



Course check in: 1pm-3pm  
Course begins: 4pm  
Course concludes: 1pm on the final day  
Schedule your travel appropriately.

# Coaching Skills for International Teacher Leaders Rome 3-7 July 2018

## COMPLETE

- ☐ Complete the survey at this link: <https://goo.gl/forms/vBEDhSpxZkcwGyE33>

## READ

- ☐ Michael Fullan & Jim Knight: [Coaches as System Leaders](#)
  - **Focus question:** What might be the most significant barrier in your school that prevents coaches and/or teacher leaders from being a part of system-wide change?
- ☐ Joellen Killion: [Reprising Coaching Heavy and Coaching Light](#)
  - **Focus Question:** What does coaching look like currently at your school?

## PREPARE

### AN ISSUE OR PROBLEM

In preparation for small group reflection sessions, please bring a short written description (no more than one page) in which you describe an issue or concern working with an individual or a team of adult learners.

### WATCH

...a [short video](#) to prepare for your course.

### BRING A LAPTOP (REQUIRED)

Your course materials are digital. Hard copies of the materials will not be available on site. Bring a laptop computer with appropriate adapters and wireless internet capability. [Click here](#) for more information about iPads and tablets. Chromebook users can use the free [Kami extension](#) to annotate.

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**We look forward to seeing you this summer!**  
*Sarah Fleming & Matt Hajdun*



# Coaches as System Leaders

*Michael Fullan and Jim Knight*

**Next to the principal, coaches are the most crucial change agent in a school.**

There's been a growing realization that we need education reform on a larger scale—at the level of the district, state, or country. This raises an interesting question about the role of coaches. It's futile to develop their role unless we treat it as part of an overall strategy to change systems.

For example, the work of coaches is squandered if school principals are not instructional leaders. At the same time, the work of schools will go nowhere unless school districts organize themselves to focus relentlessly on instructional improvement. Without coaching, many comprehensive reform efforts will fall short of real improvement.

Good coaching gets results—and it gets them fairly quickly. However, "good coaching" is not the reality for many coaches who operate in systems that are not organized to create, develop, and sustain the conditions for instructional improvement.

In the United States, for example, whole-system education reform focuses on the wrong drivers (Fullan, 2011a)—accountability, individual teacher development, technology, and piecemeal reform components. Such reform drivers as capacity building, teamwork, pedagogy, and systemic reform are much more compatible with the strategies of good coaches.

## Coaching Your Way to Success

All schools in a district must be treated as part of a single system. Changing one school at a time is no longer an option for countries that want to compete internationally.

Take York Region District School Board, a large multicultural district in the greater Toronto area in Ontario, Canada. It has 130,000 students; 8,800 teachers; and 192 schools. The district has had major success in literacy, numeracy, and high school graduation rates over the last decade (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009).

We discovered the crucial role that literacy coaches played 10 years ago when one of us, in conjunction with the superintendent of curriculum and instruction, worked with 17 low-performing schools in this district (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). In the schools that improved significantly, literacy coaches worked closely with principals to implement 14 key parameters (see "Fourteen Parameters for Success," p. 52). The coaches typically spent their day planning lessons with classroom teachers, modeling lessons, observing instruction, facilitating meetings, reviewing student data, and leading the collaborative marking of student work. We eventually brought all the schools in the district into the change process. The system improved dramatically—by more than 20 percent on most measures. School leaders saw themselves as part of a system-wide effort.

Take Crosby Heights, a K–8 school with 662 students. When a new principal was appointed in 2004, the school was one of the worst in the district. The culture was toxic, characterized by deep conflict between the union and management; the building was dilapidated; and morale was low.

In addition to setting a new direction for Crosby, the principal and literacy coach started working with teachers to improve instruction. For example, a 5th grade teacher and the literacy coach worked on a lesson to strengthen students' word choice in their writing. They planned the flow of the lesson, the posters they would create to describe success criteria in student-friendly language, the student groupings they would use, and the strategies they would implement. Together with the principal, the coach and 5th grade teachers also collaboratively examined and graded student work. Rich conversations emerged about best practices teachers could use with struggling students.

Teachers' new positive teaching experiences began to change the culture of the school. Four years later, the school had raised its proficiency rates in literacy and numeracy from an average of 43 percent to 83 percent. The turnaround was the result of successfully integrating the 14 parameters. The literacy coach was a key member of the school team that led this effort. Teachers and school leaders experienced the success as a system phenomenon. In one school survey, a majority of teachers responded that the literacy focus had "raised the expertise of teachers within their schools," "raised literacy expectations for all students," "produced more consistency and continuity in literacy across subjects," and "facilitated sharing of expertise with teachers from other schools."

The role of school leadership—of principals and coaches—must be played out on a systems level to get widespread and sustainable improvement. Successful coaches combine instructional expertise with knowledge about schoolwide and districtwide strategies. The small and the big picture merge for these coaches. They're equally comfortable on the dance floor and the balcony.

## How to Squander Your Coaching Efforts

Staff members at the Kansas Coaching Project at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning have visited more than 100 schools around the world in the past three years. They've found that coaches are often placed in impossible situations. Too often, they collaborate poorly with administrators. In many schools no one—including the coach and the principal—understands school improvement plans. Other schools exhibit a kind of organizational attention deficit disorder, jumping from one intervention to another before achieving meaningful change. As the following examples show, in far too many settings, coaches are unable to do their work.

### Give Coaches the Wrong Work

In a state-sponsored coaching workshop, the 50 coaches in attendance were asked how they used their time in school. More than 75 percent reported that they had spent less than 25 percent of their time on coaching in the previous week; more than 40 percent reported spending 10 percent or less of their time on coaching. Indeed, some coaches had spent *no* time on coaching in the previous week.

Many coaches explained that because their roles and responsibilities were poorly defined—and because their principals weren't clear how best to employ them—they ended up doing quasi-administrative or clerical work rather than improving instruction. Instead of helping teachers reach out to more students, they photocopied papers, filed documents, or ordered supplies.

### Keep Goals Unclear

A school district was awarded a grant to hire coaches in all its secondary schools. The district hired the coaches but never articulated what their professional development goals should be. Were the coaches supposed to support classroom management, differentiated instruction, curriculum development, Response to Intervention, content knowledge in all disciplines—or all of these?

In addition, the district provided no professional learning for principals, so they were unable to provide the coaches with either clarity or support. In some schools, the principals directed their coaches to take a top-down, assertive approach to their work that left little room for the professional discretion of individual teachers. Not surprisingly, the coaches' efforts prompted resistance, with little change occurring in classrooms.

## Don't Train Your Coaches

An inner-city district received a large federal grant in August to provide coaching to teachers. Because school was starting in just a few weeks, the district immediately hired the coaches from a small pool of teachers who were interested in taking on this new work.

The coaches received no training, except for a one-day workshop that didn't take place until mid-October. Not knowing what to share and how to coach, and in some cases lacking the pedagogic, communication, and leadership skills necessary for their work, the coaches were disheartened by mid-October; many had already decided to return to the classroom the following year. In some schools, the coaches shared their frustration with teachers, which negatively affected culture and morale. What could have been a promising step forward for the district became a wasteful step backward. The coaching program was abandoned after two years.

## It Can Be Done

Developing effective instructional strategies systemwide is a new goal for many school leaders, including coaches, except in those few countries that have accomplished systemwide success, such as Singapore, Finland, and Canada.

This is not abstract work. For the past 8 years, we've taken a large, stagnant system of 2 million students in 4,000 elementary and 900 secondary schools in 72 school districts in Ontario and achieved substantial improvements in student achievement. Literacy and numeracy are up 14 percent across the 4,000 elementary schools, and the high school graduation rate has climbed from 68 to 81 percent. At the heart of the strategy is instructional capacity building, with coaches at the school, district, and province levels working with instructionally focused administrators—principals, superintendents, and province officials. Literacy coaches are integral to our success at the elementary level. At the high school level, the system has funded "student success teachers." These coaches serve as change agents; working as part of the school leadership team, they focus on struggling students.

Whole-system reform also requires new capacities at the state level. In 2004, we established a unit within the ministry of education called the Literacy Numeracy Secretariat. It houses some 100 "student achievement officers"—in effect, literacy and student success coaches—to support school and district change leaders.

The new system identifies, spreads, and supports high-yield pedagogical practices, such as the *critical learning pathway*, a six-week cycle during which teachers look at student work to improve instruction. Coaches from the province, district, and school levels participate. Peers also learn from peers. One veteran 4th grade teacher who'd been sent to the workshop by her principal but who didn't want to be there was shocked at the high quality of the student writing that other teachers brought. She didn't think her own students were capable of such work. But as the workshop cycle progressed, her students' writing "soared." She's now eager to do more. She explained, "I now realize that for 25 years I've set my goals too low. How many more of my students could have reached so much higher if only I had known I could take them there?" (Fullan, 2011b, p. 20). Coaches, then, help teachers realize moral purpose.

A recent report (Mourshed, Chinezi, & Barber, 2010) that looked at how school systems improve found that schools that had gone from poor to fair in developing countries focused their interventions equally on accountability and professional learning. However, countries that had gone from great to excellent focused 78 percent of their interventions on professional learning and only 22 percent on accountability. The researchers concluded that once the capacity of teachers reaches a certain level, peer culture becomes the source of innovation and energy. Thus, peers become change agents. This is good news for coaches because developing peer cultures—and linking them to the bigger system—is the work they should do.

States, provinces, and nations need to recognize that a combination of change agents is essential for success. If teachers are the most significant factor in student success, and principals are second, then coaches are third. All three, working in coordinated teams, will be required to bring about deep change. The work of coaches is crucial because they *change the culture of the school* as it relates to instructional practice.

## A New Role for Coaches

When a system is heavily laden with accountability-driven reforms, it's difficult for an effective education system to evolve. Schools need less blatant accountability and testing and more capacity building, team learning, learning across schools, and transparency of results and pedagogical practice—the very things that coaches are good at. They also need more pedagogically driven technology and deep learning around the higher-order skills of advanced literacy, collaboration, and citizenship. School improvement will fail if the work of coaches remains at the one-to-one level. Coaches are system leaders. They need development as change agents at both the instructional level and the level of organizational and system change. It's time to recast their role as integral to whole-system reform.

### Fourteen Parameters for Success

The York Region District School Board has found that these strategies improve students' literacy achievement:

1. Shared beliefs and vision
2. Embedded literacy coaches
3. Timetabled literacy blocks
4. Principal leadership
5. Early and ongoing intervention
6. Case management approach
7. Literacy professional development
8. In-school grade and subject meetings
9. Book rooms with leveled books and resources
10. Allocation of resources to literacy learning
11. Action research focused on literacy
12. Parental involvement
13. Cross-curricular literacy connections
14. Shared responsibility and accountability

## References

- Fullan, M. (2011a). *Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform*. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Strategic Education.
- Fullan, M. (2011b). *Moral imperative realized*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Mourshed, M., Chinezi, C., & Barber, M. (2010). *How the world's most improved systems keep getting better*. London: McKinsey and Company.
- Sharratt, L., & Fullan, M. (2009). *Realization: The change imperative for deepening district-wide reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.



## Reprising coaching heavy and coaching light

Since I first wrote about coaching heavy and coaching light in the May 2008 issue of this newsletter, I have engaged in multiple conversations with coaches and their supervisors about the idea behind my original article regarding the two kinds of coaching and why I think this concept is crucial to coaches and the success of coaching.

Coaching heavy does not mean being directive, demanding, or authoritative. Heavy means substantive, weighty, valued. It means robustly engaging in the work of coaching with a laser-like focus on improving student learning. Coaching light is more focused on the teaching rather than learning. It emphasizes the sense of being supported rather than the sense of producing results. Some have even suggested that coaches cannot coach heavy without coaching light first to build relationships. Perhaps that is true for some; however, I do not subscribe to that notion.

Coaches often have the notion that they cannot have substantive conversations with their colleagues without first coaching light to build a constructive relationship. I contend that substantive conversations, held in a dialogic manner without judgment or expectations and focused on beliefs and assumptions rather than actions, does far more to build trust than any amount of coaching light. In other words, more substantive conversations about student learning increase trust.

Coaches can also establish



trust and respectful, productive relationships with teachers by giving authentic feedback supported with evidence about student learning and identifying and unpacking misconceptions.

So what do coaching light and coaching heavy look like in practice?

In practice, coaches use similar strategies for coaching light and heavy. For example, they may hold pre- and post-observation meetings with teachers before and after visiting the teacher's classroom. However, the topics and the intensity of the professional learning differ. In coaching light, the coach invites the teacher to name a focus for the observation without reference to anything other than his or her preference. In coaching heavy, the coach encourages the teacher to

select a focus for their work together, based on the content of professional learning, the school's specific improvement goals, the teacher's own performance improvement goals aligned with the district's performance standards, or student learning goals within the teacher's team or classroom.

In coaching heavy, the coach probes before agreeing, for example, with a teacher who states, "I'd like to work on formative assessment." The coach and teacher engage first in understanding specific student-learning goals and related teacher-learning goals before exploring which particular instructional practice is most likely to achieve those goals. The coach strives to build the precision of the teacher's request so that it

*Continued on p. 9*

Coaching light	Coaching heavy
Focus on teaching practices identified by teachers	Focus on student learning and the use of specific practices within the school's or district's instructional framework, teachers' performance standards, or aligned with the adopted curriculum
Feedback on teaching practices	Feedback on the interaction between student engagement in learning, performance, and achievement and teaching
Teacher self-assessment based on perceptions or opinions	Data-driven assessment based on student data
Voluntary coaching — only those teachers who request coaching receive it	Expectation for all teachers to engage in coaching — all teachers engage in continuous improvement with specific feedback and support from the coach
Focus on adapting or refining instructional strategies	Focus on transforming practice, examining beliefs, and testing assumptions
Focus on implementing strategies	Focus on deep understanding of the theory and research underlying strategies to ensure executive control
Emphasis on feeling supported	Emphasis on developing expertise

*Continued from p. 8*

becomes, “I am puzzled that students are not performing as I expect on benchmark assessments. In reality, I am not certain I have adequately assessed students. If I engage students more authentically in the learning process and use more purposeful and frequent formative assessment, I will have more evidence about students’ learning. One specific strategy that is identified in our teaching standards is assessment for learning so that I can adjust my teaching so there are no surprises on the benchmark assessments.” Coaches contribute to this type of clarity in teachers’ thinking by exploring their rationale, motivation, and expected results before providing support.

In discussing teaching, coaching light begins with, “So, how do you think it went from your perspective?” In coaching heavy, the coach begins with, “Let’s review the focus for our

work together and the reasons for selecting that. Let’s also review the data from your classroom. Let’s talk about what these data mean and what generalizations emerge from this lesson that will influence future instruction so that student learning increases.”

In meeting with teams to plan instruction, coaching light sounds like, “What instructional and learning strategies do you recommend for addressing these ideas?” Coaching heavy, on the other hand, sounds like, “What does research tell us are the most appropriate approaches to address these particular content outcomes and the needs of our learners? Let’s unpack that research and study its appropriateness for this portion of the curriculum and our students.”

Coaching heavy focuses on developing and using professional expertise of educators and deepening the body of knowledge about the field of teaching. Coaching light focuses on

pursuing areas of interest grounded in little more than preference.

Coaching heavy is based on several assumptions. First, teaching is a profession with standards of practice that are grounded in research. Coaches support teachers in linking the body of professional knowledge to their practice by examining the effects of their teaching. Second, teachers develop expertise by engaging in continuous improvement with specific feedback and ongoing opportunities to deepen professional knowledge and practice.

The differences between coaching heavy and coaching light are far from subtle and have significant implications for how coaching affects student learning and teaching.

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