Exploring the role and practice of an emergent coach mentor for transformative and sustainable learning in the early years

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Abstract

In this assignment I aim to explore the dynamics of mentoring and coaching practice as somewhat interlinking and overlapping, yet separate methods to support the career and personal development of early years educators. I consider the role of and Early Years specialist as an emergent coach mentor who practices an integrated approach, adopting both directive and non-directive coaching and mentoring practice, depending on the learner and the context.
The assignment draws on current research on the skills implemented by a coach or a mentor and explores their application in an integrated approach by an Early Years Specialist in supporting early years educators to develop quality practice. Schratz and Walker's (1995) 'Capability Learning Cycle' theory demonstrates adult learning processes that relates well to Knowles' (1970) assumptions of andragogy and serves as useful knowledge to recognise how educators become aware of their need for learning and the cycle the new learning goes through before becoming embedded in their practice. I discuss that to achieve the role of an emergent coach mentor it is important to thoroughly develop the skills and techniques required to be able to apply these in an expert way as the situation requires and not fall in to a trap where we are practicing a lot of techniques that are only understood on a superficial level. Peer mentoring and joint visits would support a deeper level of skill and technique development and greatly aid the EYS specialist to develop the expertise required of an emergent coach mentor.

Keywords: coaching, mentoring, early years, learner focus, change.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to critically reflect on the arguments for and against coaching and mentoring in my professional practice. In the following essay I aim to discuss how a Better Start Early Years Specialist (EYS) adopts practices from both coaching and mentoring during the quality development process with early years services and consider practical, ethical, problematic, philosophical and controversial issues that influence the implementation of these approaches. I will synthesise theory of coaching and mentoring practices with reflection on my own role and approaches to inform this discussion.

2. Review of my learning so far

In the previous essay I critically evaluated mentoring paradigms and reflected on their application to practice in light of my role as an EYS. During the first assignment, I was a 'novice mentor' working with my first early years services (Merrick and Stokes, 2003; cited in Garvey, *et al.* 2008: 169). Having now completed mentoring cycles (which lasted six to ten months) with a number of early years services, the lens that I view coaching and mentoring has changed. I can now clearly stand back and see the 'bigger picture' of all of the dynamics that are at play in the coaching and mentoring process. In the previous essay, I explored my application of the coaching and mentoring theory

and skills in to practice, I now wish to focus on the perspective of the mentee in the mentoring process and the context within which the mentoring occurs. I also aim to consider how mentoring can support sustainable quality development through implementing approaches that are learner focused. In the previous assignment the mentee is described as a 'legitimate other'. Sieler (2009, cited in Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2009: 57) advocates respecting the path the coachee wishes to discover as the learning that takes place will only be as effective as they will permit. For the purpose of this essay, the mentee is still regarded as a co-learner with the mentor in the process. Coachee/mentee/early years educator will be used interchangeable throughout the essay and all refer to the learner in this regard.

I reflected on my practice in light of Clutterbuck's (2014) diagram 'four basic styles of helping to learn'. In summary, the first dimension concerns directive and non-directive methods employed by the coach/mentor. Directive instruction is adopted in more traditional mentoring approaches where the mentor guides and gives advice. Directive mentoring adopts a deficit approach where the coach mentor engages with the early years educator to identify their weaknesses or areas that they need to develop (Salter, 2015). Non-directive facilitation is utilised where the learner is in need of some counselling or listening support and the coach or mentor adopts a more facilitative style where they practice a lot of 'questioning, listening and clarifying' (Salter, 2015). The second dimension of stretching and nurturing is about the learning need of the individual, if they need to be challenged or stretched, or supported and nurtured. Clutterbuck (2014: 10) states that "The essence of effective mentoring is that mentors have the ability to move along the dimensions, in any direction, in response to their observation of the learner's need at the time". Upon reflection, I discovered that many

of the mentoring skills that I had adopted were of a more directive nature where I gave advice and offered suggestions and ideas before giving the early years educator the opportunity to think of solutions or tease out the real issues at play in the situation at hand. When I recognised my approach and I realised the effect it was having on the early years educators' learning journey, I was inspired to make a conscious effort to vary my approaches more based on building a relationship with the mentee, tuning in more to the mentees stage of development, facilitating the learning centred on the mentees priority areas of practice and becoming more informed of the essential ingredients that enhance adult learning. I also became more aware of my interpersonal skills and have been working to improve my ability to actively listen, pause and wait, responding appropriately, for example, using an open ended question, interpret and analyse, support and placate (Rogers, 1961, cited in Rodd, 2006). Each educator in each room in each service has different knowledge, skills, interests and needs and our role should focus on these and support the educator by adopt practices that recognise, support and build on these. Participation in regular reflective practice by journaling, engaging in conversation with colleagues and having a reflective space in support in supervision where my co-ordinator has asked those probing questions at the right time, has been instrumental in developing my coaching and mentoring skills and knowledge.
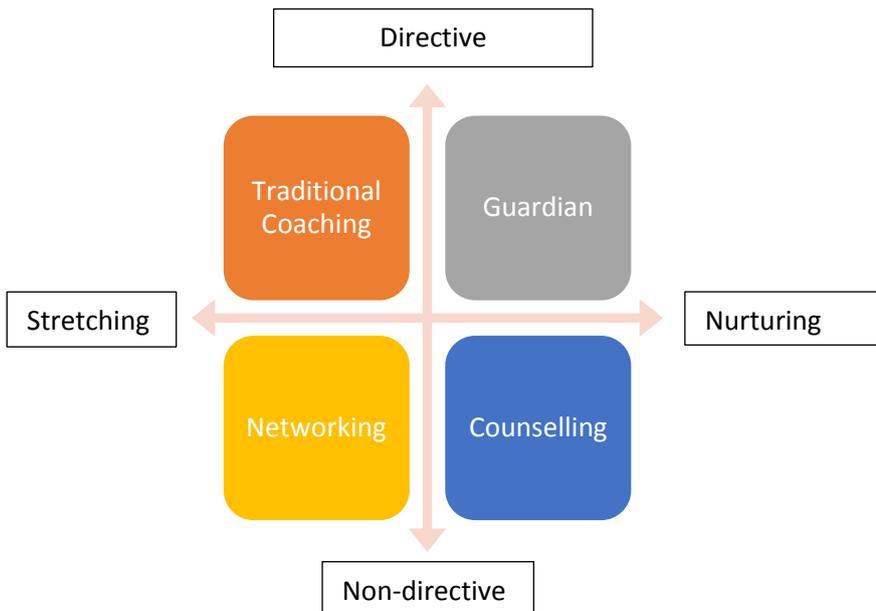
Diagram 1: Four basic styles of helping to learn (Clutterbuck, 2014: 10)

3. Defining the role of the Early Years Specialist, coach or mentor, or coach mentor?

In the first essay, I critically analysed the diverse features of the coaching and mentoring paradigms in the literature, applied them to the role of the EYS and came to the conclusion that the EYS is a mentor. I now acknowledge that the two paradigms are not as clear cut as I originally suggested. I am continuing to consider the dynamics of mentoring and coaching as somewhat interlinking and overlapping, yet separate methods to support the career and personal development of early years educators.

In research and literature, mentoring is more regularly identified as a professional development strategy in education than coaching. Rodd (2006, cited in Doan, 2013) argues that the reason that mentoring is the preferred form of professional

development in early childhood education is that the information and formal strategies it encompasses are key to helping educators to recognise their professional potential. Wong and Waniganayake (2013) agree that mentoring supports professional and leadership development, as well as supporting new teachers become accustomed to the teaching profession. John (2008) further supports the use of mentoring as she describes the needs of leaders to share their issues and circumstances with a neutral agent outside their organisation with an objective of getting support and encouragement from a person who is familiar with and understands the context and wider perspective of their work. The essence of the role of the mentor captured by these descriptions conveys the mentor as a knowledgeable person who has experience in the early years that they use to encourage and support educators to develop professional and leadership practice. This role could be interpreted as both directive and non-directive, depending on the skills, dispositions and knowledge of the individual mentor. Salter (2015) identifies a recent trend beginning to emerge where coaching is starting to become more available as a professional development method in education. Coaching is being offered as an intervention to support experienced educators with on-going professional development or as a means to develop senior leaders and management. Salter (2015) distinguishes that mentoring is more ear marked for the newly qualified teacher, while coaching becomes more available as teachers develop their practice and progress in their career. Salter (2015: 71) asserts that coaching tends to 'shy away from role-modelling and focuses instead on supporting the coachee to set their own agenda and find their own solutions'. The essence of the coaching role based on this definition portrays a more non-directive approach, where the coachee is empowered and enabled to problem solve themselves. It is clear that the EYS would benefit from adopting both of these

approaches if they are to successfully manoeuvre up and down Clutterbuck's (2014) continuum. The subtle differences and overlaps between when coaching or mentoring approaches are used depend on the context where they are found. Salter (2015) provides an interesting account from the perspective of a person who practices an integrated approach as a coach mentor to support teacher's professional development. She explains that the coach mentor adopts an integrated approach where she aims to coach the participants as she they have greater ownership over their learning with this approach. Where the participating educator displayed that they did not have the knowledge or experience to make judgements or decisions themselves without being told what to do, the coach mentor adopted a mentoring approach.

The context within which the coaching or mentoring takes place has a substantial influence on the effectiveness and the sustainability of the changes that take place (Peterson, et al, 2010). The process must recognise the educator at the centre of the mentoring process, their priority areas of focus, the routines and practices in the room they work and the values and principles of the early years service. There are also external professional influences on practice including the early years curriculum framework, the Tusla inspections and the early years quality framework. The early years Department of Education inspections also have an impact on those working with preschool age children. The educator's personal life context is also at play. All of these factors have an impact on the coaching and mentoring process.

The work of an EYS is underpinned by the principles of Aistear, the early years curriculum framework and Síolta, the early years quality framework. These

frameworks advocate early years educators to develop an emergent and inquiry based curriculum and the EYS supports them to implement these during the mentoring process. The curriculum is underpinned by fostering children's intrinsic motivation through offering opportunities to extend learning based on observations and conversations with the child carried out by the early years educator. The principles of the early years curriculum has inspired the focus of this assignment. The early years educator is a co-learner in the quality development process and they ultimately decide how effective the process is. For this reason I will explore the notion of an integrated approach with the EYS operating the role of the *emergent coach mentor* with a particular focus on the motivation of the adult learner and the strategies that can be adopted by the coach or mentor to facilitate their knowledge and learning within their context. Gallant and Gilham (2014: 237) support the premise of an emergent coach mentor. They are of the opinion that

> 'differentiated models of coaching appears to be a way to establishing
>
> a coaching culture of multiple models could be responsive to divergent
>
> coaches learning needs. In doing so it is more likely to support
>
> sustainable improvements in teaching and learning.'

Adopting coaching and mentoring skills with a mentee focus is similar to the child led practice being adopted by the early years educator involved in the quality development process. Peterson (*et al*, 2010: 157) captures my thoughts on the emergent coach mentor when she describes that mentoring 'is based on the premise that trusting, emotionally supportive relationships provide a foundation to support professional motivation, learning, and change'.

4. Emergent coaching and mentoring with a learning and context focus

Horton (et al, 1990; 157) nicely sum up the learning that adult learners and early years educators possess that has evolved from their lifetime of experience. They

> . . . bring with them inside of them, in their bodies, in their lives; they bring their hopes, despair, expectations, knowledge, which they got by living, by fighting, by becoming frustrated. Undoubtedly they don't come here empty. They arrive full of things. In most of the cases they bring with them opinions about the world, about life. They bring with them their knowledge.

Andragogy is not a coaching or mentoring technique but a philosophy that can be looked upon for guidance in relation to providing a holistic approach to adult learning. The philosophy recognises that adults naturally seek to direct their own educational experience. It is a learner centred educational paradigm where instruction is less important to personal learning. The term 'andragogy' means 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1970; 55). There are four crucial assumptions that the andragogic model is based on, these assumption are that, as a person matures;

1 The person's self-concept develops from being a dependant personality towards one of being a self-directing human being

2 the person grows a bank of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning

3 the persons interest in learning is increasingly guided by developmental tasks of their social roles

4 learning that they perceive as needed is applicable to the problems that they are facing at that time

These assumptions provide a foundation upon which to build emergent coach mentoring practices upon. Like Horton and Friere (1990) the assumptions recognise the early years educator as a learner who is an active participant in the mentoring process and who brings their own values, knowledge and ideas that when recognised and acknowledge by the emergent coach mentor can stimulate and support further progression and learning. Bhoyrub (et al, 2010; 325) agrees with the assumptions of andragogy and asserts that 'the most significant adult learning occurs around issues of exercising independence, self-awareness, being creative and achieving personal growth'.

In the initial visits to services that I have recently engaged with I have adopted some strategies through which I am to bring the philosophy of andragogy to life, in order to encourage early years educators to exercise independence and identify the path they wish to take to develop their personal growth. In the initial two visits I give them a page with three reflective questions to stimulate thought about their role which are;

What do you see are the key responsibilities of your role?

What are the three challenges as part of your role?

What changes do you think might help you in your role?

I tell them that they do not have to formally complete the page as adding to the level of paperwork they currently do may create a barrier and negative connotations to my

visits from an early stage and I want to avoid that. I do ask them to have a think about them and we will have a conversation about them over the next few observation visits. The way educators respond to these questions give me a good indicator as to the type of approach that they require to support their learning. Some educators are very eager and keen to identify the issues that they are having that they would like to focus on or a special interest that they would enjoy incorporating in to their practice. A coaching intervention works well with these educators and they generally continue as they have began, in a proactive way where their ideas are guiding the process. Where educators are slower to tell me their opinions or they tell me flatly that 'everything works well' in their room I adopt a more mentoring approach. In this situation, I spend more time in their room, participating in their daily routine, observing practice and the level of engagement of the children and listening to the educators. When more of a relationship has built and the educator develops a sense of trust, I begin to ask for time outside the room with the educator and during this time I encourage them to observe the children's interactions with the environment, their involvement in play and the stages and schemas that they are displaying. In essence, I focus on the environment and when time has passed and they have had success with introducing resources and play experiences based on children's ideas and interests, we begin to move towards prompting reflection on the educators interactions. I have found that focusing on external features in the first few months builds the relationship, builds trust and gradually builds the educators capacity to reflect on their practice.

> 'There was great progress made in the wobbler room today. After the
> last two visits and our conversations about bringing resources in to
> the room to support children's connecting and transporting schemas
> and interest in climbing, there was no movement made to follow up

and bring these in. After seeing no progress on the last two visits I had intended to support the educator to have a look through the play material store rooms in order to find resources that would appeal to the children's play interests. When I arrived I was delighted to see the leader had brought in the ball pool and changed around the room to support climbing, trajectory and transporting schemas. Children were very engaged and the educator commented on how the table was getting a rest as they are no longer climbing on to it!'

(McLaughlin, 2015)

Schratz and Walker's (1995) 'Capability Learning Cycle' theory demonstrates adult learning processes that relates well to Knowles' (1970) assumptions of andragogy and serves as useful knowledge to recognise how educators become aware of their need for learning and the cycle the new learning goes through before becoming embedded in their practice.
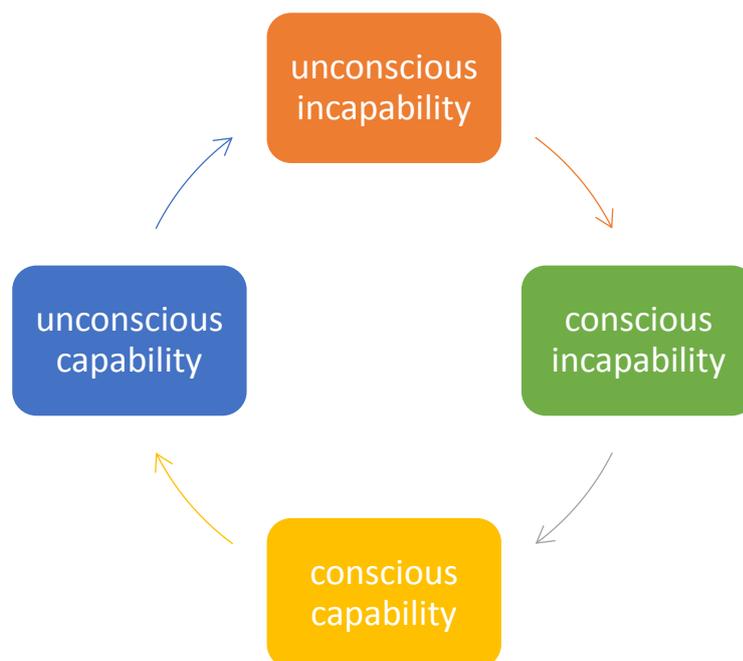
Diagram 2: The Capability Continuum

The theory suggests that we move through a series of stages when acquiring new knowledge or skills. The cycle begins where the learner is not aware of what they do not know and cannot do and they at deemed to be in a state of 'unconscious incapability'. When they discover that there is something that they do not know or cannot do they move to the next stage 'conscious incapability'. It is at this point that they decide if they want to proceed to learn the new knowledge or skill, and if the learning relates to Knowles' (1970) fourth assumption, they will progress to the next stage in their learning journey where they acquire the skill or knowledge. When they reach 'conscious capability', they are concentrating their efforts in to understanding and performing the new skill. Finally, when they have mastered the new skill or knowledge, they reach 'unconscious capability' where they can apply their new capability without deliberate attention, it has become second nature to them. Schratz and Walker (1995) propose that we are all engaged in different stages in the cycle simultaneously in relation to different issues in our lives.

Katz (1972, cited in Howe and Jacobs, 2013) identified four stages of teacher development that can be interpreted in conjunction with Schratz and Walker's (1995) theory to inform emergent coach mentoring practices to adopt. Stage one in Katz's model concerns the first year of practice and is called 'survival'. The educator's main focus is on surviving the day to day responsibility of caring for the growth and developmental needs and learning of a group of children. The emergent coach mentor would 'support the novice to survive the first stage of professional work, to cope with its problems and to reduce stress related to it' (Monkeviviene and Autukeviciene, 2015: 886). Peterson (et al, 2010) suggested that an educator in this stage may have difficulty refining and reflecting as they are at a stage where they are concentrating on putting their learning in to practice. I have found that concrete ideas that respond to

this problems work well here, visual images and videos from the Practice Guide are also very useful. The emergent coach mentor would support the educator to develop skills that have been identified in partnership and goals would be agreed as a means to supporting this development. Stage two, is where the educator consolidates their learning. Stage three, titled "renewal", indicates the educator is ready to learn about new developments and approaches. They have generated a bank of experience and knowledge and have refined it in their practice and are now looking for fresh ideas to stimulate their thinking. Stage four is reached in year three or four when the educator has the perspective to ask deeper and more meaningful questions. Katz's model assists us in shaping the coaching or mentoring approach that might be taken, depending on the stage of development the early years educator is at. It might be the case that Katz's model is more of a spectrum rather than a sequence for example, an educator who recently moves to a new age group returns to stage one, even though they have 15 years of experience working with pre-school age children, they find themselves in a position where they have to learn curriculum approaches and interaction styles that are appropriate for working with babies. During the renewal phase, Katz suggests that educators begin to show leadership potential. Recognising when an educator is at this stage and facilitating their leadership potential can be key to ensuring sustainable quality development when Better Start finishes.

'I have discovered that the educators in the wobbler room (different room to above example) are all childcare assistants on the same level, with no official leader in the room. This may be why we have not yet reached an agreed room layout in the room. Educators keep moving the furniture without consulting each other. Today, all educators were present and we agreed that we would observe the children's

interaction with the new room layout and only move furniture is they were all in agreement. From conversations with the two full time staff members, I know that they have an interest in art and developing the outdoor space, so each one is eager to take responsibility to develop their areas of interest and I will support them to do this.'
(McLaughlin, 2016)

It is also important to note that educators can sometimes be in a position where their ability to learn is limited. Knowles (1970) identified four reasons where this may be the case;

A. They may lack in confidence. It may have been some time since they were last involved in education and the idea of engaging at this time may be a barrier for them.

B. They may need time to adapt to different learning conditions. Some people are used to the most popular style of teaching where knowledge is transferred from teacher to student. They may not have experienced a style of education where they are involved and an active agent in the learning process.

C. There may be physical and sensory barriers to learning. Where time outside the room to have a conversation with an educator is not available, the educator may find assimilating information difficult where they are supervising children at the same time. Sight, sound and energy can also be barriers to learning.

D. Adults respond better to intrinsic motivation.

Another limitation to an educator's ability to learn has been identified through anecdotal conversations with other EYSs. It has been found that some educators participating in the process have been put forward by management to take part, rather than encouraged to participate by their own choice. Some educators may have

suspected that were allocated a mentor because of problems in their performance. This particular ethical issue creates barriers to quality development where consent has not been obtained to engage in the process and should be addressed within Better Start at a management level. Systems could be put in place where to request engagement with Better Start, signed consent is obtained from staff first. Where reasons that limit ability to learn exist, the change process is met with barriers to quality development. It is essential that these barriers are recognised and addressed.

The 'Stage of Change Scale for Early Education and Care' (Peterson and Cairns, 2012) provides mentors with an additional component to add to their existing toolkit that will support them to recognise an educator's attitudes to change and offers the mentor some suggested intervention techniques that would support the educator at each stage. It is based on the Transtheoretical Model devised by Procheaska, Di Clemente and Norcross (1992, cited in Peterson and Cairns, 2012) which is a paradigm that identifies processes that people experience when making any type of behavioural change. There is strong evidence of the effectiveness of the models use in health promotion programmes to support people to make behavioural changes, such as to stop smoking and to support parents to make healthier food choices for their children. The model has been adopted in early years education to promote meaningful change that is based on the educator's motivation, confidence and commitment. It describes five stages of change that people typically experience when making any behavioural change:

- pre-contemplation: the educator is not ready to change, they are generally unaware or unconcerned about their behaviour and its effects

- contemplation: the educator would like to improve their behaviour, but is overwhelmed by obstacles

- preparation: ready to change, have an active intent to make a change and are devising a plan of action

- action: the educator is proactive and can set goals for themselves, act on their goals, and observe outcomes of their behaviour

- maintenance: the educator works to maintain positive behaviours and continually reflect on their behaviour

(Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross, 1992, cited in Peterson and Cairns, 2012: 3).

Individuals advance through the stages in a cyclical or spiral fashion where they progress from one to the next, sometimes regressing to previous stages before continuing to make progress and reaching the maintenance stage. This change model offers a tailored mentoring approach for the early years educator. Peterson and Cairns (2012) assert that only 20% of people are ready to make a behavioural change so the approach taken by the mentor who is informed of the educator's stage of change can greatly impact of the effectiveness and sustainability of quality development.

Pre-contemplation

Where an educator is recognised as being at the pre-contemplation stage of change, the mentor can work to raise their awareness of the importance of the change and the benefit that the change would mean for children. The introduction of the Better Start process and the Practice Guide to the early years educators is an important tool to inspire those that are ready to make changes.

Contemplation

Where an educator has been identified as being at the contemplation stage, they can be supported by the emergent coach mentor to weigh up the risks and benefits of making any proposed change, which in turn can develop their motivation, confidence and commitment to the task at hand. Sometimes seeing concrete examples works well for educators at this stage. They sometimes need to see that their idea can work and is working so sharing visual examples of practice from other services (with their permission) that is similar to their idea gives them the boost they need to put it in to practice.

<u>Preparation</u>

When the educator has reached the preparation stage, where they agree that change is needed, it is necessary to put a plan in place of how the change can be achieved. This aligns well with the work of an EYS. The EYS works with educators to identify goals for development and actions as a means to completing the goal. Progressing through the Stages of Change model will help to ensure that goals are being developed in partnership and that the educator has ownership over their goals, which increase goal effectiveness and the likelihood that they will work to complete them. Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009) have created a dynamic and fluid goal setting system that would complement the Preparation Stage and further promote reflective thinking and goal ownership. Megginson and Clutterbuck (2009) tell us that alignment of purpose within the goals set has an impact on relationship quality and outcomes for the educator. They propose that instead of being clean-cut and rigid, goals are 'messy, adaptable and emergent' (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2009: 131). They have designed a diagram that portrays emergent goal development. In this, when goals do emerge, they are loosely defined to enable the educator to undergo a period of

reflection and consideration of their own values. The goal may then be altered to meet their new ideas around the topic.
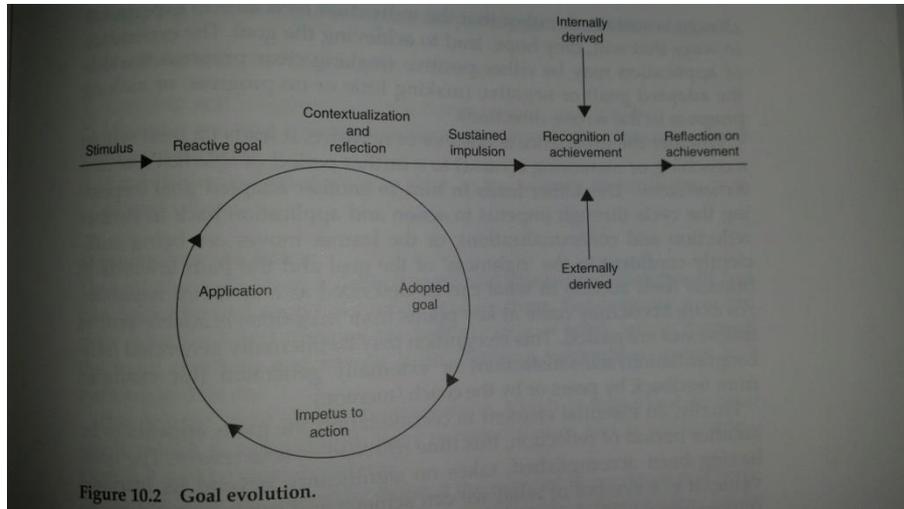

Figure 10.2   Goal evolution.

Table 1: "Goal Evolution" Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2009: 133)

This cycle has yet to be supported by empirical research, yet there is some anecdotal evidence of success within Better Start. When a goal has been agreed some EYSs have typed the goal title and actions on a page with a space for the educator to record any progress (see sample goal evolution in Appendix One). The educator is prompted to reflect on putting the new practice in to action. The goal and actions can then be adapted following a conversation with the mentor based on the reflections of how the goal is progressing. This ensures that goal alignment is inherent in the practice and as a result the relationship quality and outcomes for the educator will be affected. The emergence and adaptability of goals in the goal evolution model brings Kolb's (1984, cited in Harrison, *et al,* 2005: 422) experiential learning concept to life. The Kolb cycle moves sequentially through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation and the goal evolution model as adopted

by the EYSs invites the educator to go through this process. The educator is an active learner in the holistic change process. While there has been some anecdotal evidence of some success with this tool, some EYSs have reported that some educators have stated that they just do not have the time to complete the reflective tool. It could be hypothesised that where progress for this particular goal is stagnant and the educator does not verbally report any progress with the goal or actions, they may have to revisit the educator's stage of change to assess whether the educator has regressed to the pre-contemplation or contemplation stage. At this point they may consider adopting another mentoring technique to reconnect the educator to the quality development process.

Action

During the action phase the educator is implementing change and problem solving any issues that arise. This stage relates well to Schratz and Walker's (1995) 'conscious capability' phase where the educator is consciously implementing an identified practice.

Maintenance

When the educator reaches the maintenance stage they have integrated the changes in to their practice and is continually reflecting on their new behaviour. They may now be in a position to support others to implement change in to their practice by sharing what they have learned.

5. Conclusion: emergent coach mentoring for transformative and sustainable learning

Coaching and mentoring are both valuable methods of professional development. The role of an EYS as an emergent coach mentor is similar to the integrated approach portrayed by Salter (2015) where the practice implemented is chosen in response to the thoughts and ideas expressed by the early years educator. The early years educator is a learner and research has told us that greatest sustainable and transformative practice is achieved when the context is recognised and the process of learning is supported by developing trusting relationships. The learner's ability to learn has an impact on the change process. The Children's Institute has broken down the stages of change and this offers us a useful framework for us to tailor coaching and mentoring even when met with barriers to change. Sometimes, understanding and acknowledging that an educator is not ready to change at this time is an appropriate approach to take. The context within which the coaching and mentoring occurs impacts on the effectiveness and the sustainability of the educators personal and career development.

To achieve the role of an emergent coach mentor it is important to thoroughly develop the skills and techniques required to be able to apply these in an expert way as the situation requires and not fall in to a trap where we consider ourselves emergent coach mentors but in practice we are practicing a lot of techniques that are only understood on a superficial level. The learning culture in Better Start offers multiple opportunities to support reflective practice and on-going continuous professional development. We do however work individually in services so our perspectives and reflections are based on our own experience. It would be a fantastic learning opportunity to be accompanied on a service visit by a colleague who would offer feedback in a strengths based way. Peer mentoring of this nature would support a deeper level of skill and technique

development and greatly aid the EYS specialist to develop the expertise required of

an emergent coach mentor.

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Appendix One

Description of the role of a Better Start Early Years Specialist

Better Start is a national initiative established by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to promote and enhance the quality of early childhood education and care for children from birth to six years in Ireland. Better Start is an on-site mentoring service which works with early years managers and educators to plan and implement quality development goals as well as supporting the implementation of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Aistear, the National Early Years Curriculum Framework. The role of the EYS entails working in partnership with management and staff to develop and implement quality improvement plans based on agreed priority areas of focus. EYSs facilitate change over a six month period through onsite visits to services on a weekly or fortnightly basis, depending on the need of the service. EYSs meet with educators within their working environment or on a one to one, room group or whole staff team basis. EYSs practice the strength-based approach by observing practice and articulating the strengths and assets the educator has shown and supporting the educator to identify areas for development.

Appendix Two

Sample Goal Evolution

Pillar of Practice	Learning Through Play
Element	The adult's role in support learning and development through play
Goal	The goal is for Barbara* and Aisling* to observe children's interests to inform curriculum planning in order to make learning meaningful for children
Actions	05/04/16 • Educators want to involve children's needs and interests more in curriculum planning. EYS and educators discussed current observation methods and educators agreed to extend observation strategies to include anecdotal note taking. • EYS and educators to set up an anecdotal note taking system • EYS to model recording anecdotal note observations

	• Educators to capture 2 notes during free play each morning
	On the next visit on the 19/04/16
	The EYS will support the educators to use the observations collected to inform curriculum planning
Progress Note how the new strategy is progressing, is it easier than your previous practice? How effective is it?	

*Educator names have been changed