

# **Coaching and Mentoring in Higher Education**

**A Step-by-Step  
Guide to Exemplary  
Practice**

Jill Andreanoff

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# **Coaching and Mentoring in Higher Education**

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A Step-by-Step Guide to Exemplary  
Practice

Jill Andreanoff



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# Series editor's preface

## ► Palgrave Teaching and Learning

### *Coaching and Mentoring in Higher Education*

I welcome the publication of this invaluable volume in the Palgrave Teaching and Learning series, designed for all who care about teaching and learning in higher education. The series has the express aim of providing useful, relevant, current and helpful guidance on key issues in learning and teaching in the tertiary/post compulsory education sector at a time when the pace of change is fast and expectations of those involved in teaching and supporting students are increasing. Texts in this series address a range of essential teaching and learning imperatives, with a deliberately international focus, and a determination to offer practical advice and ideas, grounded in scholarship.

At a time when mentoring and coaching are becoming more widely recognised as central to student experience in higher education, this book offers useful guidance both to those new to teaching and support work who are just embarking on this area of work and to those who are already experienced in offering student support in this way, including as it does case studies and examples of good practice from the UK and internationally. The volume is comprehensive, clear and well written, expertly combining theory and practice, and is a very welcome addition to the series.

Sally Brown  
August 2015



# Introduction

There are continued pressures on higher education institutions to improve their provision and remain or become major competitors within the field. This is driven by financial constraints and increasing student fees which demand a higher level of accountability in student satisfaction. The impact on student expectations and retention, as identified by Foskett, Roberts, & Maringe (2006), has increased the need for higher education institutions to be more creative and diverse in providing support for students and enabling them to succeed.

It has been suggested by many for several years that offering the opportunity to form a supportive relationship with a more experienced student will ease the transition into university and reduce attrition (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Hill & Reddy, 2007). Other studies such as Andrews & Clark (2011) also refer to 'student success' through mentoring in particular. It has also been well reported that mentoring in higher education can help students to cope with the demands of academia, Quinn, Muldoon, & Hollingworth (2002), and have a positive effect for the mentees and mentors, Leidenfrost et al. (2011).

There is plentiful literature on the success of peer support programmes and in particular peer mentoring. It is worth noting that Husband & Jacobs (2009), Andrews & Clark (2011), and Thomas (2012) also identify the need for a well-structured mentoring programme to be in place within higher education institutions in order to obtain optimum results. Peer coaching, although currently not as widely used, is likely to gain momentum as higher education institutions seek alternative methods of enhancing the student experience and improving their academic attainment.

Mentoring and coaching are well-established mechanisms for accelerating learning and attainment in a number of settings from the education to the public and business sectors and are now widely used terms. However, a number of issues have arisen from their becoming more commonly used expressions. A certain amount of confusion appears to have arisen in the definitions of the processes, which has in turn led to broadly publicised misuse of the phrases, 'mentoring' and 'coaching'. The term 'mentoring' for example is often loosely used in popular TV reality shows where contestants are frequently assigned a mentor who tells them what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. Little or no consideration often appears to be given to the views, values, or opinions of the contestants being mentored.

This one-directional type of intervention bears little resemblance to the true supportive nature of a mentoring or coaching relationship, the aim of which is to encourage reflective thinking and decision making in the mentee, leading them to achieve their aims and objectives in a way that is suitable for them. It is this type of two-way relationship that proves to be so valuable to both the learner and the person offering the support. Thorough training for coaches and mentors is crucial to achieving this type of relationship, and when being offered to higher education students, in particular, it enables them to develop effective team leading and communication skills, improving their employability opportunities.

This book will endeavour to define ‘best practice’ mentoring and coaching and encourage the reader to trust in the well-documented successes of this type of relationship. Adopting these methods rather than the more directional approach is far more likely to lead to self-efficacy and personal development of the mentee or coachee. It is also less likely to result in complaints from participants who have been given ‘bad advice’ from their mentor or coach, who should in fact refrain, as far as possible, from giving any advice at all.

Mentoring and coaching are becoming more accepted within the higher education sector as a relatively cost effective form of promoting student success. However it may not be as cost effective as one might envisage if practised properly in terms of coordinator time. This can be seen from the Table of Coordinator costs later in Table 2.1 and additional costs to be accounted for in Chapter 4. It is a worthwhile investment, however, when you take into account not only the benefits for those being supported but also those who develop their skills by being trained as a mentor or coach. The pitfalls that I have both encountered and overcome during 15 years’ experience of developing and delivering mentoring and coaching programmes within the higher education and other sectors will be shared. This will allow others to avoid making similar mistakes when implementing their own programme.

How to develop both small-scale programmes and much larger ones will be covered along with advice on the possible pitfalls and how to avoid them for both types and sizes of scheme. Case studies and examples of exemplary practice programmes will be provided, from which ideas for your own programme can be drawn. A variety of topics for support will be highlighted, from supporting students with mental health and physical disabilities to alumni mentoring to supporting final-year students in the transition from education to work. The aims and objectives of each of the programmes differ from academic peer coaching for students studying specific subjects (e.g. Accounting and Finance, Law, and Physics) to Technology Mentoring

whereby members of staff are supported by students with the objective of improving their learning and use of assistive teaching technologies. Other programmes, such as those specifically designed to support international students in their first year, will also be used as case study examples.

The inclusion of case studies and examples of programme materials and resources will take the readers step by step through the process of setting up their own individual programme. The entire process, from recruitment of mentors and coaches, to inducting the mentees/coachees, to offering supervision, right through to planning and conducting the programme evaluation, will be explored. The reader will be given guidance on the nuances between individual scheme objectives and how to adapt the implementation process to suit. It will be explained, for example, how mentor or coach promotional material can be adapted for different schemes in order to attract students with the desired characteristics and attributes for your intended programme. The methods used for promoting the support to your intended audience is also imperative to prevent it from appearing patronising or unattractive and to ensure that the participants are fully engaged from the onset. It is seemingly small details such as these that can have a huge impact on whether a scheme succeeds or not.

The first part of the book explores the various ways in which coaching and mentoring can be utilised and exactly what is meant by the terms in the context of this book. Appendix 1 provides a questionnaire that can be used in conjunction with this book to help plan your exemplary practice programme. The second part is devoted to the planning and implementation of your programme. This includes everything from identifying the need, securing funding, the possible costs, the training programme, and the recruitment process for mentors, coaches, and the intended learners through to the final evaluation process.

The final chapters are devoted to more specialised programmes such as ementoring, school-pupil-based mentoring, using university students as mentors, to possible accreditation for the mentors or coaches.

# 1 What Are Mentoring and Coaching?

There is much conflict about the terms 'mentoring' and 'coaching' and the difference between them. Whilst the actual definitions of mentoring or coaching are not absolutely crucial to the implementation of a programme, serious consideration should be given to this prior to scheme implementation as it will become important when it comes to the training and preparation of your intended participants. Jacobi (1991) first recognised the need for a precise definition of peer support terms in order to determine the necessary elements for success. The debate on the differences between these two interventions still continues and is likely to do so for some time, with authors such as Chao (2006) critiquing others for not sufficiently defining the terms.

Coaching and mentoring are more usually one-to-one relationships and although the mentors and coaches should be supported throughout the process, this should be carried out through regular supervision rather than observation. A scheme coordinator should not normally impose any pre-planned structure or format to the sessions. Group mentoring is sometimes implemented, although this arguably could be labelled 'peer-assisted learning' or 'supplemental instruction', both of which are discussed later. Bearing in mind that mentoring and coaching are usually and best 'client led', group mentoring can be difficult when the clients' needs are all different. A case study example is provided in Chapter 12 of a 'Raising Aspirations' pupil mentoring programme that consists of a mixture of group and one-to-one sessions, demonstrating how the different approaches can be combined. Pupils are mentored in small groups for up to 12 weeks and, in addition, have alternate one-to-one sessions with the mentor, enabling more personal issues to be discussed in private. The group sessions are comprised of loosely pre-planned topics that are designed to promote discussion about the merits of obtaining a good education and expectations of studying at university. Group mentoring is more commonly used for school pupils and young people.

As was mentioned in the introduction, it is strongly advised that a unidirectional type of relationship should be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, mentoring, to a number of people merely consists of a more experienced person advising a younger, less experienced one on the basis of his or her own experiences. Not only does this approach bring with it the danger of the

mentor giving poor advice, resulting in possible complaints when the advice given does not meet the expectations or needs of the mentee, but it also encourages dependence. In addition it is likely to impede self-development, decision making, and reflective thinking in the mentee or coachee. What is also often overlooked with this form of intervention is the fact that just because someone is older and has more experience, it does not always follow that their advice in the given situation is best for the learner. Particularly if there is a large age gap, things might have changed since the mentor was 'in their shoes'; moreover this approach does not take into account the individuality of human beings in general. What may be sound advice for one person is not necessarily the right path for someone else to follow. Adopting this approach often encourages applications from volunteer mentors who wish to relive their careers and education through their mentees.

Self-efficacy has been shown to be an indicator of success, particularly within the context of higher education and beyond where autonomy and independence of students are vital (Crozier 1997; Sander et al. 2009). In view of this, a less directional and more facilitative approach will allow the mentee to develop these skills and thought processes to a greater degree. By teaching your selected mentors and coaches to ask good open and exploratory questions, explore various available options, action plan, and give feedback, the need to give advice is kept to an absolute minimum. The content of the training sessions is crucial to success, and the individual elements will be fully covered in Chapter 6. This facilitative rather than directive approach will also be more likely to engage the learners when used with methods and approaches that best suit them and their particular circumstances.

Mentors and coaches should always be aware that everyone is an individual; that people approach their 'problems' in different ways; and that no specific method or path is correct. The role of a mentor or coach should be to discover the right method for a particular person, allowing individuals to reach their chosen goals at their own pace and in a way that suits them. It is this skilled process that leads to achievement, success and improved performance. In addition, the processes that have been learned through their mentor or coach can be utilised long after the mentoring or coaching programme has finished. Using this method may also lead to further development of the mentor or coach, as they too may discover new approaches to problem solving from their learner.

There is far less literature on peer coaching within a higher education context, but again the definitions differ from author to author. Some, such as Huston & Weaver (2008), describe the process as a collegial and voluntary one to improve or expand their approaches to teaching, and others, such as



Cox (2012), use a broader definition where the coaching is not restricted to the development of improved classroom techniques and the participants take turns to coach each other. Two different models of coaching are described by Ackland (1991) as the 'expert' model and the 'reciprocal' model. Each is described as a different process with differing aims and objectives that range from transferring training to practice to resolving a problematic state. Donegan et al. (2000) describe the coaching process as an expert teacher giving support and feedback and making suggestions to untrained or less skilled peers, which would indicate a more directive approach.

Parsloe et al. (2000) discuss the various definitions of coaching and mentoring and state that the general consensus appears to be that mentoring is instructional whilst coaching is nondirective. They do admit, however, that the boundaries are not firmly set. Ives (2008) discusses the different approaches used in coaching in differing contexts and concludes that some approaches strongly discourage advice giving whilst others suggest that coaching requires guidance. Stober et al. (2006) agree that the term coaching, alongside mentoring, has become increasingly difficult to define.

What is apparent in these discussions regarding the definitions of coaching and mentoring is that there still remains a lack of clarity. However, for the context of this book it is advised, for the previously cited reasons, that a nondirective approach should be used for both coaching and mentoring programmes.

What can help differentiate mentoring from coaching is the length of the intervention and the aims and objectives of your intended programme. Mentoring is quite often defined as a longer-term intervention given over a period of a year or so whilst coaching is very often offered for a shorter duration. Mentoring is also often perceived as a more holistic approach than coaching, the latter being more usually focussed on a specific goal such as academic improvement or work performance.

Another factor that needs some consideration is the people who are being targeted for support – from here onwards referred to as the 'learners'. Again, depending on the context, some view mentoring as a deficit model, required when someone is failing to do as well as they could or underperforming, whilst coaching can be understood to be for those who are talented and need some investment to progress even faster. Interestingly the opposite is true within other organisations and cultures, and so some preliminary enquiries as to how mentoring and coaching are perceived within your own organisation could be crucial to the success and uptake of your programme. If, for example, mentoring is viewed within your organisation as a deficit model, possibly as a result of previous attempts to introduce a similar type of support, then it may be prudent to introduce the support as coaching.

There is also a vast difference in cultures between and within different nations, and so it is essential that when setting up your own programme, some knowledge of the context and existing culture is explored and taken into account. It will also be valuable to conduct some research with your intended beneficiaries to elicit their views on whether coaching or mentoring might be useful to them.

Within my own institution, a similar peer support programme was much more widely sought after when offered as 'peer coaching' than when it had been promoted as 'mentoring' the previous year. This may have been the result of previous mentoring schemes offered within the institution to widening participation students (those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) and those with disabilities or mental health issues. However, other factors may have been the promotional materials and wording used to advertise the peer support offered. This situation illustrates the importance of knowing the historical background of both the organisation and the wider community when implementing a coaching or mentoring programme. The case study for this programme can be found on page 119.

The final requirement for a successful programme and a thriving mentoring or coaching relationship is to ensure that the mentors or coaches do not have any vested interest in their allocated learner that could cause a conflict of interest. Whilst it might initially appear that it would be useful for the coach or mentor to have some background information about their allocated learner, it could, in fact, impede rapport building. Too many assumptions or pre-judgements could easily be made by the mentor or coach. When the learner is in some way appraised or assessed by the coach or mentor, it may also act as a deterrent to openness and honesty. Clutterbuck et al. (1999) describe this as 'offline' help, and it is this capacity of the mentor or coach to remain completely detached about any given situation presented to them that is key to success. For example it would be far more difficult for learners to talk openly about feelings of being overwhelmed with their workload or not getting on with their peers when talking to a coach who will later be appraising them either in a working or other capacity.

Whilst all the above factors do need to be considered, it is strongly suggested that any definition for your programme should adhere to the following guidelines:

- ▶ A nondirective approach should be adopted whether the scheme is labelled coaching or mentoring.
- ▶ No pre-planned schedule for the sessions should be provided for the coaches and mentors (except perhaps where the scheme is targeted at young people under 16 years).

- ▶ The sessions should consist of one-to-one meetings (with the possible exception of the scheme targeted at younger people or pupils).
- ▶ The relationship offered should be 'offline', and the learner should not be a direct 'reportee' of their allocated coach or mentor.
- ▶ The relationship should be deemed confidential between the coach or mentor and the learner without input or reporting back on the content of meetings to other stakeholders (except in the event of disclosure issues).

It is also essential to ensure that under no circumstances should the support be offered as a 'counselling' or as a 'therapeutic' intervention, as the majority of higher education institutions will have such a dedicated service in place. The mentor's or coach's role in such cases would be to signpost their learners to a therapy or counselling service should they have needs that require help of a more therapeutic nature. How to cope with this type of situation should be included as part of the mentor or coach training.

### ▶ **Other Forms of Peer Support**

There does appear to be more consensus about other forms of peer support such as 'peer-assisted learning', which is described more usually as using trained second-year or third-year students ('PAL Leaders'), working alone or in pairs, to regularly supervise the learning of a small group of younger or less able students (Boud 1999; Green 2011; Capstick 2003). Peer-assisted learning is reported to offer an environment in which the younger, less experienced students can benefit in a number of ways. Peer-assisted learning is also more often a structured process and, if well practised, supported by academics or programme tutors. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that this form of peer support is undoubtedly beneficial, it is not the type of programme that is discussed within the confines of this book.

Peer tutoring is another type of support, described by Topping (1996) as an old practice whereby able students work in pairs or in groups with less able students. Peer tutoring is also seen to have high curriculum content and utilises structured materials. Topping goes on to describe nine different types of peer tutoring to suit different circumstances, from cross-year tutoring to reciprocal peer tutoring. Colvin et al. (2010) describe peer tutoring as similar to 'supplemental instruction', whereby more advanced students help less experienced students with course content. Clearly these interventions can be fairly easily distinguished as different from a one-to-one mentoring or coaching relationship, as there will be a clear structure to the sessions from the outset.



Whilst this text is aimed specifically at those implementing a coaching or mentoring programme, many of the suggested procedures for exemplary practice would be the same even if setting up a group support intervention. The training for peer supporters would have a different emphasis and would include instruction on managing small groups as well as planning and preparing for the group support sessions. However, the advice on recruitment, promotion, and evaluation would be similar to that for a mentoring and coaching programme and so may also be of value to those planning group sessions.

### ► **The Skills Required for Coaching and Mentoring**

The skill set required for mentors and coaches will differ depending on the aims and objectives for your particular programme. For example, if the aim and objective of a peer mentoring programme is to improve the academic attainment of students who are not performing well academically, then it would make no sense to recruit students who are themselves not performing well in this area. They may well have personal skills that would stand them in good stead for a mentoring role, such as good listening and communication skills, but if they have not achieved sufficiently high grades then they will probably not be terribly beneficial in helping you to achieve your aims and objectives.

There are however some key competencies that are essential to either a mentoring or coaching role, and these should be tested at the recruitment stage and throughout the interview and training process.

Good listening skills are key to a mentoring and coaching role. Many people view themselves as good listeners when in fact they actually prefer speaking, and this can often be detected at the interview stage. Your interview questions should be aimed at uncovering specific examples of how they have proven to be 'good listeners' as opposed to them just stating that they are good listeners. If you have candidates with good listening skills, then it will be relatively easy to turn them into active listeners with thorough training.

For most schemes an altruistic nature is usually a welcome quality, and again examples of this can be looked for at the application and interview stages. For many programmes monetary rewards for your mentors and coaches will not be viable within the budgetary constraints, and so many people will be volunteering for the reward of the self-satisfaction of helping others alone. However, the other rewards that being a mentor or coach can bring should not be overlooked and should be well promoted when advertising the role. These will include enhanced communication skills (as part

of the training) and, for students particularly, an opportunity to enhance their CVs and gain a personal reference upon successful completion of the programme. As mentoring and coaching are so well utilised in so many sectors from voluntary to private and corporate, being able to include this experience on job and work placement applications can be a real bonus as it is an indicator of leadership qualities too.

There does need to be a good balance between the gains that the applicants want for themselves and what they are prepared to put into it. It would be advisable, for example, to be wary of selecting any applicant who asks at interview exactly when and how much he or she will be paid or when he or she can use you as a referee without showing any genuine interest in the role itself.

Another factor to take into account is available time which is something that the reader will need to consider when deciding from where they will try to recruit their coaches or mentors. It may be that a particular group of people would be best placed to offer the support in terms of knowledge and experience. However, if they are unlikely to be able to spare sufficient time to commit to the programme, then it might be better to select the participants from another group who may have less knowledge and experience but are likely to be more incentivised by the opportunity and have more time to fully commit. What is essential is to raise awareness of the time commitment from the outset, not only for the training days but for the one-to-one sessions as well as attendance at regular support workshops. In a student mentoring programme, for example, a good guideline would be that the students are coping reasonably well with their studies (so don't have modules to retake) and that they are not employed on a paid basis for more than 20 hours per week. If they are working more than this and studying for a full-time degree, they will likely be over-stretching themselves no matter how eager or suitable they are to take part. You would likely be doing them a disservice if you were to select them, and if you did they may become overburdened once matched and withdraw, which would prove damaging to your programme overall.

Due to the many misconceptions surrounding coaching and mentoring, readers can also expect some applicants to apply so that they 'can offer someone, less experienced, the benefit of their advice, wisdom, and opinion'. If handled correctly these applicants can either be deterred in the first instance or, better still, they can be properly trained to offer support using a more facilitative approach, as previously discussed.

A final consideration is the balance of female to male mentors who apply, and some consideration needs to be given to the consequences of a possible imbalance. It may be that an imbalance is perfectly acceptable for your scheme, particularly if it is targeted at a specific gender such as engaging