally the coaching could have had some other effect which would manifest itself at a latter date. To say that the coaching sessions had no effect would be difficult to conclude also due to such a small sample size.

DISCUSSION

In this section I would like to discuss possible aspects of the coaching sessions and the GROW model that may have had an influence on the outcome of this action research project.

The first aspect that I feel had a big impact on the project was the method in which students were selected to be coached. When a student is referred, there is an agenda with which the student may or may not agree, in this case to develop successful learning behaviour. In order for coaching to work it is important for the coach and the coachee to sit down and figure out what the coachee wants, but unless the coachee chooses to be a partner in the learning relationship, the coaching will be unsuccessful (Connor and Pokora, 2007). If this was the case in my project it would have had a massive impact on the initial setting of the goal in the GROW model. For example it is quite possible that the student who was referred to me was developing a goal that they didn't necessarily want to achieve. They decided on the goal due to the circumstances set up i.e. they were influenced by the fact that they thought their behaviour was wrong because other people (i.e subject tutors and personal tutors) thought so, therefore they developed a goal not for themselves but to appease others. If the goal developed wasn't what the student really wanted to achieve then other steps in the GROW model would be pointless as the end point would not be where the student wanted to be. Given this scenario, even though the student was referred to me it is important to let the student set their own goals, not goals bound by a situational framework, but a goal that may have nothing to do with their studies, as long as the goal really is theirs. This brings up the question is coaching designed primarily to achieve specific aims or to develop the individual as a whole? In my case I was trying to help the coachee achieve an aim/goal (maybe not theirs) where as the sessions should have been to develop the whole student not just their academic life.

The options part of the grow model assumes that the coachee has all the inner resources and life experiences to be able to come up with appropriate options to move them from their current reality to their goal. But due to the age of our students and limitations of life experiences that come with age it can make it difficult to come up with all possible options forward. As Cavavagh (2006) says "sometimes no matter how long we ask the solution does not emerge, because it is not 'In' the client, nor are the raw materials available for it to emerge via a process of questioning". During the coaching sessions I did feel that the coachee was struggling to come up with, what I felt were good options. As a result their future actions were not as focussed as they could be. We must remember that we are teachers as well as coaches and our job as teachers is to help students so if a student is struggling it is ok to point them in the right direction, i.e. it is ok to mentor them as long as they do start to develop their own thinking skills in the process.

The will part of the GROW model was where the student had to come to some sort of action which was based on other sections of the model. Now as mentioned above if the goal and the options were incorrectly formed the action toward the goal will be unsuccessful. However assuming the GRO part

of the model was executed successfully there are still reasons why the action still may not bring about the desired consequences. It is very hard for someone to change their behaviour in isolation and often need support systems. Atkinsin and Amesu (2007) suggest “ it is imperative that staff within the young person’s school are prepared for their (*the student’s*) behavioural change so that they are able to respond in a supportive manner..... the school environment may need to be adapted..... for example a change of group”. At no time was a change of group considered but this just may have been the catalyst that drove the change in behaviour. Some time factor beyond the young persons control may be affecting their learning behaviour so again it is vital that the goal is fully explored to help the whole student which could eventually help all parts of the student’s life.

Other factors that may have influenced the coaching sessions could have been location and timing of the sessions. The coaching is supposed to be a collaborative and egalitarian relationship (Ives, 2008) but the physical location of the session may have put this in doubt. The sessions were held in my office which is in the Student Service corridor, as I am a personal tutor it could be likely that the coachee saw me as an authoritative figure and therefore the relationship was not egalitarian. The timing of the sessions had to fit in with my timetable and as a result, coachee A was asked to attend a coaching session period 5 on a Friday afternoon. I am not sure that he was willing to stay around for this but if the sessions were held at a more convenient time then at least there would be less competing activities that the coachee would like to do. The time allocated to each coachee may not have been sufficient in order to effect change and the sessions were just on the verge of helping the student with a visible change when they were stopped.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion to help students develop successful learning behaviours it is important to

- Have a mixture of coaching and mentoring techniques, pick and choose carefully when to use each as we still want to develop students who can think for themselves and by using too much mentoring there is a risk of handing out the answer without the thought process behind it
- Mentoring would particularly work well when it comes to helping students come up with options and ways forward, but coaching techniques could be used to help evaluate each of the options
- The goal must be the student’s real goal and can be anything the student wants to change because as teachers we are helping develop the whole individual not just their academic skills. Hopefully by the student addressing parts of their life that are causing them discomfort, a knock on effect may be felt in the classroom
- Students may need support through the change which may mean a change of teaching groups or once the student has publicly declared a willingness to change to their subject teachers and their personal tutors provide positive and quick feedback on the change
- The location of the coaching session may be held in a confidential place other than an office of someone who has an authoritative stature
- Allow plenty of time for the coaching sessions to have an effect not only for the student to really work through issues but also so a true rapport is built up, lessening the student teacher divide

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, Cathy and Amesu, Mawuli(2007)'Using Solution-Focused Approaches in Motivational Interviewing with Young People',*Pastoral Care in Education*,25:2,31 — 37
- Bennetts, C. (2003)'Mentoring youth: trend and tradition',*British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*,31:1,63 —76
- Cavanagh, M. (2006) Coaching from a systemic perspective: A complex adaptive approach in Stober, D. and Grant A. M. (Eds) *Evidence-Based Coaching Handbook*, Wiley, New York, N.Y.
- Connor, Mary Pokora, Julia (2007) *Coaching and Mentoring at Work : Developing Effective Practice* Open University Press
- Gray, D. E. (2006) Executive Coaching: Towards a Dynamic Alliance of Psychotherapy and Transformative Learning Processes, *Management Learning*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 475-497, SAGE, London.
- Ives, Y (2008) What is 'Coaching'? An Exploration of Conflicting Paradigms *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* Vol. 6, No.2, August
- Megginson, D., Clutterbuck, D. and Garvey, B.(2006) *Mentoring in Action : A Practical Guide for Managers* Kogan Page, Limited
- Passmore, J.(2005) The heart of coaching: Developing a coaching model for the manager *The Coaching Psychologist* • Vol. 2 No. 2 November
- Spence, G. and Grant, A.(2007)'Professional and peer life coaching and the enhancement of goal striving and well-being: An exploratory study',*The Journal of Positive Psychology*,2:3,185 — 194
- Stober, D. and Grant, A .(eds) (2006) *Evidence based coaching handbook* John Wiley and Sons Inc
- Zeus, P. and Skiffington, S. (2000) *The Complete Guide to Coaching at Work*. North Ryde, NSW. McGraw-Hill.

Websites

<http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/> accessed 12/06/09

Strategies for Supporting Success

Successful behaviour

These strategies are for students who need help to achieve success in the following:

- time management including
 - deadlines
 - punctuality
- attendance
- standard of work
- language, attitude or behaviour in lessons

Extenuating circumstances

In all cases, staff should check with students or Personal Tutors if there are any extenuating circumstances and modify their actions appropriately. They should ensure that where there are extenuating circumstances students are alerted to the support and guidance services in College including the Teaching 4 Learning team.

Stage	Help given by	Strategy
A ~ 1 week	Subject Tutor	Follow Curriculum Area guidance to support student to be more successful
B ~ 1 week	Curriculum Manager	Follow Curriculum Area guidance to support student to be more successful
First discussion ~ 1-2 weeks	Personal Tutor	Give support e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss emotional intelligence • Refer to Teaching 4 Learning team who will assess need, agree strategy with student and inform Personal Tutor
Second discussion ~ 2 weeks	Personal Tutor	1) Student draws up e.g. "Time management contract" using private study periods to catch up work in Curriculum Area or Teaching 4 Learning Centre – attendance verified by subject staff or Teaching 4 Learning team 2) Subject tutor(s) sign(s) contract to indicate that all necessary work is included
Third discussion ~ 1 week	Lead Tutor and Personal Tutor	Internal suspension: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) College contract drawn up by Lead Tutor 2) Student out of lessons and working in a Silent Study Area until work is completed, including work from missed lessons

We hope that after all this support the student's behaviour will change to one that results in success.

Disciplinary Procedures – Misconduct

If all these interventions prove unsuccessful and the matter is referred to the Director of Careers and Guidance it will become a disciplinary matter and the Disciplinary Procedures – Misconduct will apply.

Appendix 2

Post Coaching Questionnaire

1. What were your thoughts/ feelings/ expectations about coaching before we started?

2. What has been most helpful for you during the coaching sessions?

3. Comparing how you feel now to when we first started the coaching sessions, how have you, as an individual, improved?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = no effect, 10= a very positive effect), how would you rate the coaching sessions? Please expand on your judgement.

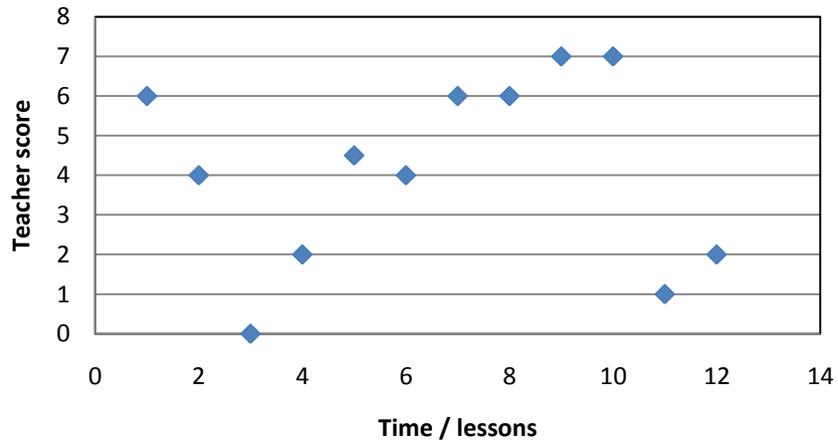
5. Did you have enough coaching sessions? Please expand on this answer.

6. Would you recommend it to others? Why? Why not?

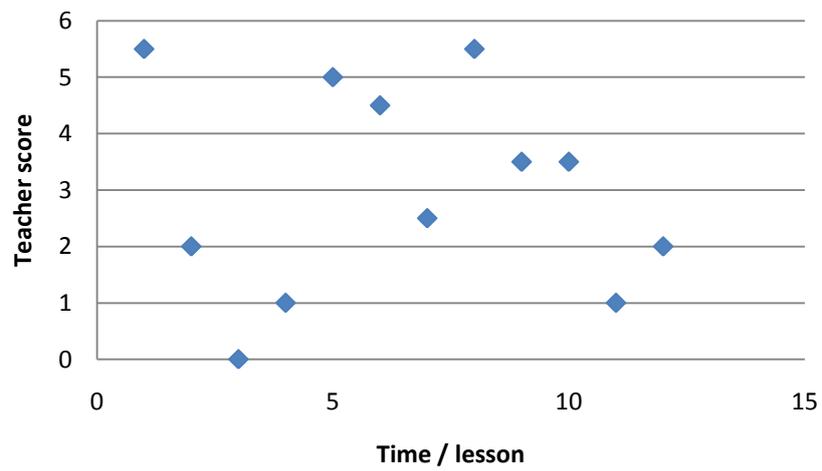
7. How can the coaching sessions be improved?

Coachee A – No coaching sessions

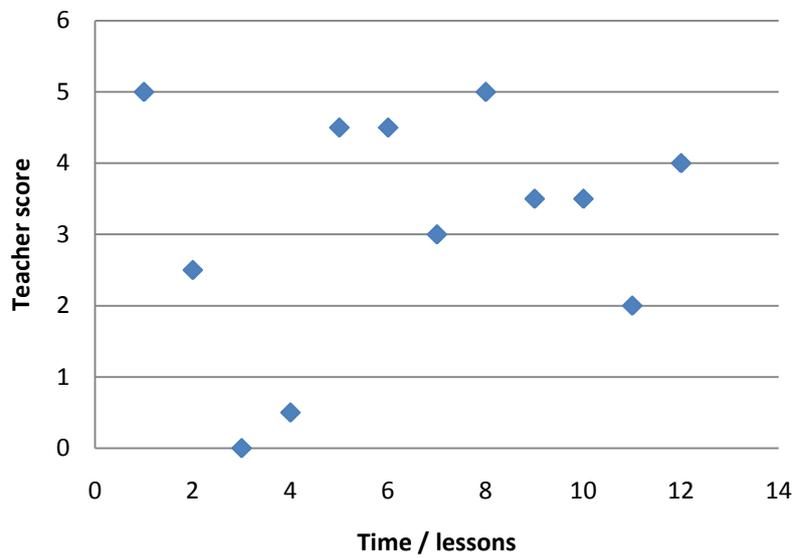
Focus in Lessons



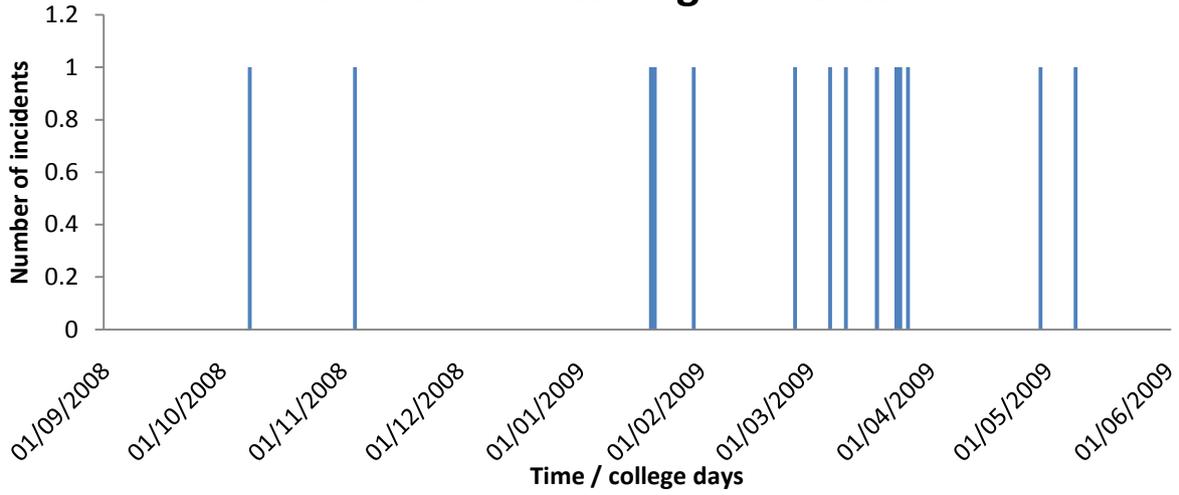
Quality of work



Participation in lessons

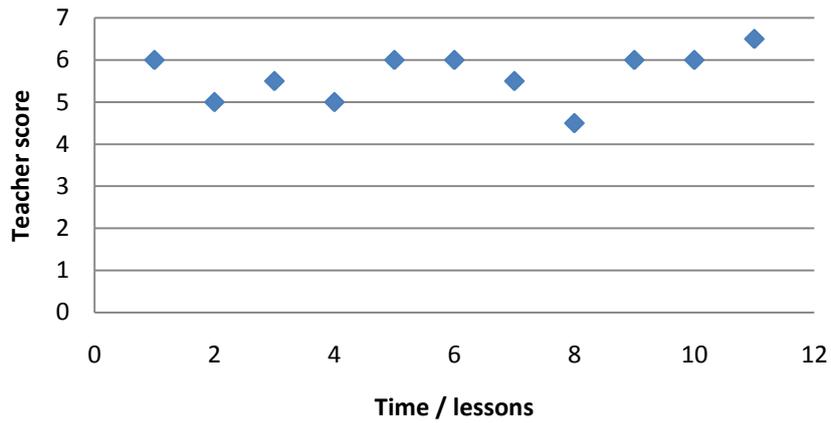


Student A Tutor log incidents

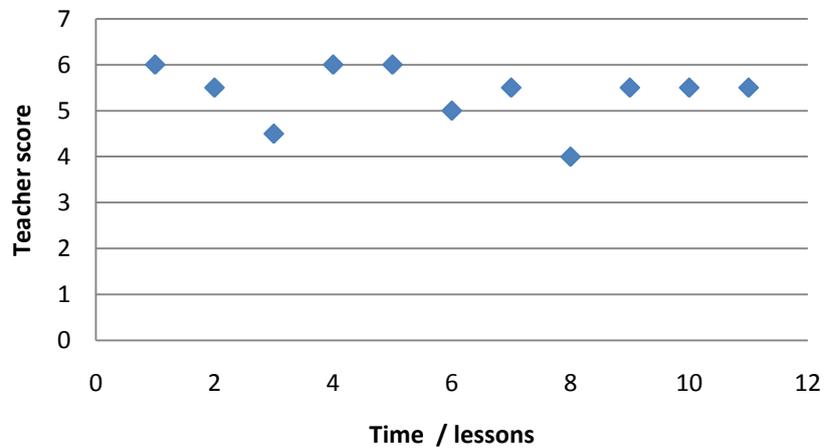


Coachee B – 2 coaching sessions

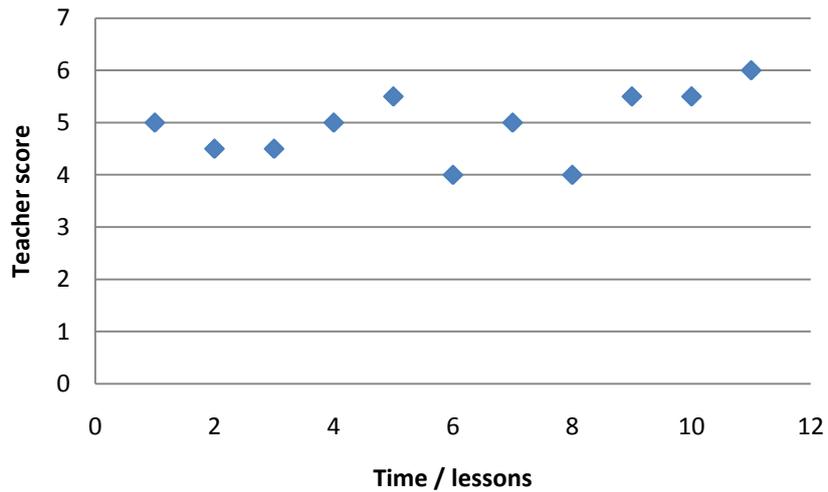
Focus in lessons



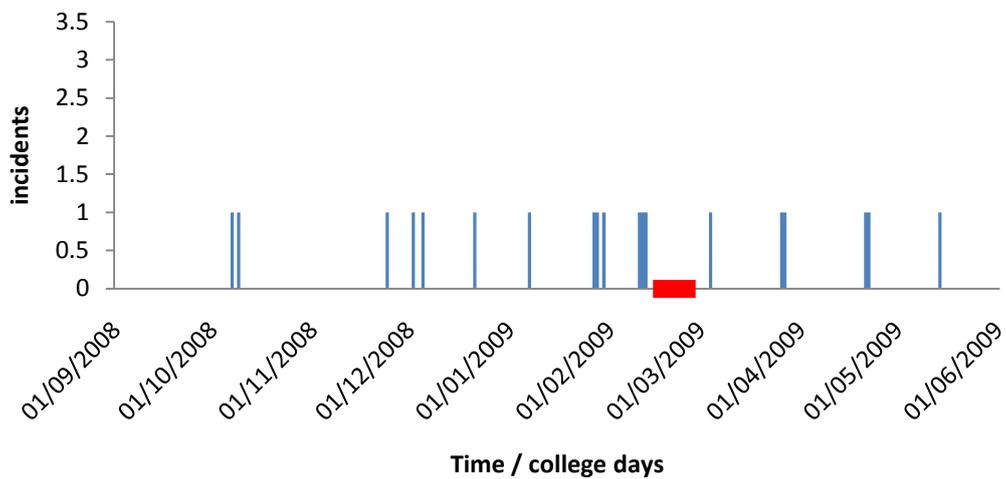
Quality of work



Participation in lessons



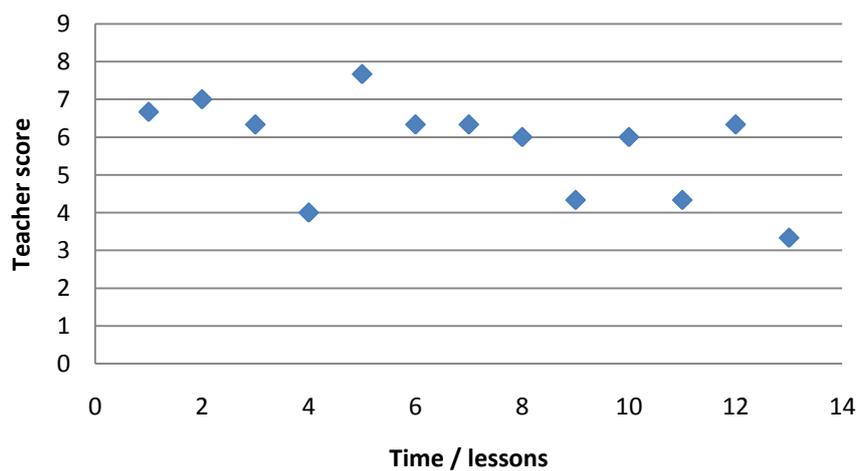
Student B Tutor log incidents



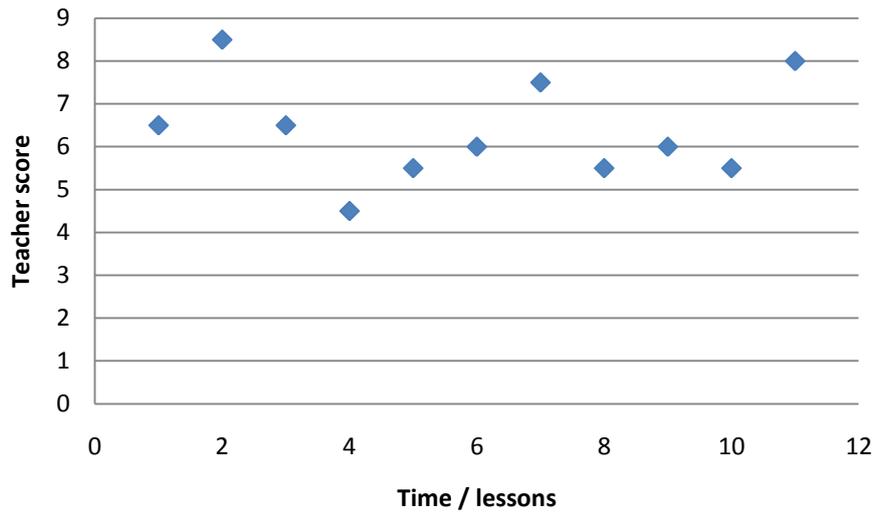
Note: Red indicates coaching sessions

Coachee C – Six coaching sessions

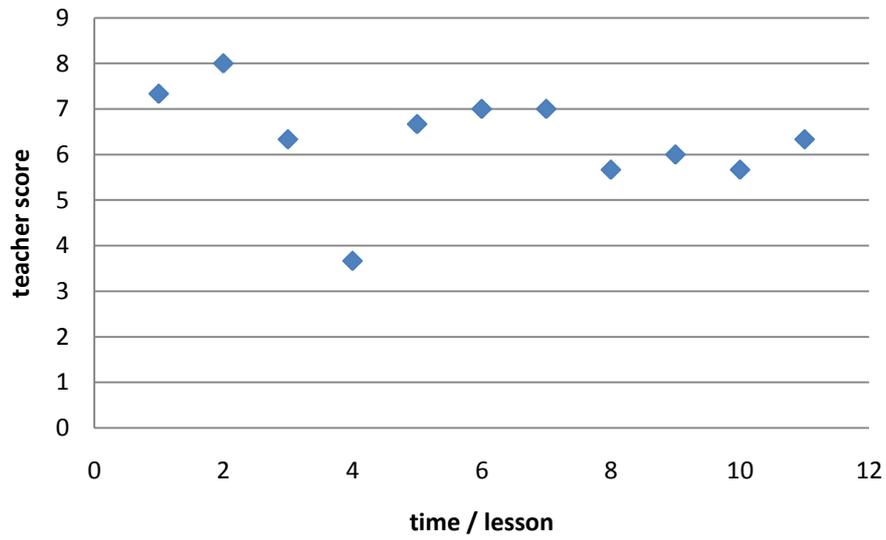
Focus in lessons



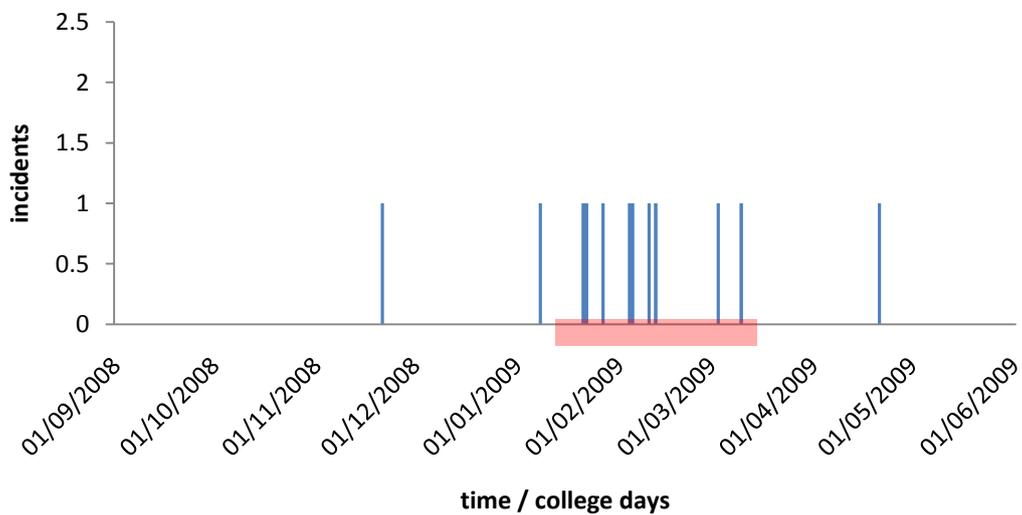
Quality of work



Participation in lessons



Student C Tutor log incidents



Note: Red section indicates coaching period

Action Research

www.farnboroughsfc2.ac.uk/research/arp.aspx

