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Mentoring, coaching and supervision

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Coaching, Mentoring and Supervision by Samantha McMahon, Mary Dyer and Cath Barker

All early years' settings are concerned with improving practice and continuous improvement is underpinned by continuing professional development of staff. Coaching, mentoring and supervision can be understood as techniques which support professional development and the terms are often used interchangeably. It can be difficult to draw a clear distinction between the concepts as they are usually based on one to one discussions and the focus is normally on improving performance. Nevertheless in this chapter we will discuss the differences between these concepts, highlight some areas of overlap and provide an overview of coaching, mentoring and supervision as they might be understood and experienced from an early year's perspective. We will also consider the role of coaching, supervision and mentoring in supporting overall quality improvement in the setting.

By the end of the chapter you will have:

Considered the purpose of coaching, mentoring and supervision

Examined a number of different approaches to coaching, mentoring and supervision

Considered the key skills and ethical practices required for effective coaching, mentoring and supervision

Consider how coaching, mentoring and supervision can contribute to overall quality improvement in the setting

Coaching

McGill and Brockbank (2012) argue that the purpose of coaching is to change behaviour, suggesting its place lies within managing the performance of staff and ensuring tasks are completed in the 'right' way. Earlier definitions also point to coaching being a very directive process focussing on performance rather than understanding or knowledge, where staff are encouraged and supported to complete work tasks in prescribed ways and adopt management solutions to problems (Parsloe and Leedham 2009).

Approaches to Coaching

In general, coaching considers specific areas of performance of an individual and the overall job outcomes, all the while focusing on the improvement of practice and development of the individual to ensure that they are working to the best of their ability and enhancing the team as a whole. When coaching is undertaken it is normally with an agreed time span with a specific goal, which will normally be set by the team leader or management of the setting. This does not always treat the practitioner as an equal partner in the process, and it can be quite a formal process in comparison to mentoring. There will usually be regular, formal meetings with a record keeping process completed from initial commencement of the coaching. Coaching is often linked to performance reviews, target setting and appraisals within the workplace, hence the role of the team leader or management in the involvement of the target setting within the coaching role.

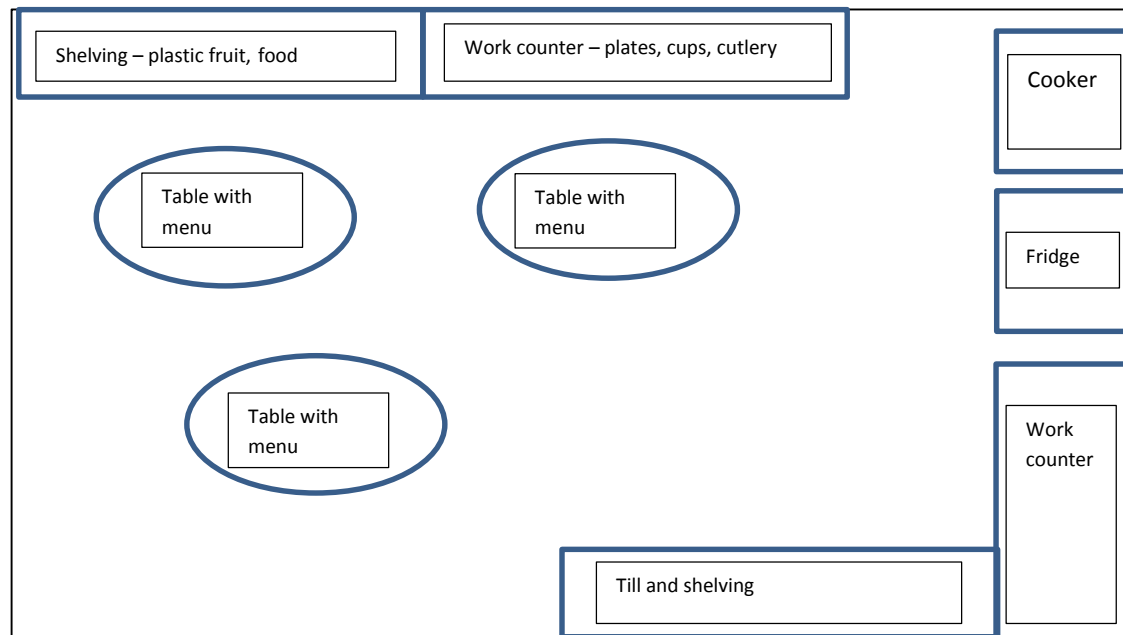
Case study

Linda is the deputy manager of a private day nursery and she has responsibility for all students who are on placement at the setting. She has set up an induction programme to ensure that all the students are familiar, from the outset, with essential policies and procedures including health and safety and safeguarding. Linda also observes students, checks their activity plans, liaises with other members of staff and checks with the student each week on their progress. The weekly sessions are an opportunity for the student to reflect and Linda, who describes herself as coach, mentor and supervisor for the students said '*the sessions are an opportunity for them (the students) to gain*

constructive feedback from me, this gives them an insight into their abilities, how we expect things to be done, and the areas they need to work on'

As the case study illustrates coaching in the early years setting may take the form of induction programmes for new staff, the following of set processes and procedures for specific tasks, and the training of apprentices following NVQs requiring competence-based assessment. It is often evidenced in the creation of tick lists and set pro-formas to support routine tasks such as the setting up of areas of continuous provision within the setting, planning learning activities and carrying out observations of children, and performing regular, routine tasks such as preparing simple snacks.

Example – plan for layout of role play area for all staff to follow:



Fruit and vegetable posters on left hand wall; price list above shelves on back wall.

Task – create a tick list/process sheet for nappy changing for new staff to follow

Whilst this can be useful to novice practitioners and ensure a measure of continuity in the basic quality of provision, such a performative approach to coaching does not support staff in dealing with the less predictable aspects of early years practice. Nor does it support practitioners in developing their own understanding of their practice. Furthermore, if practitioners are only ever coached in meeting management-set objectives, they will remain on the edge of any possible community of practice, only able to copy rather than make their own contribution to notions of what good practice is, reducing their sense of belonging to the team and their responsibility for maintaining good practice, and limiting their potential to develop their own personal effectiveness.

A more modern approach to the purpose of coaching is to see the coach as someone who supports the practitioner to identify and realise their own potential, to believe in their own ability to do their job and do it well, and to increase their self-awareness and responsibility for their own practice

(Parsloe and Leedham, 2009). The following case study illustrates how this might be achieved in practice, and brings the process closer to the concepts of mentoring and supervision.

Reflective activity

Rather than asking all staff to comply with a single plan for the layout of the role play area, which is only ever changed by a manager, consider how you can encourage them to develop and share their ideas for its layout and use. What guidance and support might you need to provide?

Mentoring

Mentoring is often regarded as a process where a more experienced individual leads the less experienced – a Vygotskyian model, where the experienced teach and the inexperienced learn. McGill and Brockbank (2012) define it as a process that leads to change in thinking, and Pask (2004, cited in Pask and Barrie, 2007) defines a mentor as someone who supports a mentee in the process of thinking things through, someone who is respectful and empowering. Mentoring, then, can be seen as a process that requires individuals to examine their values, attitudes and professional ambitions, and set appropriate goals around these to further their professional development. These goals may be individually focussed, on personal career development within and outside a particular organisation, or may be set within the context of a management vision of the effectiveness and purpose of the organisation. Within the early years setting, this may be about the professional development that takes a practitioner from their entry level qualification at NVQ Level 2 or 3 to acquiring experience and qualification that may advance them within their organisation (blue arrows) or outside it (green arrows).

Chart 1

Parsloe and Leedham (2009) regard mentoring as a less directive process than coaching, less performance driven and more of an equal relationship between colleagues where the professional development of the 'mentee' is the focus for both parties. The mentee is encouraged to feel more ownership of the process, contributing or even leading the setting of goals and achievement criteria. However, whilst it may be a more respectful and enabling relationship, for many early years practitioners, mentoring, especially where it is linked to the identification and fulfilling of training needs, is a process run by line managers, so that whilst it may be a less overtly directive process, it remains one where they are required to meet specific goals within specified timeframes, and are held accountable if this does not happen. Mentoring, for many practitioners, remains a performance management tool.

Case study

Setting X has introduced a mentoring system where senior colleagues mentor less experienced staff and apprentices undertaking early years qualifications. Jo is Room Leader for the Baby Room and has 2 permanent staff and a trainee to mentor. Consider what records it would be useful for her to keep. How can she make the process less 'managerial' for her mentees and encourage their involvement and ownership of the process?

Approaches to mentoring

Usually mentoring is undertaken by an experienced member of staff from the setting, who is able to guide and offer support. However, since mentoring may involve deeper personal concerns or aims, boundaries need to be established from the outset to ensure an appropriate professional relationship is maintained. Mentoring is something that can be developed and nurtured over a long period depending on the nature of the mentoring process, and may seem a less formal process than coaching or supervision.

As a process, it is often supported by systems of appraisal (including 360° appraisal), Performance Development Reviews, or Performance Management Reviews. However, the key principle remains the same in all these processes, the setting of goals, targets, achievement criteria and timescales. For this, accurate records and a commitment to action from both the mentor and mentee is essential. Although records of meetings can be recorded for the purpose of both the mentor and mentee it is vital that an agreement is drawn up at the start between the mentor and mentee to ensure that the boundaries of the role are clear and agreed by both parties. The mentee should always have access to the records of the meetings recorded. It is usually found that mentoring is undertaken on a 'needs based' requirement and meetings between the mentee and mentor are set on the needs of the mentee. To be effective, goal setting should be used from the start of the process. This should be with the mutual consent of the mentor and mentee. The mentee should be involved in their own goal setting and the goals set should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely), and recorded and reviewed regularly to ensure the process is effective. This in turn can lead to the identification of continuous professional development (CPD) needs to enhance the mentees skills if required.

One final consideration that must be addressed in the mentoring process lies in whose goals are being met. Where goals are management-led and organisational in nature, individuals should be encouraged to see a personal value in achieving them for mentoring to be effective. Where goals are individually led, then the setting will need to see some benefit from supporting these in terms of its own operation. This is the eternal paradox of professional development (Megginson, 2003) in any field – persuading an individual to do what their employer wants/needs them to do and persuading an employer to support (financially or in terms of time and other practical measures) the achievement of goals that may seem to have more benefit for the employee than the organisation. Chart 1 above demonstrates how mentoring and setting goals that are individual may lead to the organisation eventually losing a member of staff they have investing significantly in, but one whose developing skills and expertise they have benefitted from up to the point of their departure.

Both mentoring and coaching are used to identify areas of strength and also areas of development where support and guidance can be given to ensure practice is improved. The idea is that through continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, which can be identified through coaching, mentoring and supervision, the individual member of staff will show improvement and feel supported by the setting as a whole. If this is identified through the mentoring role then this can lead to coaching from either the same member of staff or a more suitable staff member usually from the setting but in certain situations outside agencies may be involved and brought in to support individuals or groups.

However it can easily be seen from the table below (adapted from Connor and Pakora, 2007, p.16) that there are a number of differences between the two areas of coaching and mentoring.

Coaching	Mentoring
The relationship usually has a time span	The relationship can be on-going and be over a extended period of time
Structured, scheduled and regular meetings	Informal meetings on a 'need' basis.
Short term and tailored for specialist needs	Longer term and more personal with a broader outlook
It is not essential to have formal experience of the Early Years role to coach unless it is a specialist area.	Mentor is usually an experienced member of staff based within the setting – this can be a member of staff with a senior role.
Work based issues are a focus	Personal issues can be discussed as these often impact on the role and career of the Early Years worker
There are specific goals and targets to be achieved – can be set by management or the coach	Guidance based and usually set by the individual mentee rather than management. Helps support develop the mentee professionally

Supervision

Both mentoring and coaching as described above can appear to be processes within which the focus is on performance and development but where there is limited space for the discussion of personal feelings towards one's role. In the Tickell Review (2011) successful supervision is also described as a tool which should allow staff to raise professional queries, discuss career progression, clarify roles, and support performance management and build confidence in supporting children's development. However in other caring professions such as nursing and health visiting, supervision is an established strategy to support practitioners in dealing with the emotional impact of their work. Working in early years can have an enormous emotional impact on practitioners; often it is very rewarding but as Elfer (2012) highlights it sometimes brings a significant emotional cost. Therefore Ward et al (2012) suggest that supervision must address emotions and that it should relieve stress, prevent burnout and provide an opportunity to solve problems. Ultimately this is to ensure that practitioners can continue to safeguard children.

Consider the following case study:

Case Study

Kate has recently been promoted in her setting and has taken on board additional responsibilities including SENCO, and partnership working with parents and a range of external professionals. Kate is keen to embrace the challenge presented by the new role but recognises that the best interests of the children and their families rest on her judgements and decisions. Kate is anxious that she will make a mistake and she begins to doubt her ability to cope. There is no existing system of supervision in place in the setting so Kate arranges a meeting with her manager to discuss her feelings. Her manager simply did not realise that Kate felt anxious and needs support; they now meet every six weeks for a supervision meeting.

Reflective Activity

Spend a few minutes thinking about Kate in her new role, have you ever experienced similar feelings of anxiety at work or placement and worried about how your decisions might be affecting a child or their family? How might supervision help?

Supervision should be intrinsic to effective leadership and is a key part of staff support systems (Tickell 2011). However as the case study illustrates supervision is not yet embedded as part of early years practice and its purpose is not fully understood by leaders and managers. The Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements in the EYFS offers only limited guidance on supervision it states that: Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:

- Discuss any issues-particularly concerning children’s development or well-being;
- Identify solutions to address issues as they arise; and
- Receive coaching to improve personal effectiveness. (DfE 2012)

However this does not provide hard pressed leaders and managers with much information on the benefits of supervision or what supervision might look like in their setting.

Benefits of supervision

There are many routine policies which are integrated into practice to ensure that settings are compliant with the legal requirements and these practices, such as adult: child ratios are accepted and seen as necessary to keep children safe. Supervision should be viewed as another aspect of routine practice to keep children safe. Sometimes in a busy setting it can appear to be an unnecessary luxury to allocate time for supervision and it is not until there is an incident in the setting that time is given to reflect and talk. The Plymouth Serious Case Review (Plymouth Safeguarding Children’s Board 2010) highlighted how practitioners had felt unable to express their uncertainties and discomfort in a safe way.

Supervision should be an opportunity for practitioners to raise concerns about the children in their care and to receive support to help them deal with difficult situations at work (Tickell 2011). Talking things through can help organise thoughts, feelings and actions. Good supervision can add value to the organisation, ultimately it should make sure that children and their families receive a quality service. Effective supervision ensures the implementation of policies and procedures and that the practitioner meets the settings objectives and standards. It should assist in staff retention by valuing the practitioner’s work and building self-confidence. It is an opportunity to identify learning needs and to promote the health and well-being of the practitioner.

Examples of supervision in practice

Mel is an HLTA with some teaching responsibility mostly in Reception and Key stage 1 and supervision takes place formally, on an annual basis, and is linked to performance management and results in a documented development plan. Mel said ‘ *I’m not sure of the purpose other than it’s a statutory requirement, I certainly did not feel motivated as the development areas were not my choice*’

Angela who is employed in a Children’s Centre as a family support worker has a supervision meeting every six weeks. Recently new paperwork has been introduced which prompts the supervisor to ask

about the individual's welfare and their relationships with colleagues and their manager. Actions are written down and agreed and these are revisited briefly at the start of the next supervision meeting. (An example of the supporting paperwork can be found in the appendix). Angela said *'I find supervision valid and useful; these are times when I can be honest about how things are going. However I have a good relationship with my manager, I'm not sure how things would work if the relationship was bit... tense'*

The examples illustrate how supervision is carried out in two settings, each of the practitioners has a very different experience and for Mel it is not entirely successful. What works in one setting may not work in another, there is no one size fits all model or approach, it must grow and develop in the setting (McMahon and Percival 2014). A reflective approach to supervision might be modelled on the approach suggested by Bernstein and Edwards (2012) which was adapted from work in Head Start in the United States.

A Reflective Approach to Supervision

From the outset supervision time is protected and is not related to appraisal, meeting deadlines or organisational matters and there is a mutually constructed agenda which can be worked through flexibly. Each party has a responsibility to prepare for the session and can draw upon notes, a journal or diary. The supervisee is allowed to share their account focusing on their experiences with children and families. However findings from research conducted by Peter Elfer (2012) and The Plymouth Serious Case Review (2010) suggest that relationships between staff can be a cause for concern and materially impact on practice; therefore the supervision meeting, with boundaries, may provide a forum to discuss staffing matters. The supervisor listens, asks open questions and may share some past experiences, it is important to look for positives as well as concerns. Supervision does provide the leader or manager with an oversight of practice and they must identify instances where immediate action is needed. However resolution is normally sought by working together on a plan of suggested actions these are recorded and the supervisee is asked for feedback on the session. This feedback should consider the following:

- What understandings of practice have been developed?
- What response, emotionally and practically is being planned?
- How does this affect the family? (McMahon and Percival 2014)

It is important that both parties keep accurate and timely records and that the next session starts with an update. This type of approach takes time to develop and relies on trusting relationships between the parties and is perhaps what Tickell (2011) had in mind when she asks for supervision to encourage reflective practice, so that it is more than an opportunity to check what practitioners are or are not doing.

Other approaches to supervision include more formal links to the appraisal process and will be based on a joint review of progress against an agreed set of objectives and goals. In the meeting learning resources, training and coaching can be identified for the achievement of the agreed goals. Whichever model is adopted it must always be seen as a two way process allowing the free

discussion of any aspect of work or development that the individual member of staff or manager wish to raise.

Key conditions for coaching, mentoring and supervision

Activity: consider the following common barriers to effective coaching, mentoring and supervision.

1. Lack of organisational policies or standards to provide guidance for each process
2. Lack of time and space
3. Interruptions
4. Poor recording of meetings, inadequate training for coaches, mentors and supervisors
5. Lack of supervision for coaches, mentors and supervisors
6. Unplanned and infrequent meetings

Now draw up a list of key conditions for delivering effective coaching, mentoring and supervision.

Adapted from the Care Council Wales (2011)

The activity above is designed to encourage consideration of the organisational and structural conditions needed to support effective coaching, mentoring and supervision. However the coach, mentor and supervisor also needs the following qualities to provide effective supervision; integrity, empathy, good listener, honesty, anti-discriminatory, reflective and respect.

It is essential that through each process the individual has their thoughts and feelings recognised and is able to learn from their mistakes. In turn they must also be willing to contribute to the process, to come to the meeting prepared, be honest, listen and seek advice. Disagreements may occur and not be easily resolved within the meeting; this should be recorded and followed up in the next meeting.

In any system of coaching, mentoring and supervision, the development of an effective relationship must be developed to ensure that the individual benefits from the process and this supports continuous improvement within the setting. To ensure that the processes of coaching, mentoring and supervision are mutually beneficial then both sides need to be aware of their responsibilities at the start of the process with those involved. Practitioners need to understand that coaching, mentoring and supervision is there to support them within their role and help to improve and develop their practice.

Whether it is mentoring, coaching or supervision that is being implemented within the setting, some basic ground rules will help to ensure effectiveness. These assume a more transformative approach to these processes that is concerned with the development of the individual practitioner and the quality of the setting as a whole, rather than the superficial improvement of performance on routine, everyday tasks (McGill and Brockbank, 2012).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Agree what to talk about | Set ground rules and keep meetings focussed |
| 2. Make sure you meet | Time management is key – share responsibility and commitment for this, make appointments to meet and keep to them. |

3. Keep it brief	Meetings should take from 30 – 75 minutes long, to maintain focus and purpose and allow sufficient time for meaningful dialogue.
4. Stick to the basic process	Again, agree ground rules and an agenda, then keep to it. Come away with agreed action points.
5. “Ask not tell”	Adopt a non-directive style, move away from being a manager.
6. It’s all about learning	The emphasis is on personal development, and reflection based on experience/performance – i.e. the importance of the learning relationship; it does always have to be finding the right training course to send someone on.
7. Be aware of boundaries	Coaching/mentoring/supervising is not counselling, or therapy – share and agree boundaries, respect them.

Adapted from Parsloe and Leedham (2009)

Ethical considerations

Coaching, mentoring and supervision should be conducted within an ethical framework of mutual respect for the parties concerned and also the fundamental beliefs and values which shape early years practice. The values, principles and objectives of the setting should be clearly articulated within their policies and mission statement and these are grounded in an ethic of care for children, their families and staff. Ultimately for coaching, mentoring or supervision to be effective requires trusting and supportive relationships which requires a mutual understanding of the following ethical issues.

Confidentiality

It is important for staff to feel comfortable in discussing all aspects of their work (Care Council Wales 2011) and confidentiality plays a huge part in the trust between the parties concerned. Whilst the documentation from the meetings is confidential they are also organisational documents and may be open to scrutiny in particular circumstances such as audit, grievance, or internal/external enquiry. It is essential that all parties are aware of and understand what will happen to the information discussed; it is private but not necessarily secret.

Power

Another consideration is the potential power imbalance between the parties, if the coach, mentor or supervisor has a more senior role in the organisation they need to recognise that they are in a powerful position. They need to remember that the other party may say things to try to please them and be unwilling to be honest about their practice in order to avoid recrimination or conflict. Any agenda, goals or targets discussed should be by mutual agreement and any notes should be written up and actions agreed. Both parties should have a signed copy and the next session should begin with revisiting the agreed actions.

Coaching, mentoring and supervision – their contribution to quality improvement

The impact of having these in place within the setting contributes to:

- The development of sharing knowledge and skills – this has an impact on the whole team as a community of practice, as working together and sharing good practice helps to refine skills and works to the advantage of working to individuals' strengths.
- Recruitment, retention and career development of staff - knowing that support is available to staff from the onset of employments will not only make them feel reassured but this will help retain them within their employment and in turn help support career development within the setting.
- Developing reflective practice – practitioners often need support to develop reflective practice and having the support of coaching, mentoring and supervision can help to support this as areas of development can be discussed and reflected on between individuals to ensure the appropriate steps are undertaken to ensure improvement.

Professional development of all staff within the early years setting can make a significant contribution to its overall continuous quality improvement, especially if the focus is on a transformative approach (McGill and Brockbank, 2012) rather than simply the management of performance in routine tasks. Transformative development, as the name implies, is a process which changes the nature and quality of the organisation – an approach which can support practitioners in developing their practice based on personal and individual professional goals, and putting children and their development, families and their needs at the heart of their practice.

By moving from the initial performance management coaching of induction and basic training for new staff and apprentice early years assistants, to encouraging their participation in developing processes and procedures and requiring them to identify their own learning goals, even the least experienced of practitioners can contribute to the quality improvement of a setting. By taking a developmental approach (McGill and Brockbank, 2012) to mentoring and supervising individual practitioners, where goals and targets are identified by practitioners in discussion with their managers, and issues of values, confidence and personal responses to practice are discussed through reflective dialogue, deeper learning is possible that supports the practitioner in understanding their role and its place within the setting. By extending this to an examination of the values of the organisation and inviting discussion and evaluation of the overall mission statement for the setting, a more systemic change becomes possible for the organisation (Brockbank and McGill, 2012), where the whole team takes ownership of the values of the organisation, and responsibility for embedding these in their practice, thus driving up the overall quality of the setting.

Pause for thought.....

What would be the benefits to you, your role and your setting of having coaching, mentoring or supervision?

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