Academic Paper

Empowering Educators: Exploring the Impact of Coaching on Mid-Career High School Teachers' Wellbeing and Professional Growth

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Abstract

The impetus behind the research was the recent industrial action by teachers, in both the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand (NZ), who were seeking better working conditions and an increase in pay, throwing teaching into the spotlight once again. The high attrition rates within the profession are well documented. We are in a time of crisis in education and the support offered to teachers has never been more crucial. UNESCO (2020). My teaching career spans 24 years, and the way in which teachers are supported to ride the waves of change and challenge has remained the same as when I attended teacher training college. The first two years of a newly qualified teacher journey in the UK and New Zealand are usually filled with mentor support, collegiality and governing body accountability followed by a void that can easily be filled with self-doubt, long hours, stress and pressure. I hope to offer a central location for some of the most influential research on coaching in education. I aspire to offer a springboard for future action research from a firm foundation of there being a clear argument for the benefits of coaching for mid-career high school teachers. The study behind this report focused on interviewing six teachers, two located in Auckland New Zealand and three teaching in the South of England. The sixth participant in the interview stage had been coached within the last two years as part of their professional growth. All teachers are classroom practitioners in the state system whose student age ranges from 10 to 18 years.

Introduction

The research behind this paper is intended to add to the existing literature of Joyce and Showers (2002), Knight (2019), See et al., 2020 and Müller, 2022, examining the efficacy of the coaching phenomena as applied to the world of secondary education. The research focuses on the narratives of a small group of secondary school teachers who have experienced coaching and found that commonalities existed in the stories of how coaching could be implemented in each setting and the benefits gained on a personal level.

This paper starts by reporting the teaching pressures that were illuminated by the participants of the study and ways in which they felt coaching supported them in their current role. This is followed by a presentation of the narratives provided by the teachers. The expansion into a critical analysis of internal or external coaching support needed to retain good educators and slow down the attrition rates will make up the mid-section of this paper with the discussion of coaching interactions and their implications for teacher growth and development.

The studies of Neal (2012), McCarroll & Lambert (2024) and Southworth (1995) focus on how to coach staff as a member of a school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) but little has been reported on what mid-career teachers say about being coached to support them in their desire to continue in the profession and remain happy and effective in the classroom.

The main purpose of this study was to report on the experiences of coaching from a teacher's perspective highlighting the importance of supporting teachers' wellbeing in a profession that undergoes constant change and challenges. The aim is to understand how coaching impacts teaching practices and overall wellbeing of mid career teachers and to emphasise the need for teachers to have tools and support systems in place to navigate the demands of their profession effectively. There has been relatively little written about this application of coaching, and it warrants a closer examination. The participants highlighted in their narratives a set of issues that were either common to all or very important to the individual. These issues were professionalism, working conditions, career progression, appraisal, stress, trust and professional development. The eighth participant (?) I have labelled 'under the spotlight'. This theme title was chosen as a result of teachers voicing their concerns about issues that they feel put them in the public eye including:

- being accountable to parents at, what are sometimes very difficult accusatory parent conferences
- being expected to build relationships with teenagers while at the same time implement school rules
- expected to be psychologist, therapist, mentor, disciplinarian and 'mother/father' to students
- the constant scrutiny and expectation to be the perfect teacher

In 2015 at Holland's University of Twente, researchers from Durham, Oslo, Rutgers and Harvard universities joined colleagues from ETS (USA) and DIPF (Germany) to discuss approaches around the thorny matter of measuring teaching quality. The discovery was that; 'The problem with measuring teaching quality starts with the simple fact that there is no agreement over a single, unified definition of it.' (TES, 2015).

Literature Review

In England the Department for Education's latest school workforce census data, published in June 2023, shows that 43,997 teachers left the profession in 2021/2022, an increase of 36,197 from the year before. (DfE 2022).
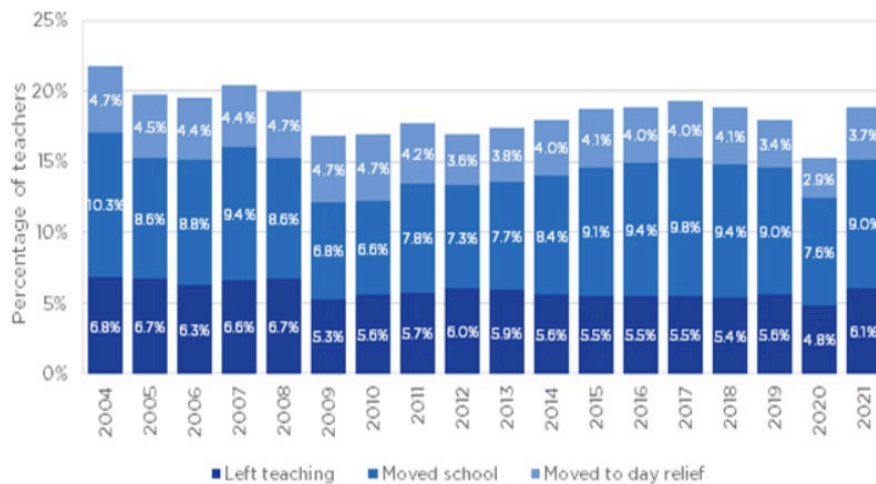
Figure 1: Teacher Turnover in England 2010 to 2020
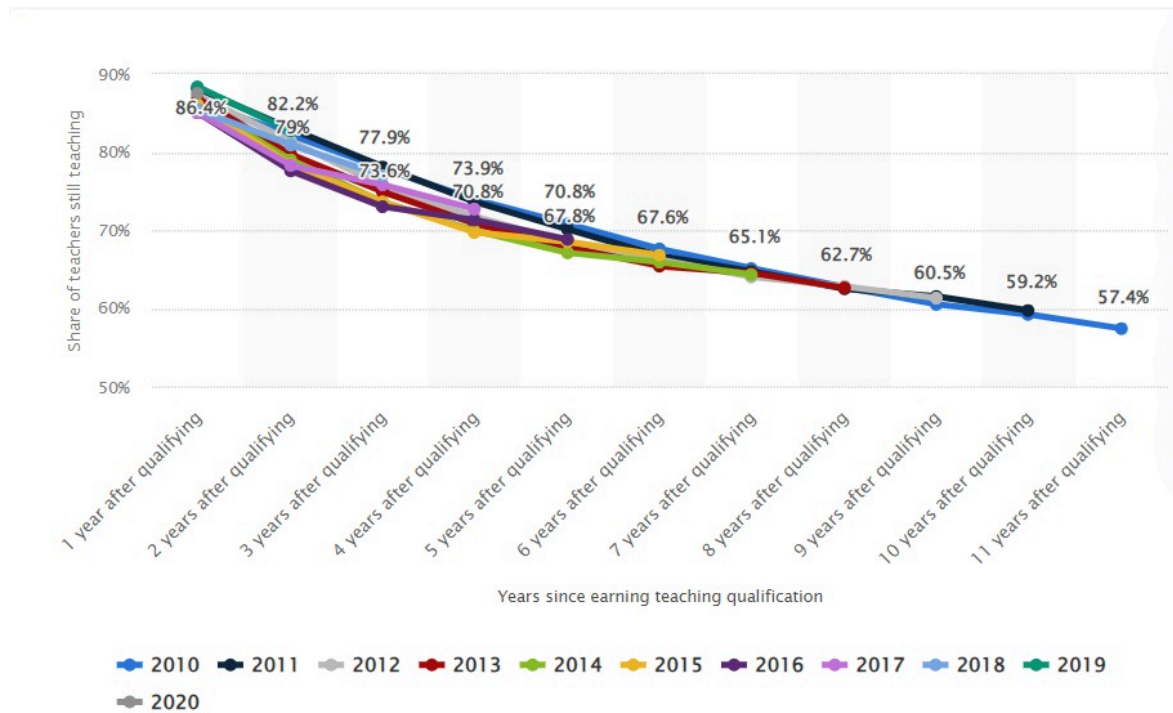
The New Zealand Government statistics for teacher turnover and retention (Education Counts, 2023) indicate that in 2021 the rate at which teachers left the profession was 8.1% compared to 6.9% in 2020.

Figure 2: Teacher Turnover in New Zealand 2020

What is notable in this graph is that in 2021 the percentage of those leaving teaching in New Zealand was higher than it had been since 2008. Another notable aspect, from my perspective, is the decrease in those switching to day relief teaching. Day relief is usually, in my professional experience, the path of transition that most of my colleagues have taken to retirement. In 2020 this

was only 2.9%; lower than any other year in this timeframe. The Covid pandemic may be a reason for this as schools were not open for instruction for some of that time in New Zealand but when they were opened many teachers were still sick with Covid and there were few relief teachers to take their place.

In 2021 more teachers than ever left the profession, and fewer teachers were available for day relief to fill that gap. This puts pressure on existing staff as they are, in most schools, required to cover classes of absent staff. Consequently, the time that teachers are allocated for marking, planning, administration and contact with caregivers, is diminished and these essential tasks have to be undertaken outside of school hours.

Mentoring in Education

The available literature on coaching and mentoring in education seems to mainly fall within the realms of leadership (van Nieuwerburgh, 2012), student outcome (Joyce and Showers, 2002), and teacher performance reviews (Lueger, 2006). However, there is little research on coaching for teacher wellbeing. With the rates of attrition on the rise, I feel this is an area that needs further attention to discover what is understood about the practices employed by school leaders and the education departments to stem the flow of teacher attrition. Concerns about teachers' wellbeing and their mental health have heightened since the pandemic (Müller, 2022). While this concern has been raised and discussed in several outlets – for instance in the recent issue of *Research Intelligence* (issue 152) and *BERA Bites* (issue 6), few evidence-based interventions have been suggested to address the problem. (See et al., 2020). These studies extol the importance of professional development for teachers and point to the need for educational institutions to provide resources and opportunities for teachers to continue learning and growing in their roles. Yet there remains a disconnect between what teachers say they need and what many schools provide.

By exploring the research on what is leading to a crisis in teacher wellbeing and retention, and what can be done to overcome the challenges teachers face in their roles, it became clear that a dearth of experiential evidence exists. While there are many policies, initiatives, and legislation that impact the teaching profession, there is often a lack of focus on how to support teachers' wellbeing in an ever-changing environment. Treating teachers and school leaders as professionals and providing them with the support and resources they need to succeed in their roles is essential for retaining quality educators in the field. There is an intellectual need for further research into coaching classroom teachers for their wellbeing.

The teaching role can be challenging, and many within the profession struggle with reconciling the reality of the role with the initial inspiration that led them to enter the profession (Alansari et al*.*, 2022). While it is understood that being an educator will not be without its challenges, the demands placed on teachers, both within and beyond the role of classroom facilitator, are progressing beyond the stimulating environment within which most teachers can thrive (Mielke, 2023).

There are many surveys available to aid research in understanding what challenges teachers face and what leads them to leave the profession. A key study that started the process of investigating the literature on the stresses that teachers face as possible evidence for why they leave the profession, was the annual Hauora/Health and Wellbeing Survey carried out by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI). In 2019, 201 secondary teachers and principals took part, and of those 62% cited **burnout** due to workload as the reason for their wishing to leave the profession, 51% cited worklife **balance** and 35% **remuneration**. Of the teacher respondents to a nationwide survey in Australia, 21% said the reasons for their current dissatisfaction with the profession was **workload** pressure, burnout and **wellbeing** related issues, and the low **esteem** experience by teachers in the public discourse (Longmuir et al., 2022).

Methodology

A large body of research in education has multiple limitations, primarily because researchers do not always craft their conclusions in ways that are applicable to actual teaching situations (Sharpes, 2015). Sharpes (2015) suggests that statistics help researchers find new uniformities among people and their actions. My research was not focused on patterns of similarity purely because teachers are so diverse and few that I know think, behave, and experience teaching in the same way. I was looking for something more expansive and enlightening, providing a way by which teachers can share with me their ideas and thoughts on a phenomenon and be listened to in a way that would present their narrative with a large measure of honesty and respect.

The strength of the research behind this study is heightened by co-constructing a unique pathway for each of the participants to guide them in moving from a 'situation' in their professional lives to a secure place of autonomously being able to implement strategies to assist them in the future, making this research very much 'applicable to actual teaching situations'.

In the process of evaluating the methodologies available to me I considered the following aspects of my research: focus, participants' perspective, an exploration of subjectivity, the open ended nature of the enquiry, the small sample size chosen and the time constraints.

Phenomenography offers a framework that was designed by the Department of Education, University of Gothenburg, Sweden and was intended to answer questions about thinking and learning (Marton, 1986). Phenomenography facilitates solid links between research, educational development, and change (Brauer, 2023). It offers a way of studying the different framings of phenomena in the world around us (Marton, 1988). The purpose of my study was to collect the narratives of teachers who have been coached and examine the language they used to describe their teaching situation as well as their experience of coaching as a possible support for their wellbeing.

It is also important for me to report their opinions of the possible transferability of this wellbeing to their teaching practices and interactions with students within the classroom. This last point arose from literature that suggests the reciprocal effects of teacher well-being has a positive outcome on their instructional behaviour (Aldrup et al., 2018). The research question here focuses on the teacher stories which convey an 'issue' they are facing and how they express the opinion that the coaching did or perhaps did not help them. In the realm of educational advancement and professional development, coaching has recently emerged as a pivotal tool for enhancing teaching practices, promoting reflective pedagogy, and facilitating teacher growth (Blazar and McNamara, 2020). This phenomenological research embarks on a journey to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of coaching experiences among trained educators, aiming to uncover the diverse ways in which coaching influences their professional journey and supports them in tackling the 'issues' they face.

Choosing a narrative approach was a logical step for this study because I am, like many teachers, a storyteller, and giving voice to challenges faced by the teachers in this study is important to me. The narrative enquiry methodology is relationship based, and is used to study the nature of peoples' experiences. Even the way that we understand ourselves is based around our own stories (Bachkirova, 2016). The self is seen as a narrative construction, an aspect of human nature (narrator) that explains the view of the self that we consciously and linguistically conceive. The way that we express our reality to others is through language and the choice of language can also be interpreted differently depending on the listener. Language is the basic tool of constructionism. It is through language that discourses are constructed to produce or represent a particular version of events or people (Burr, 1995 in McIlveen, Schultheiss, 2012).

Findings

During the interview process I drew on terms such as: "If I am understanding what you are saying", "Can you clarify what you mean by that", and "Please expand on that point for me". By presenting the participants' contributions as quotations, my aim is to limit the chance of erroneous interpretation of their narratives. When considering the benefits of coaching to each participant their answers support the idea that coaching could be installed in schools as an avenue for exploring their strengths, ambitions and career aspirations as well as providing them with a way to recognise what they can or should change about their situation.

Professionalism

Although the aim of this research was not to focus on teaching as a recognised profession, the status of teachers in terms of the challenges they face became important. In the current climate, teachers seem to be negatively impacted by external control and influences to be able to see the positives in their professional lives and convey them to the wider public. If teaching is not a recognised profession, then the question remains, how can they be paid as such. It is suggested by Lortie (2002), that the reason teaching may not be regarded with the prestige teachers would like, is that for almost two hundred years those who were responsible for teaching in schools were not subject to any form of specific preparation or training (Lortie, 2002).

Working Conditions

Through coaching Elle found the confidence to draw a line and recognise when something was too much and said this was an essential takeaway from the coaching saying…

> "From now on I'll do it how I can manage it. When I'll have time allocated, I'll make sure that things are in the right place for it to happen. Yeah, so I'm not going back down the hole. I can manage it and enjoy it. You'll be saying you enjoy your work now and you're enjoying the coaching and with more time to put into what's important you can get fulfilment."

Ollie was adamant that they did not want to get overwhelmed by the teaching role "And I think, as a newer teacher it's really important not to get burnt out."

Aggie mentioned not feeling in control of what was happening around them 11 times in the transcript of their interview. Coaching enabled them to take a step back saying coaching;

> "gave me practical steps that I could do in order to feel a little bit more in control and a little bit better that I was doing something. Whereas previously I guess I just felt powerless about all these massive issues that I had no control over".

Career Progression

Nic aspired to progress their career wanting to stay a classroom teacher was important to them but they were bored and needed a challenge. They were unable to see any career progression or development in the position of classroom teacher at a secondary school.

"So I was quite bored in my role. And I couldn't see any natural pathways for career progression or for career development in my role. It was this feeling of stagnation that led me to seek out assistance from a career coach".

Appraisal

B was adamant that the coaching initiative that was trialed in their school (but never got off the ground in its entirety due to Covid) was welcomed because it was put forward as a collegial exploration of teaching practices and not linked to appraisal. "It was a system that relies on teachers self-identifying as being ready for coaching."

Nic expressed their appreciation of external coaching eloquently.

> "So for me to have this individual coaching, which had nothing to do with anyone's else's expectations of me or performance management factors allowed me the freedom to explore beyond what I thought was possible."

Stress

Aggie recognised that they were stressed because of the pressure placed on the staff by management. They had physical manifestations such as neck pains due to tension. Coaching helped them realise the reasons for the tension were…

> "I couldn't control all the things that management the principal were expecting us to do. We were told to get the kids to class and yet 'they' weren't doing anything to tackle the problem. My conversation with the coach kind of started around like how rude kids were and how much wagging was happening and the fact that I had given up trying to get these kids to class because there were just too many. Then during our coaching we narrowed it down to, okay what would be manageable for me to feel better that I wasn't defeated in that sense."

Trust

Hattie (2015b) highlights the importance of having safe and trusting places for teachers to explore ideas, to make and to learn from errors and to use expertise to maximise successful learning. All the participants of this research referred to trusting the external coach they had worked with because of their detachment from their school.

Lou expressed the coaching opportunity coming along at just the right time because they were facing challenges in having to explain why test scores might be down that term and was considering a move to a school where a more holistic approach is taken to considering student learning…

> "It is getting worse with the expectation that teachers are solely responsible for student achievement. There are so many mitigating factors and yet my school management are not trying to find ways we can all work together to view achievement differently."

Professional Development (PD)

I aimed to find out if coaching, offered as part of a PD programme, could support teachers through challenging times. Campbell and van Nieuwerburgh (2017) suggest that there are indications that being coached helps educators be more effective in their roles. In their study of 1,027 mathematics and science teachers in America, Garet et al. (2004) propose that professional development for teachers is frequently criticised on the grounds that the activities are disconnected from one another and individual activities do not form part of a coherent program of teacher learning and development. There is little direct evidence on the extent to which the current characteristics of PD relate to positive outcomes for teachers.

Aggie mentioned their school 'calling back' teachers during non-instructional days for PD. They said that staff are not consulted about what PD they wish to participate in and there is nothing like coaching, mentoring, collegial group work to build confidence and resilience...

> "Teachers can feel more in control of their professional development if they have a say in what it will be but all our personal inquiry goals now have to be linked to the school wide goals and the school wide goals are based on achievement. This leaves no room for requesting PD for well-being or job satisfaction."

In summary there is evidence that professional development is a hot topic in education. Despite there being little research in the efficacy of coaching for teachers there are obvious links between the uptake of professional development if it is linked to the needs, values and goals of teachers. Even the most recent and greatly anticipated literature by leading authors Oberholzer, L. *a senior lecturer in teacher education at the University of* Wolverhampton and Boyle, D. who is the director of the school centred initial teacher training (SCITT) at a school in Hayes, seem to miss a key component of coaching in education and that is the coaching of mid-career classroom teachers. Their research focuses on 9 elements within school ranging from initial teacher training to coaching for headteachers but no mention of the vast majority of mid-career classroom teachers whose career aspirations are to remain in the classroom.

Discussion

The findings of this study hold the promise of enriching the educational landscape by providing educators, coaches, and educational institutions with valuable insights into the dynamics of coaching interactions and their implications for teacher growth and development. The 'issues' discussed during the coaching sessions and recounted to me in the interview stage provided a clear correlation with the findings of the teacher surveys interrogated for inclusion in the literature review of Burnout, Work life balance, Remuneration, Workload, Wellbeing, Low esteem.

Elle was clear that "It's not effective to work under such pressure without the whole well-being packaged. We need the whole well-being package, we need balance in our lives"

Coaching is often defined as "non-hierarchical and does not depend on any expert/subject specific knowledge." (ibid.). There is general agreement with van Nieuwerburgh (2012), that coaching is a managed conversation that takes place between two people, that it "aims to support a sustainable change to behaviors or ways of thinking, and that it focuses on learning and development." Coaching has been defined as the art of facilitating the performance, learning, and the development of another (Downey,1999). This leads on to the next issue raised by the participants; the place of internal or external coaching in teaching.

External and internal coaching

The mode of coaching that would be most appropriate for use in school is highly dependent on the organisational culture of the school. Cox (2012) discusses the importance of external coaching for managers and executives who may find it difficult to benefit fully from a peer coaching relationship or internal coaching. Their position in the organization and the level of responsibility demands an external coach who is not enmeshed or likely to be involved in organizational politics. When external coaching is used, there is an important distinction between "relationships where the goal of both parties is just instrumental and where the goal also involves the development of relationship products such as trust and friendship or relational capital." Cox (2012 pg. 10). This is significant to the current study of coaching for teachers as the data collected suggests that many of the participants felt external coaching would eliminate feelings of mistrust.

Joss expressed that they felt in 'a safe space' to discuss their journey honestly with external coaching…

> "It is your own journey, and especially if you're having someone that's outside of your school or your space, because I feel like teachers are always worried about being judged or being observed or anything like that."

External coaching shapes our anticipation of how the other will behave. Thus, some of the social complexity of the dyadic relationship is reduced through recognition of the role of the external coach. It is essential to build an environment of trust free from judgement or power inequity (Netolicky, 2015). When external coaches are brought into an organization, trust may come as part of the professional package (Cox, 2012). Offering teachers external coaching could alleviate some of the potential problems of power disparity and the reluctance of teachers to open up with vulnerable ways in an internal coaching relationship. Netolicky (2015) states that coaching for empowerment and capacity-building benefits from a non-hierarchical relationship.

Empowerment was a crucial element for Aggie during our conversation and they expressed that..

> "Through coaching, teachers can recognize the areas where they do have control and provide strategies to address challenges, leading to a greater sense of empowerment."

All the teachers coached for this study reported increased feelings of wellbeing that they attributed to the coaching they received. They spoke of the transferability of feelings of positivity to their teaching practices and interactions with students within the classroom.

Supporting teachers to navigate through a career that can be demanding and stressful, could stem the flood of those leaving the profession. Creating an environment in which teachers feel secure enough to share and examine their experiences, struggles, and motivations could be provided by coaching. There was no intention of formulating a link between coaching and increased teacher retention. However, on the shoulders of this study, the focus can now switch to investigating the provision of future professional development being teacher-led, there to support teachers in an ever-changing and sometimes demanding environment. If coaching is seen as a supportive pathway to fostering a growth mindset in teachers, then this option should be investigated further.
  Teachers are expected to be; subject specialists, counsellors, pedagogues, motivators, and leaders. Much school-wide professional development is a one-size-fits-all instructional approach whereas coaching is likely to be more effective because it is purposefully differentiated. (Hampton, Rhodes and Stokes, 2004).

The findings of my research suggest that the teachers in my sample benefitted from the coaching conversations and the support they received. All expressed that coaching being offered as an element of professional development could help them in retaining their growth mindset and establishing a feeling of well-being and being valued by senior management. A coaching culture in any organisation will only be successful when coaching is committed to and properly understood at the most senior level (Hawkins, 2012). The consensus from my participants was that internal coaching would be very challenging due to the intimacy of the coaching relationship and the delicacy of the subjects broached. They all stated that the coaching offered through this study gave them anonymity away from their school setting allowing them to discuss their stresses with a non-biased advocate.

Each was asked if they felt coaching had benefited them and all answered in the affirmative. Elle said "So much so that I am going to use coaching conversations in my role as much as possible. This will give me the opportunity to work with people individually, alongside them."

While Nic suggested, "Even though at the time I didn't realise how much but in 2016 I applied for a job in the university sector, because I started exploring and looking at jobs outside of the norm

because the coaching process helped me realise I had the skills and confidence to do it."

Joss agreed, commenting "Oh, yeah, like 100% definitely" and Ollie indcated "I think that it was helpful in that it can kind of changed my mindset of how, I could work. If the opportunity arose I would do it again.". Similarly, Aggie suggested,

"I think the guidance helped in order to move me out as I said of all the other things that I was moaning about that were impacting me and just to have the recognition that a lot of that was outside my control. I could focus on one thing that I could implement (focus on getting one boy to every class, every day) to make me feel like I was doing something worthwhile."

Finally, Lou concluded "I have had coaching during my teacher training and that is why I jumped at the chance of doing it again for your study. I had forgotten just how effective it can be and am so glad I experienced it again."

Conclusion

Despite the pressure teachers are placed under to provide quality education to all students regardless of ability, diversity and educational challenges, it is my experience, and the literature supports this view, that there is little for them in terms of supporting their wellbeing in a profession that is in a constant state of flux. As Fullan (2012) has long argued, teachers are not unfamiliar with change. Change is their life, to the point at which many are inured to it.

Set against a background of constant policy reform and curriculum change, my discussions with teachers sought to explore the ways they perceive their experiences of coaching. I collaborated in conversations with each teacher participant, in order for them to explore their own narrative and fully articulate to me how they 'felt' about the coaching taking them from point A to point B. If indeed that is what coaching did for them. We embarked on a journey of curiosity that paved the way for them to arrive at a conclusion from an enlightened perspective. 'Through conversation we form and reform our life experiences and events; we create and recreate our meanings and understandings; and we construct and reconstruct our realities and ourselves.' (Anderson, 1997 pg. xvii).

Outcomes from this study show that a teacher's perception of the value of a coaching experience is intrinsically linked to the availability of coaching as a recognition of teacher effectiveness and support in encouraging continual professional development. It was evident that it should not be linked to performance and appraisal. Following an ideology of students consolidating knowledge through meaningful engagement with the content, their peers, and their teachers, leads to better learning outcomes for students, and I believe on the basis of this study, the same to be true of the learning outcome for teachers. We construct better pedagogy when we learn in collaboration with other educators or, as in this study coaches. This is supported by the recent review of school leadership research, Coe et al. (2022), which identified that teacher collaboration is more likely to drive improvements in pupils' learning when teachers work together in ways that support, enhance and challenge each other with feelings of trust towards peers that engenders feelings of affiliation to the team and organisation.

All the teachers who were coached for this study reported increased feelings of well-being that they attributed to the coaching they received. They spoke of the transferability of feelings of positivity to their teaching practices and interactions with students within the classroom. Supporting teachers to navigate their way through a career that can be demanding and stressful, could stem the flood of those leaving the profession. Creating an environment in which teachers feel secure enough to share and examine their experiences, struggles and motivations could be provided by coaching. There was no intention of formulating a link between coaching and increased teacher retention; however, with this study in mind, attention can now be directed towards exploring teacher-led

initiatives for future professional development, aimed at aiding educators in navigating an evolving and occasionally challenging landscape. If coaching is perceived as a beneficial avenue, it warrants further exploration. Teachers are tasked with fulfilling multiple roles such as subject specialists, counsellors, pedagogues, motivators, and leaders. While many school-wide professional development efforts employ a uniform instructional method, coaching stands out for its potential effectiveness due to its tailored approach, as suggested by Hampton, Rhodes and Stokes (2004).

The findings of my research suggest that the teachers in my sample benefitted from the coaching conversations and the support they received. All expressed that coaching being offered as an element of professional development could help them in retaining their growth mindset and establishing a feeling of well-being and being valued by senior management. A coaching culture in any organisation will only be successful when coaching is committed to and properly understood at the most senior level (Hawkins, 2012).

Advocating for the support of external coaching for teachers is aligned with the work of John Whitmore and his development of the GROW model, with which my participants were familiar within their school settings, shows that coaching has at its core the practice of empowering a person to expand their understanding of what they are capable of. There is a paradox in that teachers use models of support for their students and yet many do not enjoy similar levels of support from their schools.

Maintaining the passion for teaching once the support for the newly qualified teacher, and in New Zealand the fully registered teacher, comes to an end is when the hard work begins. I have experienced firsthand how hard it can be to face what seems to be an insurmountable challenge to the personal identity of a teacher when they are supposed to have undergone the training and are now equipped with the skills to cope in the classroom. Asking for help and support from an already overworked, and in many cases under resourced, department head comes with its own sense of failure. Would chasing the dream of being the Mary Poppins of teaching be attainable if continued professional development is supported by a coaching culture in a school? These are all questions that have arisen during my interviews with participants and, although not initially the focus of this research, it has opened an avenue to further study.

Australia is at the forefront of research into teacher training and retention, and much has been done there to investigate the reasons for an estimated 25 percent of teachers leaving the profession within five years (Kid, Brown and Fitzallen, 2015). A small study by Halford (1998) showed that the teacher who had been mentored was still in the profession seven years on, while the teacher who had not been mentored left after six months feeling overwhelmed. Although this is a very small sample it is backed by my own experiences of being mentored as a new teacher.

Google 'magic wand in teaching' and it is clear there is a belief that the wand exists. What magic wand would a teacher wave if they could have just one wish (Morrison 2007)? The answer to this question may change over time as the teacher overcomes each new barrier to learning in their classroom. For the new teacher, it will likely be the classroom management wand (Cowley, 2014). For the second year teacher it might be the student engagement wand and for the experienced teacher that wand might be more useful in the area of securing funding and resources for their department. Among the most powerful interventions in schools today is providing teachers with information as to where they are going, how they are going to get there, and what they need to go to the next phase (Hattie, 2012). Through my interrogation of the narratives of those participating in my study I found that all expressed a similar journey in their teaching career. Although I was not looking for patterns, I was interested to see if coaching was perceived as a useful tool to tackling the issues that arise for teachers at various stages through their careers.

Much of the available literature draws on classroom management as a key to a successful teaching career and one that contributes to the longevity of those able to master it. As a teacher who has

mastered the relationships within my classroom, I was still seeking more ways to support my own as well as my students' learning. Coaching was never an option for me as a teacher and, now that I have some influence over what support is offered to teachers in my own school, I will ensure that building a coaching culture is the way forward, toward an environment where internal or external coaching is available to all teachers who desire it.

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About the author

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