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Coaching as an educator: Critical elements in a faculty development program

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Abstract

Introduction: Coaching has gained acceptance in the education field as a way to enable learners to achieve their fullest potential. In the endeavor to set up a coaching ecosystem in our university, we started by equipping our educators with fundamental coaching skills and techniques. Our training workshop, *Coaching As An SIT Educator*, covers the key coaching competencies and is highly practice focused. Participants get hands-on skills practice using contextualised scenarios that are based on realistic academic, workplace and clinical placement settings.

Methods: To address concerns on time-effectiveness, we adopt a solution-focused approach to coaching. We want to create a mindset shift for educators, from subject experts providing advice and solutions, to coaches asking powerful coaching questions that help students make discoveries and work towards their goals. We encourage our educators to engage students holistically by finding coachable moments in their daily student interactions.

Results: Competency-based assessments are conducted to determine achievement of the learning outcomes, articulated by the knowledge, attitude, and demonstration of coaching skills with students. Assessments consist of a reflection, multiple-choice question (MCQ) quiz, and scenario-based coaching role plays. Participants achieved the learning outcomes as demonstrated from the assessments.

Conclusion: The coach training workshop is the major pillar of our coaching initiative. Beyond the workshop, ongoing coaching development is supported through other activities and resources, including community of practice, coaching circle and knowledge repository. Opportunities for continuous learning and conversation platforms for sharing coaching experiences are part of the growing coaching ecosystem at SIT.

Keywords: *Assessments, Coaching Competencies, Coaching Conversations, Coaching Ecosystem, Coachable Moments, Faculty Development, Feedback, Holistic Development, Solution-Focused*

I. INTRODUCTION

Coaching has gained greater awareness and wider acceptance in the education field in the past decade, led by the efforts of innovative educators and more evidence-based research. Coaching has been described as a very powerful approach that facilitates personal and professional change through deep level listening, questioning, setting the right challenges and providing support along the process (Griffiths, 2005). More specifically, academic coaching is defined as individualised practice of asking students reflective, motivation-based questions, providing opportunities for formal self-assessment, sharing effective strategies, and co-creating a tangible plan that promotes accountability (Deiorio et al., 2017).

In traditional educational settings, communication tends to be mostly directive, where the educator is the subject expert who gives instructions, solutions or advice to students. From this “telling” or “pushing” stance where the focus is on problem solving and advice giving, shifting to coaching conversations requires an “asking” or “pulling” communication approach. Engaging in coaching conversations involves the educator coaching students through powerful questioning, active listening and guiding them to explore possibilities so as to discover new ideas and find solutions for themselves.

In 2020, Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) introduced internal coach training for all academic staff with the aim to build educators’ capability to work with

students at a deeper level. This highly contextualised academic coaching training was made mandatory for all educators. This was essential for the creation of a strong coaching ecosystem in the university and adopting coaching practices across a variety of learning contexts, such as providing assignment feedback, consultations on projects and supervising students at the workplace. In working with students towards their preferred futures, SIT educators can help the students develop confidence and self-efficacy, enabling them to achieve their fullest potential.

II. METHODS

This section highlights the critical elements of the faculty development programme.

A. Solution-focused Approach

One of the top concerns of many educators is time. There are underlying concerns on whether coaching students will take up too much time, and what happens if they uncover student issues that they cannot deal with. A solution-focused coaching approach alleviates some of these concerns. The basic principle of the solution-focused approach is to help coachees reflect and design their solutions, rather than go down the path of root cause analysis. Its forward-oriented solution approach contrasts with other traditional psychological techniques, which tend to look back at the past or are problem-focused (Grant & Gerrard, 2020).

The solution-focused approach is known for its simplicity, attention to language and time effectiveness. The conversation is steered to a preferred future of the issue at hand without dwelling on the troubled past. The coach encourages the coachee to focus on their strengths and positive resources, to think about their resourceful past, and to draw on positive lessons from when they have been at their best. After identifying their desired outcomes and considering their options in the context of present realities, the coach guides the coachee to think about the next steps to progress towards their preferred future.

B. Mindset Shift

In higher education, many coachable opportunities outside the formal contact hours can be easily missed. For example, instead of merely deducting marks for repeated late submissions of assignments, the educator could coach the student on improving time management. In clinical fieldwork, when a student complains about limited interaction with the busy clinical educator, the university supervisor can coach the student on how best to schedule time for feedback. Our daily encounters and interactions with students present many coachable moments that offer just-in-time and authentic learning

opportunities to support students in their development to become work-ready graduates.

Students may initially find coaching sessions difficult as it is easier to just ask for solutions than to discover solutions for oneself. However, with time, students will realise the value of coaching as they witness their progress. In an Asian context, where many students are respectful and value advice from authoritative figures, such as professors, coaching can require a mindset shift for both students and faculty (Lim, 2021).

C. Tailoring the Coaching Training to Education Context

The *Coaching As An SIT Educator* workshop is an in-house designed 2-day program. It is highly contextualised for the needs of SIT academic staff, to equip them to be versatile and agile educators, performing the role of Teacher-Coach-Mentor. The workshop covers the key coaching fundamentals and is highly practice-oriented. The programme design was intended for participants to develop hands-on coaching skills with contextualised role play scenarios (see Appendix A for an example), so that they can apply what they have learnt with their students immediately after the workshop.

While we do not intend to train credentialed professional coaches, the key International Coaching Federation (ICF) coaching competencies were referenced to guide the design of the SIT workshop. The GROW model (Whitmore, 2019) was introduced as a framework for the participants to organise and manage the flow of the coaching conversation. Drawing on inputs from academic staff, realistic student-centric scenarios were created for class discussions and role plays. The coaching practice sessions are conducted in dyad, triad, and hot seat formats. The workshop design and facilitation ensure that there is psychological safety, providing a trusting space for constructive debriefing, feedback sharing and open questions and answers to take place.

To manage the workshop time and resources effectively, e-learning content was developed in-house, specifically to complement the interactive classroom session. A week before the start of the workshop, the participants can access materials in the form of an asynchronous pre-recorded webinar. The webinar consists of five micromodules, covering topics such as Mindset, Motivation, Emotional Intelligence, and Feedback Skills (refer to Appendix B for more details). As many participants may already be familiar with these topics,

this self-learning component serves as a good refresher to prepare participants for the coaching workshop.

Please refer to Table 1 for details of the Coaching as An SIT Educator workshop.

Workshop: Coaching As An SIT Educator	
Learning Outcomes	
By the end of this course, participants will be able to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articulate the role and responsibilities of a coach/mentor in educational settings; 2. Demonstrate listening, questioning and feedback skills to have good coaching conversations; 3. Apply the GROW coaching model to conduct coaching sessions; 4. Show empathy to build rapport and foster good relationships; and 5. Implement coaching/mentoring in academic and workplace attachment settings to achieve the desired programme outcomes. 	
Topics Covered	
Pre-Workshop: eLearning	Workshop Day 1:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindset & Motivation • Emotional Intelligence (EQ) • Feedback Skills • What Is Coaching? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Coaching & Mentoring Fundamentals • Coaching Tools & Techniques; Coaching With GROW Model
	Workshop Day 2:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War Stories From Coaching as Internship Supervisor • Mentoring Versus Coaching • Getting Feedback On Your Coaching • Summary & Closing
Assessments (Day 2)	
Role Plays: Standardised Students & Assessors	Quiz: Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)
Scenarios (each – 20 minutes):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Intelligence • Building Rapport & Trust • Coaching Conversations • Coaching Process: GROW Model • Role Of Educator-Coach
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic Context 2. Workplace Attachment 	

Table 1. *Coaching As An SIT Educator* Workshop

III. EVALUATION OF COACHING COMPETENCY

To assess the attainment of the learning outcomes and development of the participants' coaching competence (knowledge, skills, attitude), assessments and reflection exercises are incorporated into the workshop. As this is not a certification program, assessments are formative in nature, with focus on providing the educators quality feedback. Coaching knowledge is assessed through a multiple-choice question (MCQ) quiz. Attitude and mindset shift is evaluated through pre- and post-workshop surveys, and reflection questions.

Coaching skills are assessed via role plays (with standardised students). The role play format involves two 20-minute coaching sessions with the participant (playing the role of an educator) having a coaching conversation with standardised students (who act as coachees) and are conducted virtually in real time over the Zoom platform, using breakout rooms. The role plays that are based on common scenarios in university and workplace supervision settings. An invaluable part of the learning in this assessment comes from the feedback conversation between the participant (coach) and assessor, who observes the coaching conversation. Many participants regard the skills assessment and individualised feedback on their coaching skills as the highlight of the training programme.

IV. DISCUSSION

Many readily available coaching materials or vendor-run workshops are geared towards executive or corporate scenarios. While the skills of coaching may be transferable, it is difficult for educators to draw relevance to student engagement. Therefore, *Coaching As An SIT Educator* workshop focuses on case studies of university scenarios, and supervision for work-integrated learning (e.g., internship, clinical placement). Participants get to work with fellow learners in group work and discussions, to engage in personal reflection, and takeaway practical knowledge and skills on their learnings in a safe space.

For a sustained effort to practice coaching and build an on-going coaching culture, a mandatory workshop is inadequate. Other coaching resources are available to support coaching practice and promote continuous learning in SIT:

- Community of Practice: Coaching Conversations @SIT (offered to any interested academic staff)
- Coaching Circle (offered to all alumni of the coaching workshop)
- Coach Academy (knowledge repository with academic and coaching industry resources).

V. CONCLUSION

In coaching, there lies great potential for students to be developed holistically if we tap on coachable moments in higher education. A contextualised, well-developed coaching development programme is an enabler for this potential to be fulfilled. Drawing on evidence-based research from academia and professional practice, a practice-oriented programme which focuses on developing hands-on coaching skills will be impactful, as educators can put these skills into action in their interaction with students.

Notes on Contributors

Associate Professor Lim Sok Mui (May) led the Center for Learning Environment and Assessment Development (CoLEAD) and spearheaded the coaching initiative in the university, contributed to the conception, drafted and critically revised the manuscript.

Ramesh Shahdarpuri is the senior educational developer in CoLEAD and plays the role of the coaching trainer for the faculty training program. reviewed the literature, contributed to the conception and assisted in revising the manuscript.

Pua Ching Yee is the learning analyst in CoLEAD and plays the role of coordinating the coaching training and assessment of the participants. She assisted in critically reviewing, revising and formatting the manuscript.

All authors gave their final approval and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Ethical Approval

This is a narrative review related to coaching training program with no data presented and no ethical approval is required.

Data Availability

This paper is a narrative review with no data analysis.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A: Example of a scenario used in the workshop

Scenario of coaching student on internship

Terry finds it hard to communicate with his workplace supervisor. As the supervisor is always busy, she is often unavailable. Terry ends up making decisions on his own without consulting the workplace supervisor. This has resulted in Terry making several mistakes on the job.

Task

As a coach:

- How will you use the GROW model when you meet him?

Background Information (for the role play actor)

- Terry feels that he should be self-reliant and does not want to be seen as needing help all the time.
- He is not an assertive person.
- The supervisor is always busy – she was recently promoted and has a new portfolio to manage.

Appendix B: Pre-workshop e-learning topics and outline

Mindset & Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growth & Fixed Mindset (Carol Dweck)• Self-Determination Theory (Richard Ryan and Edward Deci)
Emotional Intelligence (EQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal Competence & Social Competence; Awareness & Regulation (Daniel Goleman)
Feedback Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SBIR Framework: Situation, Behavior, Impact, Response (Center for Creative Leadership)
What Is Coaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coaching Overview (International Coaching Federation, John Whitmore)• Coaching In Education (John Campbell and Christian van Nieuwerburgh)