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WHAT IS COACHING AND MENTORING?

INTRODUCTION

Youth work draws on a variety of strategies and methods to engage with and support young people. These have varied greatly over the years, often beating to the drum of various government agendas, times where there have been significant resources funnelled into youth work and other seasons where there have been virtually none. Traditionally, youth workers train in the areas of creating and delivering projects which draw on group work skills and interventions; they have developed various one-to-one approaches such as advisory or advocacy roles. One of the longest-standing interventions used by youth workers has been mentoring. There have been many references to mentor roles over the centuries, but perhaps one of the earliest formal mentoring programmes to be established, and still survives today, is Big Brother, Big Sister, founded in the USA in 1904. Many subsequent mentoring programmes have since been developed in the UK. However, in more recent years, there has been a surge of coaching programmes specifically aimed at young people. This chapter will give an overview of coaching and mentoring, how they have developed over the years and where and how they are different or similar, from a global, European and UK perspective. It will also propose a definition of coaching and mentoring within the context of youth work and youth studies. We will also look at using a blended approach, integrating coaching and mentoring approaches which are young person-led and dependent on the young person's specific context and issues. This chapter will enhance your confidence to effectively support young people by equipping you with coaching and mentoring knowledge that can best support young people's needs.

WHAT IS COACHING?

Like mentoring, coaching is used in a variety of settings and contexts, making a comprehensive definition difficult, as it largely depends on who is doing the coaching, who is being coached and why. From a business perspective, coaching tends to place the emphasis on performance and is applied when an employee needs to up-skill in some way or when someone has been promoted and is offered coaching by way of supporting their transition into the new role. Often, coaching is applied at more senior levels and tends to be paid for or bought into by an organisation, whereas mentoring is usually 'in-house' and therefore less costly to the organisation. Entry-level employees transitioning to a new role often get offered a mentor rather than a coach, which may suggest that there is a hierarchy and priority associated with each discipline.

Examining coaching definitions across the literature, common themes alongside performance include goal setting and giving feedback. Compared to mentoring, where role modelling is sometimes emphasised, coaching does not technically require the coach to have a similar or shared background to the coachee. This is based on the concept that coaches can coach in any setting, utilising their ability to facilitate conversations which support the coachee to develop insights in line with their overarching or smaller goals. This is not to say that a facilitative approach is not useful in mentoring. However, there seems to be a consensus that coaches will use conversation and questioning in order to support the coachee to reflect and come to their own conclusions or decisions.

It is also important to consider that when it comes to coaching young people, often there are less commonalities between the adult and the young person – there may be some mutual interests or shared background, but this wouldn't necessarily be a pre-requisite for the match. Therefore, we would argue that using coaching approaches is highly appropriate when working with young people – not assuming you have the right to give advice, although at times that may be appropriate and welcomed.

When examining sports coaching, arguably the oldest form of coaching, one can determine some overlaps with youth work; it would not be uncommon for a youth service provision to include staff members who also hold a sports coaching qualification. This is because offering sports activities to young people can be a useful way of connecting and engaging with those who might not otherwise access youth provision. The sports coach can then get to know that young person and recommend other activities or programmes that might address a specific need that the young person has. Whilst elite sports

coaching is still focused on performance, within the context of youth work, sports coaching is seen as more of a relational activity. For young people who are particularly passionate about one or more sports, or for youth services that take the health and wellbeing of young people seriously, youth workers can use sports coaching as a way of offering bespoke support that develops their interest. It is not uncommon for youth services to provide a gym or specific sport programmes such as football training. Sports also provide an opportunity for young people to let off steam or burn energy that can also help improve their mental health.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

As with coaching, mentoring has been used in many different formal and informal settings over the years. If I were to ask if you have ever had a role model in your life, many people can name someone – perhaps in their family or a school teacher – who they looked up to and sought to emulate in some way. Perhaps there was never a conversation about that person being a mentor. Many people have referenced those whom they have never met but have seen live or online or have read about, who they have felt have in some way inspired or influenced them and subsequently have impacted the course or direction their life has taken.

Where mentoring has been established more formally in business settings, it has often been part of an induction process or for those at the early stages of their careers. Whilst not all mentors are older than their mentees, there is usually a requirement for the mentor to have gained more experience in the area that the mentee wants to follow. For example, it has long been established that newly qualified teachers are assigned a mentor whilst training and in their first year of teaching. In educational settings, mentors are often on senior management teams, reflecting a high level of experience in the role. This positions them well to provide role modelling in relation to best practice, as well as provide the support needed when adjusting to a new and demanding profession.

Mentors within an organisational setting may perform their role informally or formally. Sometimes, employees might seek someone out to informally mentor them, meaning this is never officially recorded. An informal arrangement may be useful for the mentee who may not want it known that they are seeking help, guidance and support. This can sometimes be detrimental to the mentor, who is not recognised for the time and support being given to their colleague. In more formal arrangements, the mentor can also act as a sponsor,

helping to 'open doors' for their mentee in terms of career progression, giving credence to the idea that it is not what you know, but who you know.

Mentoring within the context of youth work can have slightly different dynamics; a young person coming forward to be mentored may not necessarily be matched with someone whom they know and therefore look up to, and the mentor may not necessarily possess an area of expertise that the young person is looking to acquire. Having said that, some mentoring programmes for young people do place an emphasis on future career aspirations, in which case the mentor will be working in an area or role that the young person is hoping to get into in the future. With younger people (say, early to mid-teens), mentoring programmes tend to be aimed at those who may be struggling or are isolated in some way. Matching them to a mentor allows them to build a connection with someone who is going to offer flexible support and guidance.

There are examples of mentoring where young people select a family member or close friend that they nominate as a mentor, for example, in the Netherlands, where a youth-initiated mentoring approach (Van Dam et al., 2017) has been adopted within the realm of social care. Here, we might expect mentors to be more likely to offer advice based on what they know about the young person in a quasi-parenting role.

Within youth work, it is also possible for the mentor role to spill over into advocacy. Again, depending on the context and the remit of the organisation, it could be that the mentor might be able to attend other sessions with the view of providing helpful information that could enable the mentee to either access more support or make further progress. For example, support with housing needs or where social services might be involved with a family. Where mentors are volunteers, this level of support may need to be discussed to ensure the mentor is happy with providing further advocacy input.

THE PROBLEM WITH UNIVERSAL DEFINITIONS

There are several reasons why it has been difficult to clearly define what coaching and mentoring are. This is because each intervention has its own history across different professional or recreational contexts, drawing on a varied range of ideologies and approaches. The literature that looks at coaching or mentoring separately, or together, tends to reflect the author's professional background and therefore might present ideas that may not be relevant to coach or mentor practitioners working in other spheres. It can be frustrating as a youth worker when reading books about mentoring that are

largely related to business and therefore do not address issues being raised in the context of working with young people.

Unlike social work, there is no clear overriding governing body that licences coaches or mentors. Anyone can call themselves a coach or a mentor and establish themselves in any sphere. There are several umbrella agencies or associations related to coaching and mentoring. Some are UK-based, others span across Europe or further afield. Whilst the lack of regulation is worrying for some, others view this as allowing coaches and mentors to be more flexible and creative in their roles. Nonetheless, a lack of oversight from a professional body does add to the confusion about the remit and purpose of each role.

It could be argued that this lack of clarity around defining coaching or mentoring is a strength. Having clear definitions might pin some people down too much and be almost restrictive, prohibiting creative approaches. Surely the proof is in the pudding – if coaching or mentoring works for the client, the experience is given credibility by the person on the receiving end, and it is the coachee or mentee who is in the best place to describe their experience rather than a coach or mentor pre-determining what the experience is going to look like.

Offering some clarity around the role and remit of the coach or mentor is largely driven by the context. Even within youth work, it could be that a coaching or mentoring programme might look different from agency to agency. However, it is important that those working or volunteering within a programme or organisation need to have a clear understanding of expectations from the outset, both in terms of how the coach or mentor is expected to deliver the coaching or mentoring, and for the young person, what they might expect before they sign up for the programme.

HOW IS COACHING AND MENTORING SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT?

In general terms, coaching and mentoring both prioritise the learning and development of the person on the receiving end. An individual signing up to be coached or mentored usually wants to experience some form of positive change because of working with someone who is there to support them. This requires the coach and mentor to be in it for the right reasons, with the focus on the other person rather than their own needs. It is true to say that the learning is usually two-way, and the coach or mentor does get something out of the experience. We can both vouch for the fact that coaching or mentoring conversations have prompted us to reflect on our own experiences, or

have encouraged us to set our own goals, as a response to working alongside young people who are reflecting and setting goals towards their own development.

It is not uncommon for coaching and mentoring programmes to place an emphasis on transition. Those targeted for the programme are often there because they are about to embark on a significant life transition, whether it be transitioning into adulthood, becoming a parent and returning from maternity leave and starting or progressing in their career. These key transitional points often warrant additional or bespoke support, and this is something we will look at in more depth in Chapter 3, where we will look at specific transitions that young people go through.

Whilst some coaching and mentoring approaches use group work as a basis for support, most are one-to-one in format. This then raises common elements such as the two individuals being able to connect and develop a good working relationship. Depending on the way in which the pairing is established, there may be information being shared with third parties such as those with oversight or those commissioning the coaching or mentoring. This can play into the dynamics of the relationship, not least aspects such as confidentiality and power. These themes will also be examined later. Notwithstanding, the coach or mentor's skills and abilities in relating well to others, demonstrating good listening and interpersonal skills, are central features of both interventions.

Often coaching has been described as more indirective (facilitative) than directive, whereas mentoring has been viewed to be more directive (advice giving) than indirective. However, very little research has been carried out to see what goes on within the coaching and mentoring conversations, and how much content is advice giving or facilitative. It is highly likely that there is usually an element of both, regardless of the session being a coaching or mentoring one. We would therefore argue that most coaching and mentoring sessions are a blend of the two and integrate a range of approaches and styles. We call this 'moaching'! There are probably more overlaps than differences. However, it is important that all parties involved are aware of these approaches and can adapt depending on the person being coached or mentored and their specific needs.

Fig. 1 suggests a more transparent integrated approach that blends coaching and mentoring. This can help both parties understand where and how coaching or mentoring approaches might be applied and become explicit in the evaluation process.

The other difference is the length of the intervention. Overall, coaching interventions tend to be shorter than mentoring, which usually lasts

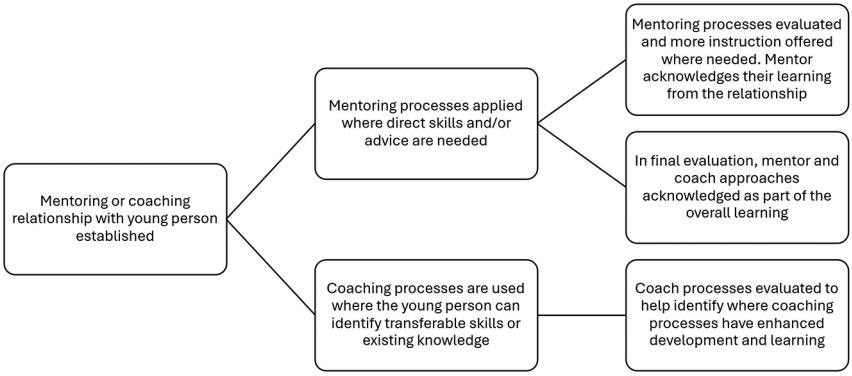

Fig. 1. Coaching–Mentoring Integrated Approach.

for a year or more. Like counselling, some coaches tend to contract for a specific number of sessions from the outset and then review this towards the end of the contract. This could be 6 or 12 sessions, for example. Having a shorter time may help the coachee to be more focused, and it also requires the coach to work harder at building the rapport from the outset. Where mentoring typically lasts longer, this requires the mentor to maintain and sustain motivation and sometimes look for creative ways to keep the mentee engaged.

One perspective on coaching and mentoring is viewing mentoring as the broader relationship which utilises coaching approaches within a wider mentoring remit (Balfour, 2024). This might not be relevant in every context, but it would certainly be relevant to youth work. Young people tend to bring up anything and everything within a mentoring session, regardless of why they started the mentoring in the first place; and taking the view that coaching is one strategy that might be used alongside many other youth work strategies is a helpful way to frame things.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF COACHING AND MENTORING?

Research has been undertaken to try and identify what can be achieved through coaching and mentoring. Most of the research has been carried out within organisational settings. In these contexts, coaching has been shown to:

- ✓ Establish and take action towards achieving goals.
- ✓ Become more self-reliant.

- ✓ Gain more job and life satisfaction.
- ✓ Contribute more effectively to the team and the organisation.
- ✓ Take greater responsibility and accountability for actions and commitments.
- ✓ Work more easily and productively with others.
- ✓ Communicate more effectively (Institute of Coaching).
- ✓ Help improve mental health (Boniwell et al., 2014).
- ✓ Group coaching can help combat isolation and provide mutual support, provide accountability and reduce depression (Whitley, 2013).

Proviso:

- ✓ The coachee needs to be ready and suitable for coaching – it is not for everyone.
- ✓ The coachee needs to possess the right aptitude and attitude.

Looking at the research for mentoring, the benefits within organisational contexts are not dissimilar. Mentoring has been shown to:

- ✓ Increase motivation.
- ✓ Increase performance.
- ✓ Support policy implementation.
- ✓ Manage change and succession.
- ✓ Benefit the mentee, business/organisation and mentor (Garvey & Garrett-Harris, 2008).

Proviso:

- ✓ The mentee also needs to be open to being mentored.
- ✓ They are committed for the long haul.

WHAT MAKES COACHING OR MENTORING YOUNG PEOPLE DISTINCTIVE?

Most of the literature and research emphasises mentoring, rather than coaching young people and this reflects the dominance of mentoring in these

contexts. There are several features of mentoring young people which stand out. These include:

- Working with a deficit model.
- Being flexible.
- Taking into account the circumstances and needs of each mentee and keeping this central to the work that they are doing.
- Placing an emphasis on the relationship itself, which in turn can help steer the direction and focus of the mentoring.
- Knowing when it is appropriate to be directive and non-directive and offering support at a transitional time of their life.

Projects and mentoring schemes associated with young people are often based on some form of deficit. This is because mentoring is offered to young people with needs such as 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (EBD) or those who are not in education, employment or training. These negative labels placed on young people who are perceived not to fit into societal norms can often be used to attract funding to help set up projects and interventions such as mentoring and this deficit cycle is then reinforced as it creates further demand. For some mentoring programmes aimed specifically at 'hard to reach' young people, it can be particularly challenging to capture the impact due to those young people not always being in a position where they are ready to change.

The complex needs of young people referred for coaching or mentoring therefore require the coach or mentor to be flexible. This is important because often the young people themselves not only experience significant personal difficulties, but they are also going through the key life-stage, transitioning to adulthood, with all the struggles that this entails. However, the potential reward for the coach or mentor is also significant, as a by-product of learning and development is often two-way. Coaches and mentors should be open to learning about themselves as part of the process and possess good self-knowledge and awareness of their own values and prejudices prior to embarking on a coaching or mentoring journey.

Coaches and mentors working with young people also place a strong emphasis on the relationship itself and the ability to build trust and rapport. One of the outcomes of a positive coaching or mentoring relationship is equipping the young person with the tools to replicate good relationships. However, the relational boundaries can sometimes become blurred; therefore, coaches and mentors need to ensure that they make the parameters of the relationship clear. For example, whilst coaching or mentoring can have a positive impact

on the young person's relationship with their parents, there may be occasions where the parent feels undermined, and the coach or mentor therefore needs to be aware of this.

It is important that coaches or mentors are mindful of when to offer advice or self-disclose and when to hold back. For example, the coach or mentor might impart specific first-hand experience or knowledge but not be fully aware of their role or the processes that could be used in that situation. Sometimes it will be appropriate to self-disclose and at other times it will be better for the young person to be allowed to figure out things for themselves. Some peer coaching or mentoring schemes have specifically matched young people with similar backgrounds or life experiences so that knowledge can be shared. Coaching is suggested as an intervention that mentors might use when looking to develop a skill or work on a particular task, therefore being less reliant on the mentor's prior knowledge or experiences.

Given the specific challenges that young people with EBD have, or for those who are perceived to be underachievers within the formalised education system, the emphasis here is to help build up the mentee's self-esteem and confidence. Therefore, the assumption is that mentors know how to do this and can effectively apply their role without stepping into territories that warrant specialist support such as counselling and psychotherapy. One of the ways that the coach or mentor ensures their input offers consistent support is through a commitment to meet with the mentee regularly and demonstrate consistency and reliability, particularly when a young person has felt let down by other adults in their life.

Whilst there is very little that has been written about coaching young people, there are some emerging trends. Theoretical models for coaching young people are underrepresented in the literature. This could be related to constructs which view young people as disadvantaged or not complying with social norms; therefore, the help offered to them needs to target and address these 'problems'. One way to look at this could be to see mentoring and coaching at two ends of a continuum. At the start of the relationship, more mentoring approaches might be applied, offering advice and support where needed. As the relationship develops, more coaching approaches could be adopted, allowing the young person to take more of a lead on the direction the relationship takes. This could reflect the nature of a young person who may have EBD. Once self-esteem and confidence have developed, the young person may then be ready to identify longer-term goals.

One example was found where coaching was cited as an intervention used to help young people make behavioural changes. Spence's (2003) study suggested that young people with particularly complex needs would benefit

from multi-method approaches for change to be ongoing. Therefore, coaching in isolation would be less effective than a combination of interventions. This also supports the view that interdisciplinary mentor–coaching approaches can be useful to the young people, where a wider range of needs can be met.

In terms of using mentoring and coaching approaches interchangeably with young people, it is not known to what extent mentors of young people integrate coaching approaches. However, what seems to be apparent is that, in general terms, mentoring interventions used with young people are based on a deficit model and coaching interventions tend to adopt more strengths-based or asset-based approaches. For the field of mentoring and coaching to develop further, young people and practitioners alike would benefit from the development of a greater range of mentor and coaching approaches. Many young people who have sometimes been written off by the adults in their lives have often developed greater capacities of resilience than those young people who have not had to face such adverse and challenging situations. Therefore, some learning opportunities which arise in the mentoring relationship may warrant a coaching approach where good questioning can be used to identify areas where the young person has proven the ability to navigate their way through a past difficulty, which in turn can help them reapply their learning when faced with a new challenge. Young people may benefit more from an integrated mentor–coach approach, rather than separate out coaching and mentoring programmes for young people.

In terms of specialist skills and knowledge, when coaching or mentoring young people, the key element which stands out compared with other areas of coaching and mentoring is the requirement for coaches and mentors to know and understand how to apply safeguarding and child protection procedures. This is a particular stand-out component that is not required in coaching or mentoring that takes place in other settings. Therefore, anyone involved in coaching or mentoring a young person will first need to undertake training in this area. We will further look at this key element in Chapter 6, but it is worth noting for now that this specialist knowledge is unique to the area of coaching and mentoring young people.

KEY ATTRIBUTES OF A COACH AND A MENTOR

Many youth coaching and mentoring programmes rely heavily on volunteers supporting professional staff in offering coaching or mentoring to more young people within youth service organisations. Therefore, it is important

that those who are identified as potential coaches or mentors go through a selection process and subsequent induction training before they are matched to young people. Who should youth organisations be looking for? There is not a one-size-fits-all approach – a wide range of personality types should be considered, as these will also reflect the range of young people needing the services. However, there are some key attributes, attitudes and skills (Table 1) which suggest the potential suitability to effectively engage with a young person, who in some instances, has been referred to the programme but may not necessarily be convinced that coaching or mentoring is for them.

In this chapter, we have started to navigate the challenges in defining coaching and mentoring, reflecting the historical and contextual factors which have led to it being difficult at times to pin down what coaching and mentoring are – there are no universal definitions. That said, we have suggested how coaching and mentoring might be defined and applied to young people and within the context of youth work. We have also argued that it needs to be acknowledged that coaching and mentoring interventions are often used interchangeably with young people. By understanding where and how these interventions can be integrated, we can start to move away from a dominant mentoring approach and emphasise more how coaching and mentoring can be used in ways which draw on strengths-based approaches, encouraging young people to build on their life experiences and further develop their resilience and abilities to make positive life decisions as they transition into adulthood.

Table 1. Key Attributes and Skills of Coaches and Mentors.

Attributes	Skills
Good interpersonal skills	Confident in implementing safeguarding policies and procedures
Emotional intelligence and empathy	Able to distinguish between mentoring and coaching processes and can apply this appropriately to young people's needs
Believes that young people can think for themselves and make decisions	Strong relationship-building skills
Reliable and trustworthy	Active listening skills
Flexible and adaptable	Effective questioning which eliminates bias
Self-aware, curious and reflective	Able to challenge young people appropriately
Culturally competent and inclusive	Can look beneath the surface and explore the reasons why someone might be presenting certain behaviours

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF COACHING AND MENTORING YOUNG PEOPLE

Having broken down some of the key components of what it means to coach and mentor within the context of youth work, we propose here a working definition that could be adopted in youth work organisations to help clearly establish the purpose and parameters of this type of specialist work:

> *Coaching young people uses strengths-based, goal-orientated processes which support them to develop skills, make decisions and take ownership for their personal growth. It focuses on facilitating self-reflection, resilience and behavioural change through structured questions. Unlike mentoring, coaching does not rely on the coach's prior knowledge or experiences but instead supports young people in identifying their own solutions and pathways forward.*

> *Mentoring young people is a relational, supportive process that typically lasts longer and may at times adopt coaching techniques and approaches. It emphasises building trust, offering guidance and providing stability during the adolescence period when a young person is going through lots of changes. Mentors may take a directive or non-directive approach depending on the young person's needs, fostering self-esteem and confidence whilst helping them navigate personal and social challenges.*

These definitions have been purposefully kept quite broad and therefore can be adapted to reflect specific organisational contexts or more specialist forms of coaching or mentoring for young people. The key purpose of these proposed definitions is to encourage those involved within such programmes to develop a shared understanding so that everyone involved is clear about the purpose and scope of the coach or mentor role.

EXERCISE

Can you, in no more than three sentences, define coaching for young people?

Now do the same for mentoring young people.

If you currently work or volunteer as a coach or mentor of young people, how do your own definitions above align with the organisation,

other workers or volunteers and, importantly, the young people you support?

How do you see yourself blending coaching and mentoring approaches, and how do you articulate these to the young people you support?

If you wanted to explore with young people their thoughts on coaching or mentoring, here are some questions you might want to use to start a conversation that captures their views:

- How do you see coaching/mentoring as similar or different to other adult roles you currently have in your life (parent/guardian, teacher, social worker, other)?
- What do you appreciate most about your coach/mentor in terms of how they treat you and what they do within sessions?
- After the coaching/mentoring has ended, how would you want to look back on the relationship and describe how it supported you?