



Professional Learning  
Research  
Innovation

# Learning in Practice

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### About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

### About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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**Len Nixon** has taught for 41 Years. During this time he has been a Head of Department, Tutor and Careers Advisor. Currently, he is the Barker College of Teachers' Lead Coach. Len is both an author and a co-author of Business Studies' textbooks and he has taught in Teacher Education both at UNSW and UTS as Method Lecturer. He has also been an AIS Business Studies' and Economics' Consultant, RBA Consultant and Occasional Lecturer at Blacktown City Library, UOW, Macquarie University in addition to his Rugby coaching at School, CAS and NSW levels. Len has also been Coordinator of Waterpolo.

# The Barker College of Teachers: Developing Capacity in Educators



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## Abstract

Coaching in education is increasingly being recognised as a pivotal dimension in school improvement and an critical means in building teaching and learning capacity, develop confidence in classroom practice and even leadership skills. The ultimate goal, however, is to improve the learning outcomes and wellbeing of students.

The professional coaching of teachers has grown quickly in school environments in the last ten years. Coaching articulates itself in a number of areas that includes a range of coaching programmes designed to augment and enhance teaching practice as well as leadership coaching opportunities in the development of succession planning. Educationalists have embraced coaching in all of these school contexts.

As these coaching initiatives develop, school leaders concomitantly seek to establish a strategic approach to what arguably is part of the core business of schools: to develop capacity in both students and teachers.

In this context, coaching may be part of initiatives related to educational leadership, enhancing professional teaching practice, student success and wellbeing and community (including parent) engagement. In particular, it is clear that teacher quality is a critical factor in student success and coaching has been shown to have a positive impact on teaching practice in the classroom. Coaching focused around teaching practice can take several forms. It can be led by school leaders, by specialist instructional coaches and by teachers coaching each other in peer based arrangements.

What does a collaborative coaching partnership look like?

- Teachers work with a peer in a high trust relationship.
- Teachers asks their peer to collect 'data' on them. This data collection is aligned with the teacher's specific classroom needs and own developmental needs.
- Follow up coaching conversations between teachers and peers occur that establish goals and actions.

This concept is nothing new - the best teachers have always done this.

For the first time, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers provide us with a common language as to what highly effective teachers need to know and do, and describes what good leaders also need to do to support their teachers. Increasing research evidence

within highly effective schools is that a coaching approach is essential. It points the leadership of the school to create a coaching culture where these collaborative partnerships will flourish. (McKinsey and Company 2010)

So what does a school leader do to lead instruction? Years of experience in a Principal role, and now in supporting other school leaders grappling with this question suggests that the following guidelines/principles will be a helpful place to start:

- Leaders set the direction and priorities within the school using participative processes with their community and board.
- Leaders seek over the medium to longer term to create a culture in their school where feedback is sought and welcomed.
- Leaders communicate these in a way that will influence the coaching conversation between peers.
- Leaders conduct performance conversations with the next level of leadership within the school (e.g.; Assistant Principals) where this exists, or directly with teachers in small schools.

One of the key focus areas of these conversations where the school has a middle management level, will be how the Middle Manager will lead the teachers they manage. At least one of the focus areas of these conversations between Principal and Middle Managers is how they interpret the school's direction, within their specific context and conduct coaching conversations with individual teachers, to support them in setting goals and actions relevant to the needs of their students.

The teacher is interpreting the school's direction and the Professional Standards within the context of their individual skillset and knowledge base, via performance conversations with their manager. The teacher's focus areas are always informed by the needs of the students.

The outcomes of these performance development and review conversations would be recorded and referred to in subsequent performance development and review meetings. This is the accountability aspect of the performance development and review process and may include iSMART goals and strategies that the coachee has committed to implementing. This process is collaborative and the coachee is expected to be professional and self-directed in how they interpret the school's priorities.

Leaders are a "leader as coach" and model the approach in the way they conduct themselves.

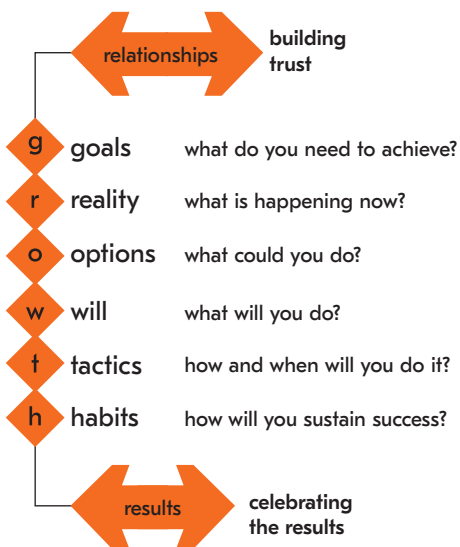
In moving towards the establishment of a coaching culture at Barker, a significant initiative has been undertaken in the creation of the College of Teachers in 2016. As a professional practice arm of the Barker Institute with Dr Greg Cunningham as its Director and Len Nixon as the foundation Master Coach, the College of Teachers develops a system of clear principles and purposes of coaching. Here teacher coaches are being equipped with coaching skills to ensure that staff are trained sufficiently to coach well. In this way, bringing a 'coaching orientation' to each conversation in which professional educators participate provides critical, incidental support for the establishment of a coaching culture. Indeed, without this orientation permeating informal conversations, more formal coaching initiatives are likely to be subtly undermined.

How What might a coaching conversation look like? From the flourishing of peer coaching

in education literature together with important insights emerging from the fields, the Growth Coaching Model (Goals, Reality, Options, Will, Tactics and Habits) provides a useful (and critical) framework of coaching steps that are achievable and which, in turn, enhance self-efficacy and the likelihood that professional growth may be achieved. Small steps also allow for tentative movement in a certain direction so that if it works, then more effort and energy can be channelled in that direction. If not, then other actions in other directions can be implemented.

Harnessing the power of a school improvement strategy requires more than setting up an action plan and providing high-quality professional development. It requires that the strategy is translated into instructional improvement through discussion of collective meaning making new understandings of instructional patterns, increased expectations for the kinds of tasks students can tackle and deep understanding of what creating such tasks entails. If our ultimate aim is to make the changes in instruction that will lead to improvements in student learning, we must engage in dialogue that is likely to help change practice.

## 8 steps to coaching



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